



Autism Intervention Research
Network on Physical Health

Sensory Inclusive Clinical Spaces: Guidance for Providers

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Outline

1. Sensory rich clinical spaces
2. The Patient Care Frontier
3. Approaches to Sensory Sensitivity: A Case Study/Emergency Dept Care
4. Approaches to Sensory Sensitivity: Outpatient Care
5. Additional Tools
6. Benefits
7. Summary





Our sensory world: Sensory rich clinical spaces

- Imagine a clinic or hospital
 - Sights
 - Sounds
 - Smells
 - Textures
 - Tastes





Our sensory world:
Sensory rich clinical spaces

- **BUSY**
- **NOISY**
- **BRIGHT**

Our sensory world-

Our sensory sensitive patients

- Autism
- PTSD
- Anxiety
- Concussions
- Hearing loss/vestibular disorder
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Pain disorders
- Dementia
- Altered mental status



Sensory Sensitivity: A Barrier to Health Care

- “Fear, anxiety, embarrassment, or frustration keeps me from getting primary care”
- “My behaviors are misinterpreted by my provider or staff”
- “My providers do not take my communications seriously”
- 30% say facilities contribute to sensory issues

Raymaker DM, McDonald KE, Ashkenazy E, Gerrity M, Baggs AM, Kripke C, Hourston S, Nicolaidis C. Barriers to healthcare: Instrument development and comparison between autistic adults and adults with and without other disabilities. Autism. 2017 Nov;21(8):972-984. doi: 10.1177/1362361316661261. Epub 2016 Sep 22. PMID: 27663266; PMCID: PMC5362353.



The Patient Care Frontier

- 1 in 44 children will eventually be diagnosed with ASD- CDC
- 90% of persons with ASD have a medical or psychiatric comorbidity
- 30-90% of persons with ASD have sensory sensitivities
- Higher rates of medical use
- Return to in-person medical care

Wood EB, Halverson A, Harrison G, Rosenkranz A. Creating a Sensory-Friendly Pediatric Emergency Department. J Emerg Nurs. 2019 Jul;45(4):415-424. doi: 10.1016/j.jen.2018.12.002. Epub 2019 Jan 21. PMID: 30679010.



Approaches to Sensory Sensitivity

Emergency Care



Emergency Care



Children's
of Alabama®

- Children's of Alabama Birmingham
 - Task force created
 - Families interviewed
 - Nursing & medical staff trained



Emergency Care



Children's
of Alabama®

- Environmental Modifications
 - “Calming paint colors: [Soothing blue](#)”
 - Blank walls with a few children’s artwork
 - Sounds/alarms only at nursing stations
 - Lights replaced with LED bulbs with dimmers
 - Sensory cart
 - Visual charts





Emergency Care



Children's
of Alabama®

- Staff Training
 - Autism explained & methods of presentation
 - Methods to approaching patients
 - Communication methods
 - Ask about sensory sensitivities





Children's
of Alabama®

Emergency Care

- Workflow in the ED
 - Sign “Autism & Sensory Sensitivity Friendly”
 - Sensory pathway created for early identification



Sensory Sensitivity Workflow

Triage nurse asks if patient has sensory sensitivity diagnosis



Patient will not be sent to waiting room



Patient given a bed and isolated room



Survey provided to family about sensory sensitivities



Patient Example



Outcomes

- Process applied to adult ED
- Process applied throughout the hospital
- Improved staff satisfaction and patient management
- Improved patient satisfaction



Approaches to Sensory Sensitivity

Outpatient Care



Clinic Care Challenges

1. Crowded spaces
2. Bright lighting
3. Inaccessible washrooms




Sensory Friendly Solutions

Reduce noise 

Remove bright and flashing lights 

Provide accessible bathrooms 

Welcome caregivers 

Provide food and drink 

Develop clear and concise instructions 

Create sensory-friendly hours 

Clinic Care Solutions: Reduce Noise

- Separate waiting rooms/quiet zones
- Earplugs or headphones
- Eliminate background music
- Sensory friendly map (quiet & loud areas)
- Allow waiting in car



