

Helping the Hospital Make Sense: Improving Care Experiences for Patients with Sensory Sensitivities

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Joe's Story

What is the Scope of the Problem?

Clinics

Emergency Room

In-patient Units



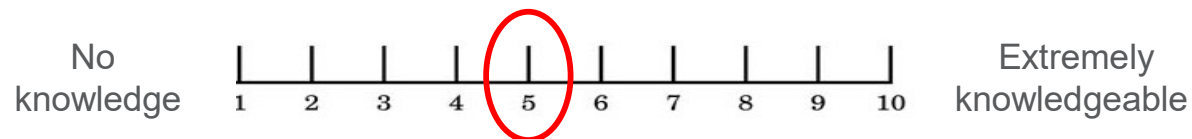
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ADHD
- Down Syndrome
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- History of Prematurity

Is More Training Needed?

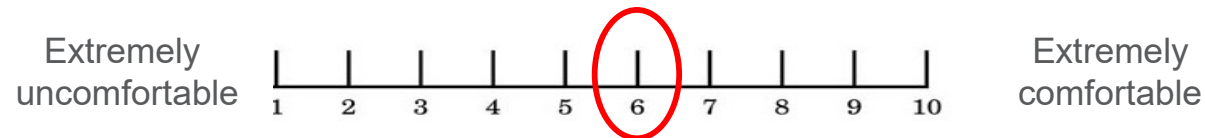
	More Training Needed	No Training Needed	Unsure
Medical Staff (427)	403 (94%)	8 (2%)	16 (4%)

Staff survey pre-training

How knowledgeable are you with issues related to sensory sensitivities?



How comfortable are you with taking care of a patient who might be experiencing sensory overload?



What Happens?

- 7 senses + Interoception
- Over vs. Under-Responsive



Challenges Seen in Care

- Atypical response to sensory input
- Communication challenges
- Variability in range and severity of symptoms and needs
- Rigid insistence for sameness of environment and routine
- Inability to understand expectations or social norms
- Attention problems and difficulty with transitions

Barriers to Assessment and Management



4 Main Components of the Sensory Pathway




Staff Training: Focus

- Awareness of sensory processing challenges
- Identifying dysregulated behaviors
- Shifting from a reactive to a proactive care approach
- Communication strategies
- Environmental modifications
- Familiarization of available tools, resources, and unit's workflow

Staff Training: Approach

- Initial Training
- Yearly Refreshers
- Go Live and Monthly Newsletters
- Additional Staff Resources



Sensory Pathway Procedure Guide


Medical procedures can be challenging for any child, especially children with sensory challenges. Here you will find 3 areas for creating a positive experience for sensory patients.

Preparation

Allow time for the patient to transition from one task to another by using visual or auditory prompts. "When the sand timer is empty (or when you hear the timer beep) it will be time for your ____."

If you have Child Life Specialists available in your area, contact them to help prepare your patient for the upcoming procedure. Social stories can also be utilized to help prepare and familiarize the patient with upcoming procedures.

Identify a coping plan prior to the IV placement using the Who, What, When, Where, & How strategies. Who will be in the room during the procedure? What will be patient be doing during the procedure? When/where will the procedure take place? How will the patient be positioned during the procedure (sitting up, laying down, etc)? Provide choices in positioning when able.




Modification

Make environmental modifications prior to the procedure. Identify and address sensory components in the environment that could lead to overstimulation during the procedure.

When able, set supplies up outside of the patient's room to avoid increasing the patient's anxiety.

Offer sensory tools that will promote comfort and positive coping (Weighted lap pads, sunglasses, fidgets, etc).

Reduce the number of staff in the room during the procedure. If compliance is a concern, have additional staff wait outside of the room out of the patient's sight until needed.



Communication

Tell the patient what you are doing before you do it. "I am going to tie the rubberband on your arm." Use visual prompts when needed.

Avoid metaphors and analogies that may be confusing for the patient. Use simplified, specific, concrete language. "Lay your arm here."

Use the ONE VOICE care approach to create a less threatening environment during the procedure. Remember, only one voice should be heard during the procedure.

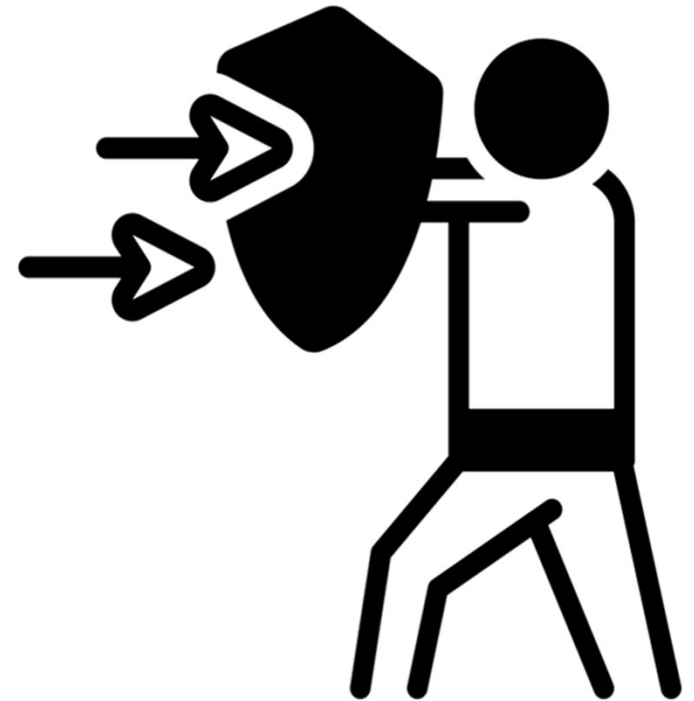
Avoid using threats or consequences which may cause the patient to escalate. Instead, validate the patient's feelings during times of upset. "I see you are upset. We are here to help." "I am going to hold your arm still to keep you safe."

