

# ABC of Autism; Avoidance, Behavior and Communication



**Robin Rettie, M.Ed**

Lighthouse Learning Resources

[WWW.LHLEARNINGRESOURCE.COM](http://WWW.LHLEARNINGRESOURCE.COM)

[WWW.SENSO-SCIENCE.COM](http://WWW.SENSO-SCIENCE.COM)

If you could try to  
understand me rather than  
try to change me... this  
parenting thing would be a  
whole lot easier!

[Facebook.com/AFineParent](https://www.facebook.com/AFineParent)



## GOAL

- Provide insight to characteristics of Autism: Avoidance, Communication, and Sensory Processing challenges
- Provide characteristics of red-flag sensory behaviors in children
- Provide research-based strategies supportive of behavior management
  1. Presentation – you & environment
  2. Observe
  3. Plan
  4. Communicate
  5. Open mind
  6. Reflect/review
  7. Needs – make adjustments

# Terms To Know

- Sensory Processing (desensitize)
- Stimming - self stimulation (calming)
- Perseverate
- Theory of Mind
- Dysgraphia
- Hyperlexia
- Irlen Syndrome
- Demystify Processing Speed - Executive Functioning
- Transitioning
- Snoezelen – quiet corner

# Neurology of Autism



**NEUROLOGICAL TRAFFIC JAM!**



Difficulty Receiving or Responding To Language  
Challenges with Sensory Processing  
Appears to be disengaged and avoid group or task activities  
Diagnosis by age 3

## Co-existing Conditions

ADHD - Inattentive/Combined type

Autism

Bipolar Disorder

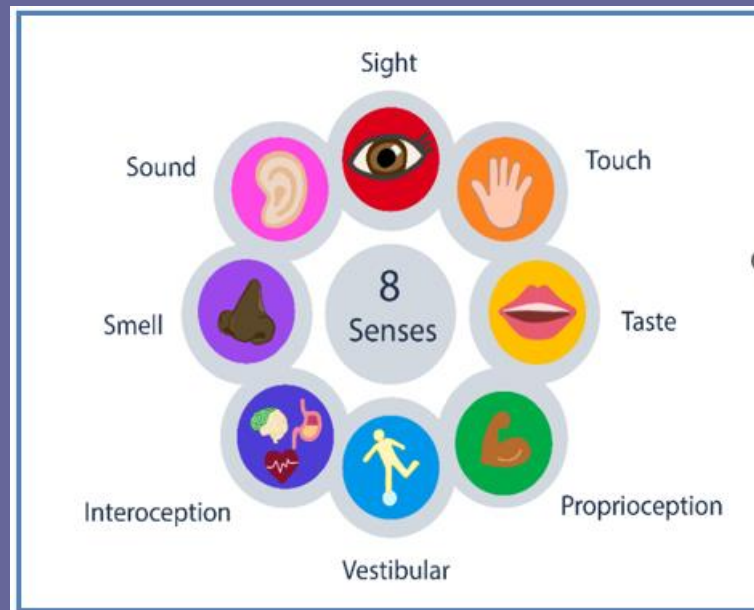
Dysgraphia/Dyslexia

Mood Disorder

And the list goes on...



# SENSORY SYSTEMS



# EIGHT SENSORY SYSTEMS

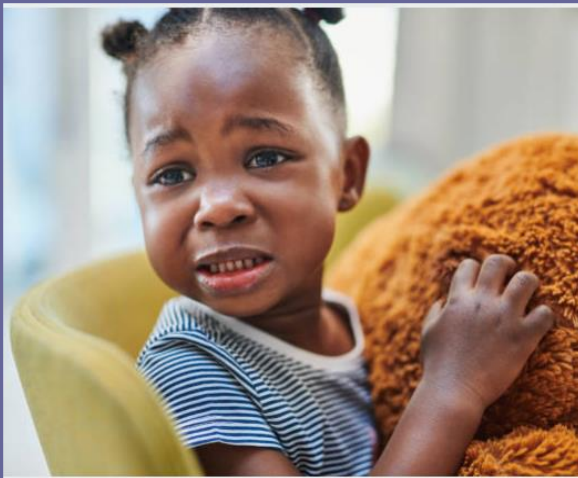
(not 5)

1. Tactile or Somatosensory System—  
sense of touch and tactile sensation on  
the body
2. Auditory System—sense of hearing
3. Gustatory System—sense of taste
4. Olfactory System—sense of smell
5. Visual System— sense of sight
6. Vestibular System— sense of  
balance/pull of gravity
7. Proprioception System— sense of body  
awareness/position

# 8. INTEROCEPTION



- Body's internal warning system.