Clinic Care Solutions:
Reduce Bright
Lights/Flashing Lights

- Windows/natural lighting
- Dimmable lighting in rooms/lamps



Clinic Care Solutions: Accessible bathrooms

- Ensure wheelchair accommodations
- Reduce bright lights



Clinic Care Solutions: Caregivers

- Welcome caregivers
- Allow involvement and presence as much as possible
- Provide food & drink



Clinic Care Solutions: Clear concise instructions

- User friendly systems
- Visible signs
- Staff support





Clinic Care Solutions: Sensory Friendly Hours/Appointments

- Dedicated time for minimal crowds (early/late)
- Sensory toys
- Encourage to bring support toys/tools
- Longer time visits if possible

Clinic Care Solutions: Considerations for Adults



Welcome identification
of sensory sensitivity



Consider providing a
survey to review with
patient



Offer separate room for
discussion/questions
with patient if possible



Allow questions



Create sensory plan





Clinic Care Solutions: Providing Care

- Create a soothing environment
- Limit number of staff
- Team approach
- Care giver involvement
- Interaction techniques



Clinic Care Solutions: Interaction Techniques

Review	Review sensory sensitivities
Explain	Explain process and maintain space
Allow	Allow patients time to process and ensure understanding
Avoid	Avoid physical contact until necessary
Explain	Explain what will be done prior to doing so
Move	Move slowly, perform exams proximal to distal
Assume	Assume person's competence (especially if non-verbal)
Ensure	Ensure method of communication for non-verbal (paper, symbols)



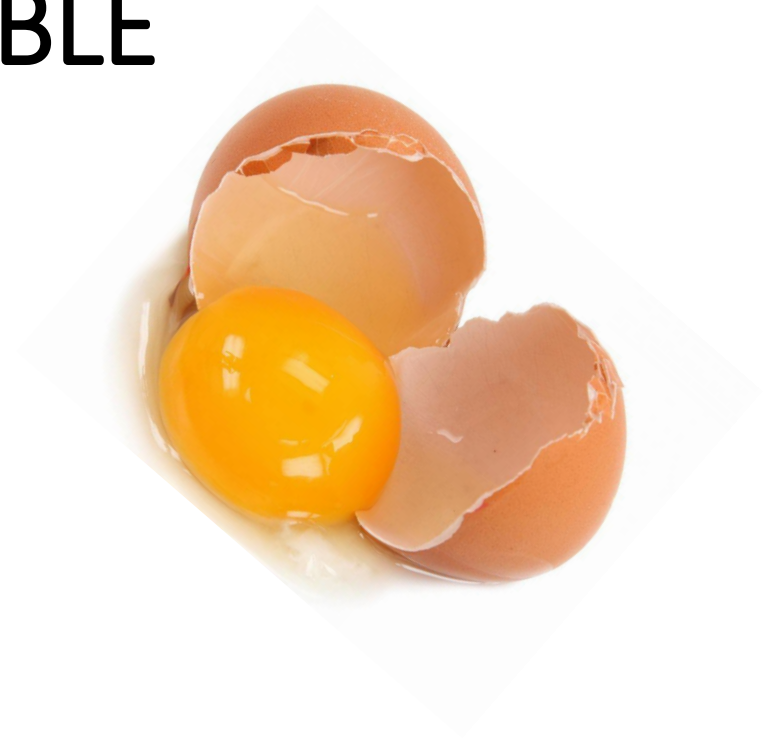
Clinic Care Solutions: Interaction Techniques

Speak	Speak in simple phrases, use age-appropriate terms
Allow	If a person becomes fixated on an object or has the need to perform self-stimulating activities or body movements, do not interrupt unless necessary
Notify	Notify if needs to move to another room or procedure
Prevent	Some patients may become self-injurious or have fight or flight responses to challenging situation



Clinical Care Solutions: SCRAMBLE

- **S**ensory management that reduces stimuli
- **C**ommunications kept simple
- **R**educed or limited staff involved in care
- **A**llow for extra time
- **M**edication reconciliation
- **B**ox of sensory support items
- **L**istening
- **E**xamination and treatment modification



Additional Tools



Other Tips/Solutions

Hospital Passport

Please do not assume there is nothing wrong with me if I don't express pain the in the same way.

