

The Sensory Connection Program Conference: Groundwork for Psychosocial Self-Care

Marlborough, MA
November 12th -13th 2010

This was the first “open” conference presented by Karen and the first opportunity to present the Sensory Connection Program in its entirety. The SCP includes assessment, group treatment, individual treatment and environmental interventions including the development of sensory rooms. Key to the success of the SCP is the education and training of staff. Background education on the senses and pertinent research was presented in a way that participants could return to their own settings and provide education and in-services using the program materials. Neurological underpinnings and recent research explaining the responses to sensory modalities and approaches were discussed throughout the conference.



Through exploration of a wide variety of sensory activities in the “I Tried It” experiential lab, participants learned about their own sensory preferences. This exploration continued as participants completed various assessments including the Sensory Profile for Adults and Adolescents. The focus of this conference was to not only learn about various assessments, but to learn how the information can be used in treatment and in everyday adaptations for comfort and function. By understanding their own sensory proclivities and brainstorming ways these preferences play out in relationships and responses in various environments, participants learned to appreciate how sensory styles and reactions impact the lives of our clients.



Participants learned firsthand the benefits of the *Sense-ability Group* by actual participation in a group; examples of activities from all the stages were explored from novelty items to learning activities. Stories were shared about the many “mini-miracles” observed in this interactive group; participants brainstormed the numerous applications for the group from geriatric care to adolescent treatment. Examples were provided of ways to use activities from the various stages in the group to provide individual treatment sessions that engage clients on many levels giving them the opportunity to experience the benefits of sensory input rather than just learn about them.

Coping Through the Senses activities for clients with higher cognitive levels were introduced such as developing a stress management plan or balancing “work, rest, and play” and ways to develop healthy habits that can be used post discharge. Participants also tried out treatment activities such as the ROM Dance and Infinity Walking and they discussed potential applications of these activities in various settings. After learning about environmental interventions, participant groups actually started the planning process of developing a Sensory Room. As they worked together they



shared ideas and discussed challenges and ways to involve staff from all disciplines in the use of the room.

Each participant was given a personal “sensory kit” to help with attention and comfort throughout the conference. Participants agreed that the kit and also the many “sensory breaks” for various participatory activities helped them to manage the enormous amount of information and ideas presented. Examples of many sensory activities remained on tables throughout the conference for people to try out and explore. Popular items included the weighted dog, the “lycra hug,” the Bosu Ball, and an example of a simple inexpensive pressure vest made from two Neoprene “waist trimmer” belts.



Therapro added to the conference experience by providing a table where participants could see and purchase various books and materials including the *Sensory Connection Self-Regulation Workbook* and some of the activities used in group activities and demonstrations. [Learn more about Therapro.](#)

Kristi Langset from Sommerfly, Inc. was a delightful addition to the conference. She brought her fabulous OT designed weighted items including weighted blankets, “the relaxer” a travel size weighted blanket, sashes, and other innovative products. [Learn more about Sommerfly.](#)



A special thanks goes to Beth Moore for her excellent job as the conference manager and event planner. Her attention to detail and the attractive appearance of the conference helped to make it a pleasant sensory experience for everyone. The conference would not have been possible without her invaluable help, thoughtful input on marketing and her handling of all of the venue negotiations.

An additional thank you goes to my friend and editor Marilyn Vaillancourt who helped us out with conference registrations. After so many years of working on the Sensory Connection Program books and materials, it was exciting to have her on hand to see how all of this information is used and appreciated by clinicians in the field.

Conference participants came from all over the country. Their comments sum up the conference experience:

Lisa Chew, OTR/L from San Francisco CA says, *“This has been one of the best conferences and learning experiences in my career. Thank you for your expertise and energy. “*

Leah Guimont, OTR/L from Lynnfield MA writes, *“Thank you! It was beautifully presented and full of a wealth of information. I felt trapped into a job I was unsure of and now I feel like I can do this!”*

Anastasia Mandrussow, OTR/L from San Francisco CA says, *“Thorough; research based; grass roots foundations from where O.T. profession arose. Thank you for your leadership and tremendous contribution to psychosocial OT!”*

Tamasin Kekic, student from Dominican College VT writes, *“Fabulous! Thank you so much for the conference! I loved it - great combo of teaching methods. I was worried I would be too inexperienced (a student) but I thought it was perfect.”*

[Follow this link for references from the conference.](#)