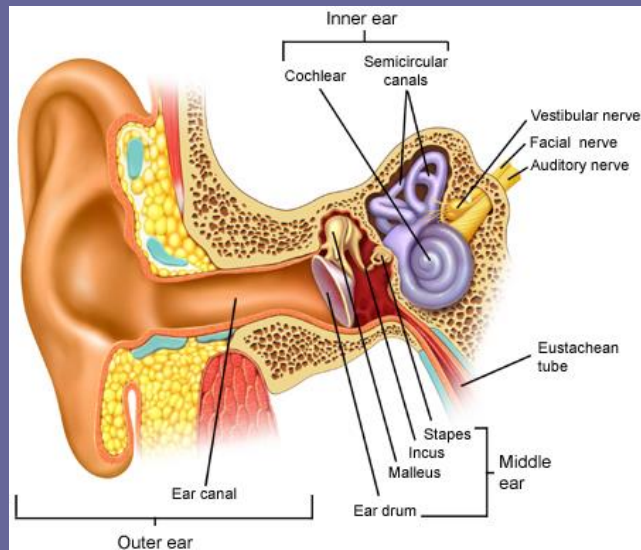


# Tactile System

- Difficulty with Clothing, Types of Clothing, Tags
- Difficulty Sitting With Anyone Behind Them in Class or Stand in Line
- Difficulty in Crowds
- Apprehensive Touching
- Over responsive – seeking input
- Over or Under Reactive to Pain



# Auditory System



# Gustatory System

## Sense of Taste

- Avoids or Seeks Out Certain Types of Food
- Difficulty with Textures of Foods
- Pockets Food
- Seeks Out Salty or Spicy
- Likes Bland Foods



# Olfactory System

Sense of Smell



# Visual System



Hyperlexia  
Light Sensitivity



# Vestibular System



Motion, equilibrium, and spatial orientation is provided by the Vestibular Nerve located in the inner ear. Development occurs through movement.

**CHILDREN OF ALL AGES MUST HAVE MOVEMENT!!**

# Proprioceptive System

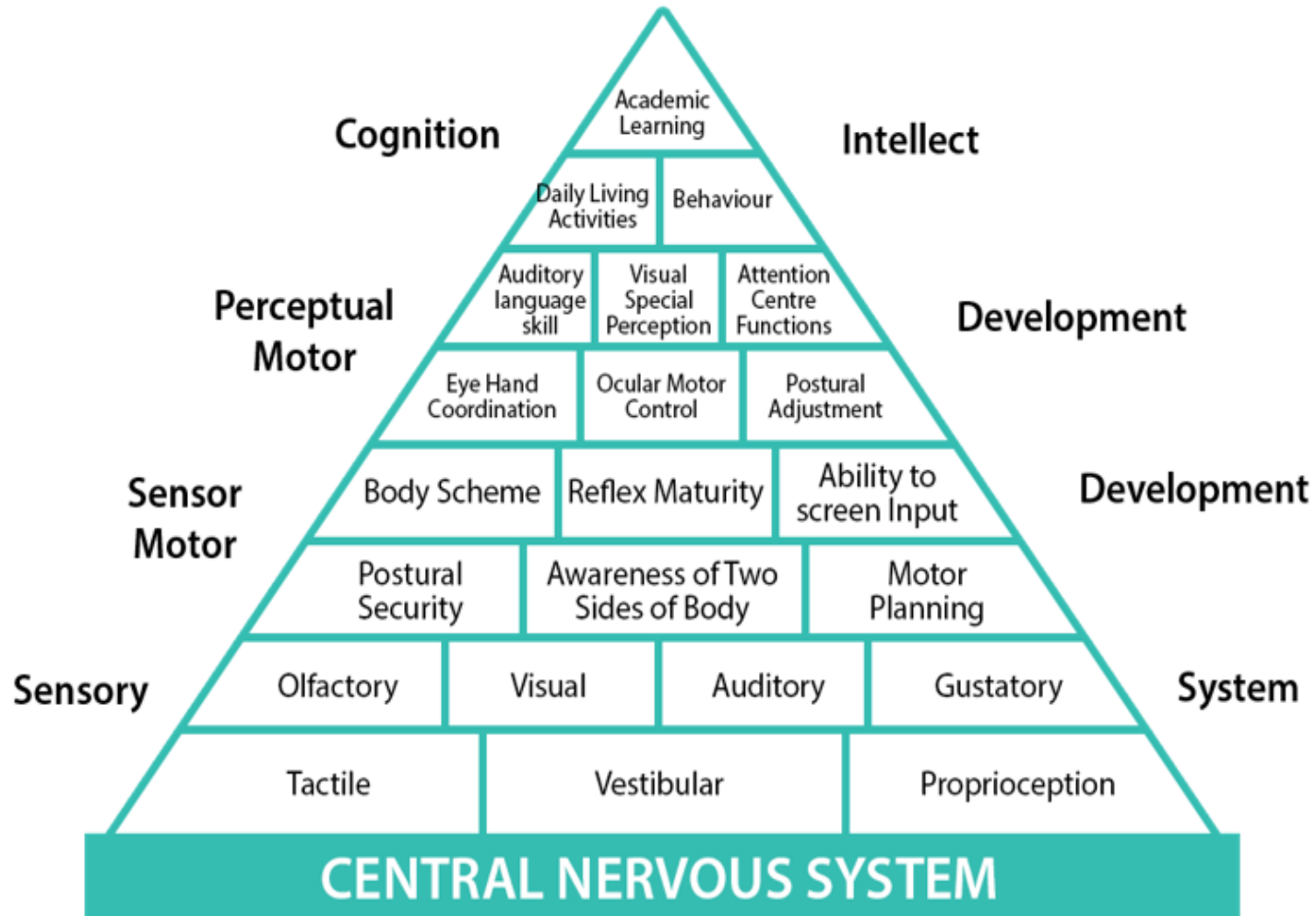
Receptors located in muscles, joints & tendons