How I experience pain:



For example, do you rub the part of your body that hurts?

For other examples of what to put here, see the guidance notes at www.autism.org.uk/health-passport

How I communicate pain:



For example, do you groan when something is hurting you?

For other examples of what to put here, see the guidance notes at www.autism.org.uk/health-passport

Things I struggle with that cause me distress:



For example, are you scared of needles?

For other examples of what to put here, see the guidance notes at www.autism.org.uk/health-passport

Ways to help me avoid distress:



For example, does being told you're getting an injection and you can look away help?

For other examples of what to put here, see the guidance notes at www.autism.org.uk/health-passport

Other Tips/Solutions

- Coping plan
- Sensory box/kit



Other Tips/Solutions

- Ambulance
- Occupational
Therapist in hospital





Other Tips/Solutions for Providers

- Minimize going 'back and forth'
- Make your environment comfortable for you as well!

Benefits of Applying Sensory Support Means

- Improved care
- Improved patient experience
- Attracts more patients and families

Wood EB, Halverson A, Harrison G, Rosenkranz A. Creating a Sensory-Friendly Pediatric Emergency Department. J Emerg Nurs. 2019 Jul;45(4):415-424. doi: 10.1016/j.jen.2018.12.002. Epub 2019 Jan 21. PMID: 30679010.



Universal Benefit

- All patients can benefit from modifications
- Solutions are low cost or free



Bottom Line: Sensory Inclusive Clinical Spaces

1

Soothing environment (lights low, sound low, less people)

2

Soothing tools (Sensory box, food, space)

3

Soothing approach (Calm & clear)

Simple changes support all our
senses & create a better
environment for care!



Thank you for attending!

A link to view the recording will be emailed to all registrants.

We hope to see you next month!

Next webinar: Tues. 10/18/22

4-5pm EST

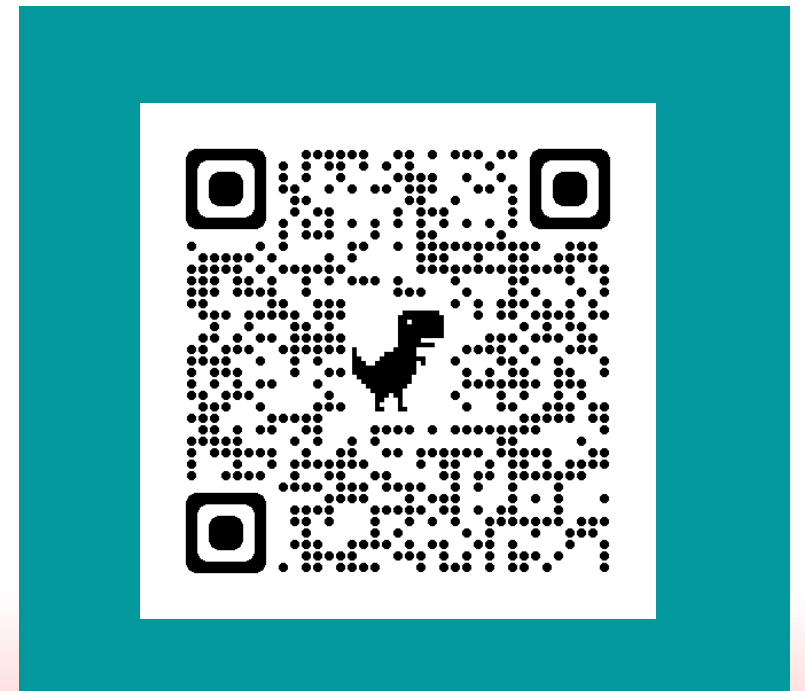
AIR-P Presents: Standing desks, rocking chairs and bouncy balls...in school?! Evaluating the use of flexible seating for neurotypical and neurodivergent children.

Presented by: Laura Crane

In this webinar, Laura will begin by discussing the research to practice gap in autism education, before emphasizing the need to take a collaborative approach when it comes to meeting the needs of autistic young people in school. Laura will then focus on a case example of a research-practice partnership, where researchers at the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE) worked collaboratively with staff from an inclusive school for children aged 4-11 years, to evaluate the use of flexible seating in classrooms.



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