# Proprioception is Closely Related to Vestibular System



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6O6Cm0WxEZA>



Pyramid of Learning (Williams and Shellenberger 1996).

# Effects of Arousal on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

- **SOR - Sensory Over-Responsive** – sensory defensive, appears clumsy, don't like to walk on uneven surfaces, don't want to spin, don't want to move too fast, don't like crowds of people dislike cafeterias, busy environment overwhelming
- **SUR - Sensory Under-Responsive** - slow processing, difficulty shifting attention, inattentive difficult to arouse, rigid, does not like transitions, needs routine
- **SS - Sensory Seeking/Craving** - needs intense movement, seeks jumping, spinning, running touches others and things, licking, hands in mouth, low attention span, can get easily overly excited!

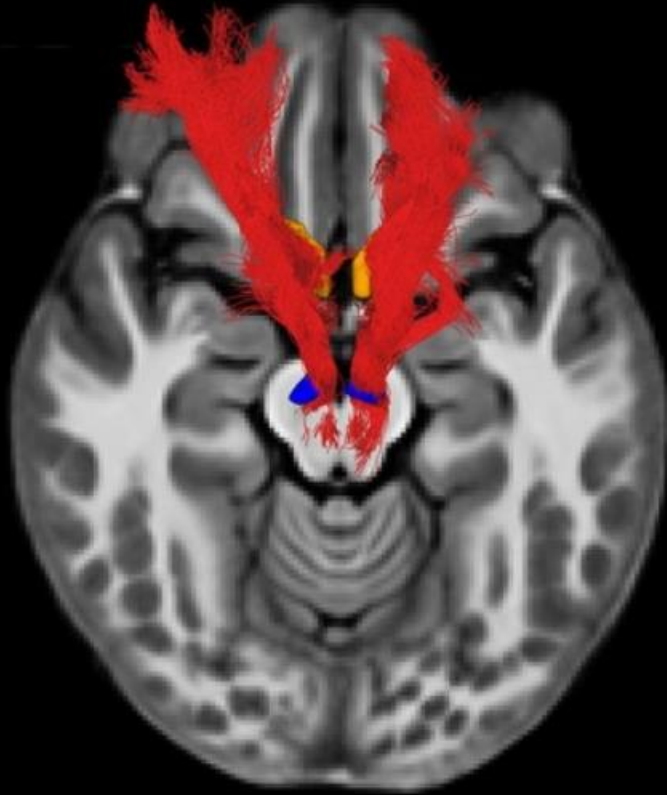


Cortex  
Rational Brain

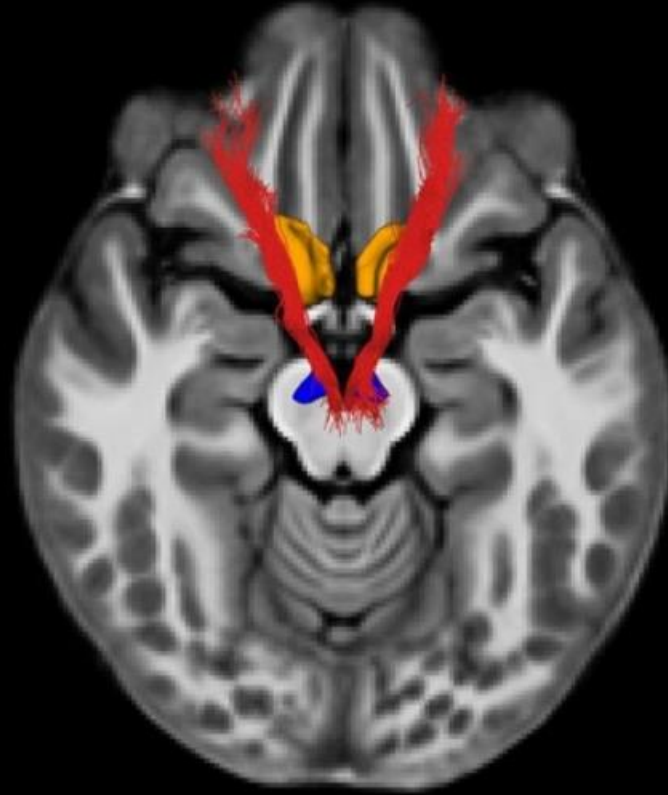


Emotional Brain  
Reptilian Brain

typical child



child with autism



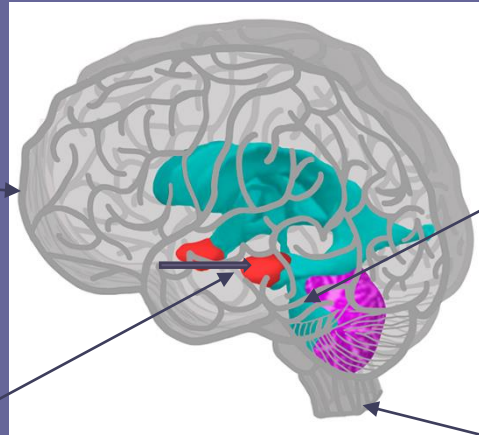
MRI scans revealed that kids with autism have deficits in a brain pathway that normally makes social interaction feel rewarding. Nerve-fiber tracts along the pathway, in red, are less dense in children with autism than in typically developing children.

*Kaustubh Supekar*



# When the Emotional Brain takes control!

Prefrontal Cortex



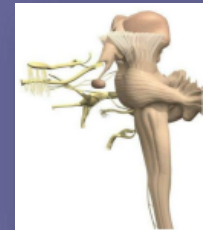
Hippocampus



Amygdalae



Brainstem



Hippocampus is our human memory bank and smell can be associated with positive or negative emotions.

# BEHAVIOR

## 1.) Behavior is Functional

- It occurs for a reason

- It is predictable

- There are triggers (antecedents) for behaviors

- Behaviors are learned due to consequences

## 2.) Behavior is a form of communication

## 3.) Behavior is changeable

- Understanding the function (antecedents and consequences) of behavior can lead to changes in problematic behaviors when utilizing appropriate researched based strategies.

# Red Flag Behaviors



Can't Sit Still  
Chews Non-Food Items  
Avoids Food  
Constantly Moves, Bounces, Swings  
Covers Ears  
Avoids Conversations Close in Proximity  
Crashes Into Things/People  
Easily Distracted  
Dislikes Transitions  
Disruptive In Loud Places  
Fidgets Frequently  
Hits Self and Others  
Invades Personal Space  
Kicks People/Things  
Meltdowns Easily  
Pushes People/Things  
Shuts/Makes Noises  
Clumsy/Drops Things Often



# 5 Assumptions

Functional Assessment : Strategies to Prevent and Remediate  
Challenging Behavior in School Settings

By Lynette K. Chandler and Carol M. Dahlquist  
4th Edition, 2014

# BAD Syndrome

The child is choosing to behave in an adverse manner.



# The Disability

The assumption is the behavior is a characteristic of the disability and cannot be changed.



# Bad Family or Poor Parenting and Discipline Practices

The idea that a child's behavior is the result of inappropriate parenting/care.



# Bad Home Situation

Suspecting a bad home-life can result in looking outside of the environment in which the behavior occurs  
resulting in the assumption that lower expectations are acceptable.



# Previous Trauma or Bad Experiences

Because we assume we cannot change the past traumatic event, we assume we cannot change the behavior.



What Can Be done?

# Current Situation, Not The Past

"Not to rescue a person from an unhappy organization of his behavior is to punish him, in that it leaves him in a state of reoccurrent punishment"

Psychologist, Don Baer (1970)

# Calming Environment

- Spaces: bathroom, bedroom, classroom, playground Music/PE/Art - building a safe and trusting environment
- Vestibular: navigating space, items that promote movement, daily activities, too much or too little stimulus
- Proprioception: opportunity for release, calming opportunities
- Taste/Oral: water, crunchy snacks, gum, chews - brain power!
- Breaks: relaxation, movement, meditation/yoga - consideration for healthy body/healthy mind
- Escape Plan: classroom & community - facilitate feeling safe/Snoezelen

# Calm Learning Environment



# Plan, Autism or otherwise

## Environment At First Glance

Lighting: bright, low, moving, color,  
natural/ florescent

Visual stimulus: walls, color, clutter,  
shiny objects, spinning objects

Scents: personal body odors, room,  
food, mold/musty, candles, toilet  
paper, tissue, essential oils

Sounds: soft, hard, loud, quiet, pitch,  
tone, white noise, annoying  
repetitive noise

Temperature: cold, hot, mixed

Snoezelen



# Your Approach

- ◆ to touch or not to touch
- ◆ too close/too far
- ◆ too loud/too soft
- ◆ too personal/crossing emotional boundaries
- ◆ too abrasive
- ◆ too bold/demanding
- ◆ too quick - consideration for wait time
- ◆ body odor - perfume, breathe, deodorant,
- ◆ hairspray, lotion
- ◆ building a relationship - safety and trust
- ◆ Discuss differences openly
  - ✓ dialogue
  - ✓ books
  - ✓ pictures
  - ✓ demonstrate care and concern
  - ✓ create a positive culture in home and school - 31 flavors!



# Social Stories & Social Thinking

- Carol Gray [www.carolgraysocialstories.com](http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com)
- Michelle Garcia Winner  
[www.socialthinking.com](http://www.socialthinking.com)

# Transitions



# Building School Success

## Accessing Social, Emotional, and Academic Success

### Child Find Law: 34 CFR 300.111(c)

- Child Find covers every child from birth through age 21.
- The school must evaluate any child that it knows or suspects may have a disability.

### Non Categorical

- Ages 3-5 may be described as Non Categorical Early Childhood (NCEC) if he or she has been diagnosed as having one of the following:
  - ✓ Intellectual Delay, NCEC-ID
  - ✓ Emotional Disturbance, NCEC-ED
  - ✓ Specific Learning Disability, or NCEC-SLD
  - ✓ Autism, NCEC-AU
- When a child demonstrates difficulty over time in maintaining appropriate behavior, the campus staff are obligated to consider the following. "No Academic Need"
  - ✓ Social - relationships with students and faculty
  - ✓ Emotional - regulation under normal circumstances
  - ✓ Academic - maintain average success within traditional teaching application

# Building A Successful Plan

## Professionals Who Conduct Assessments:

- Behavior Specialist - Texas has autonomy (insurance/school)
- Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP)
- Board Certified Behavior Analyst
- Occupational Therapist - trained in evaluation and identification of SPD
- Speech Therapist

# POPCORN

## Home & School Connection



- P: prepare environment, presentation (approach)
- O: observe - home/school/all environments to collect data
- P: plan with professionals & parents
- C: communicate & collaborate - email/phone log/team meeting
- O: open-minded to reach expected outcomes  
accommodations and modifications - consider 5 assumptions!
- R: reflection, revise, & review - is the plan working?
- N: next, moving forward what are the needs - update plan as needed  
based on observable needs

# Questions?

Robin Rettie, M.Ed., Special Education

Lighthouse Learning Resources

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[www.senso-science.com](http://www.senso-science.com)

**[infoLHlearningresource@gmail.com](mailto:infoLHlearningresource@gmail.com)**

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