Communication



Environmental Changes

- Guarding against sensory overload
- Room placement
- Reducing staff in the room
- Using same staff when possible
- ONE VOICE

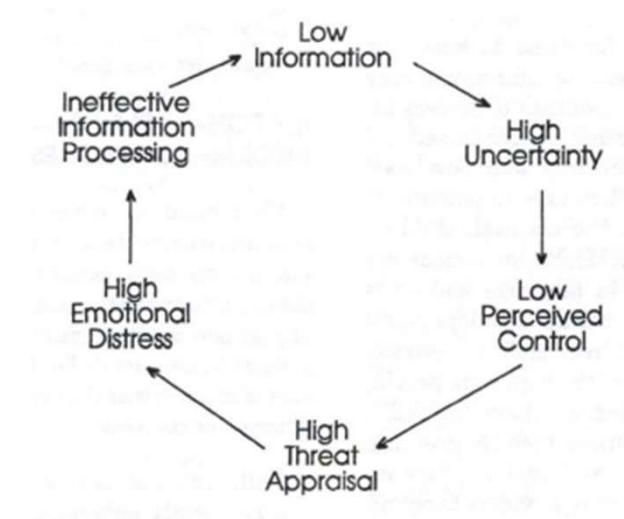


Utilization of Resources



I am going to the Emergency Department at Children's of Alabama.

This story will help me learn more about my visit.

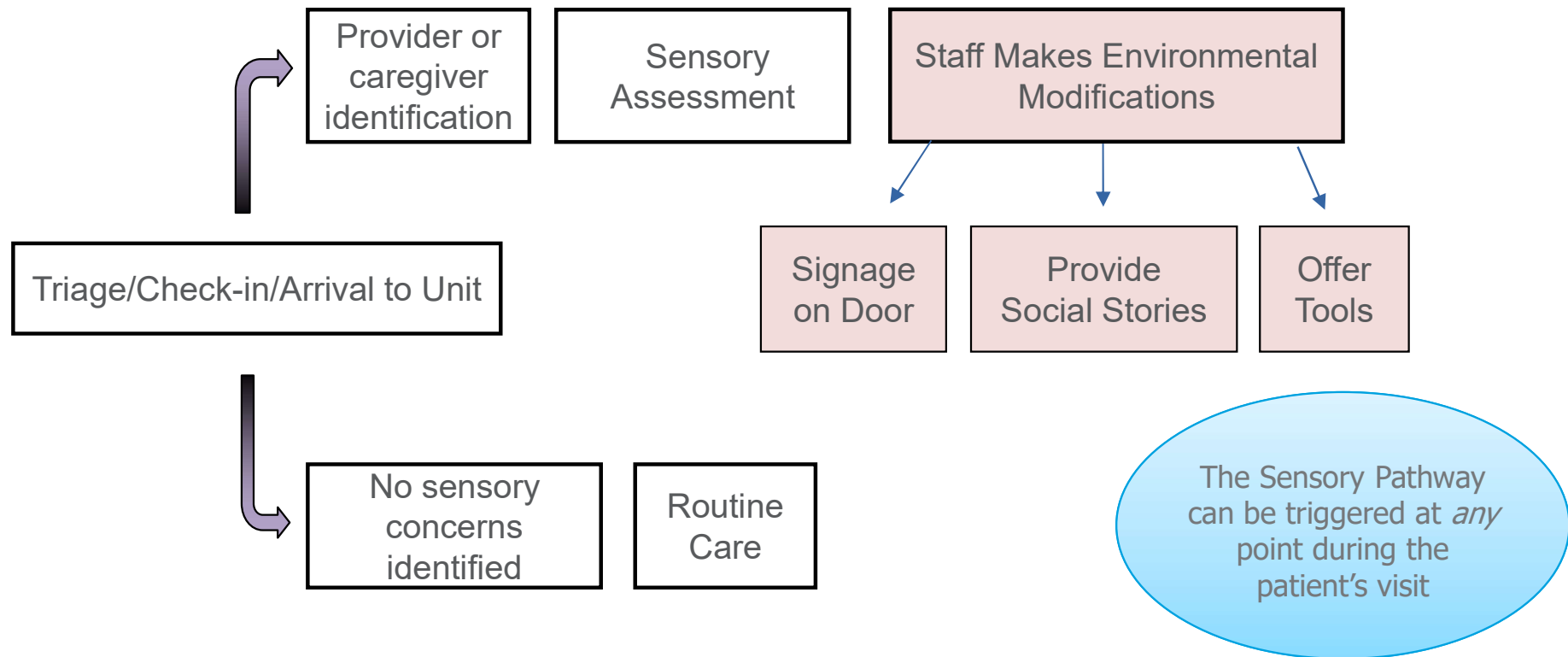


www.Childrensal.org/Sensory-Pathway

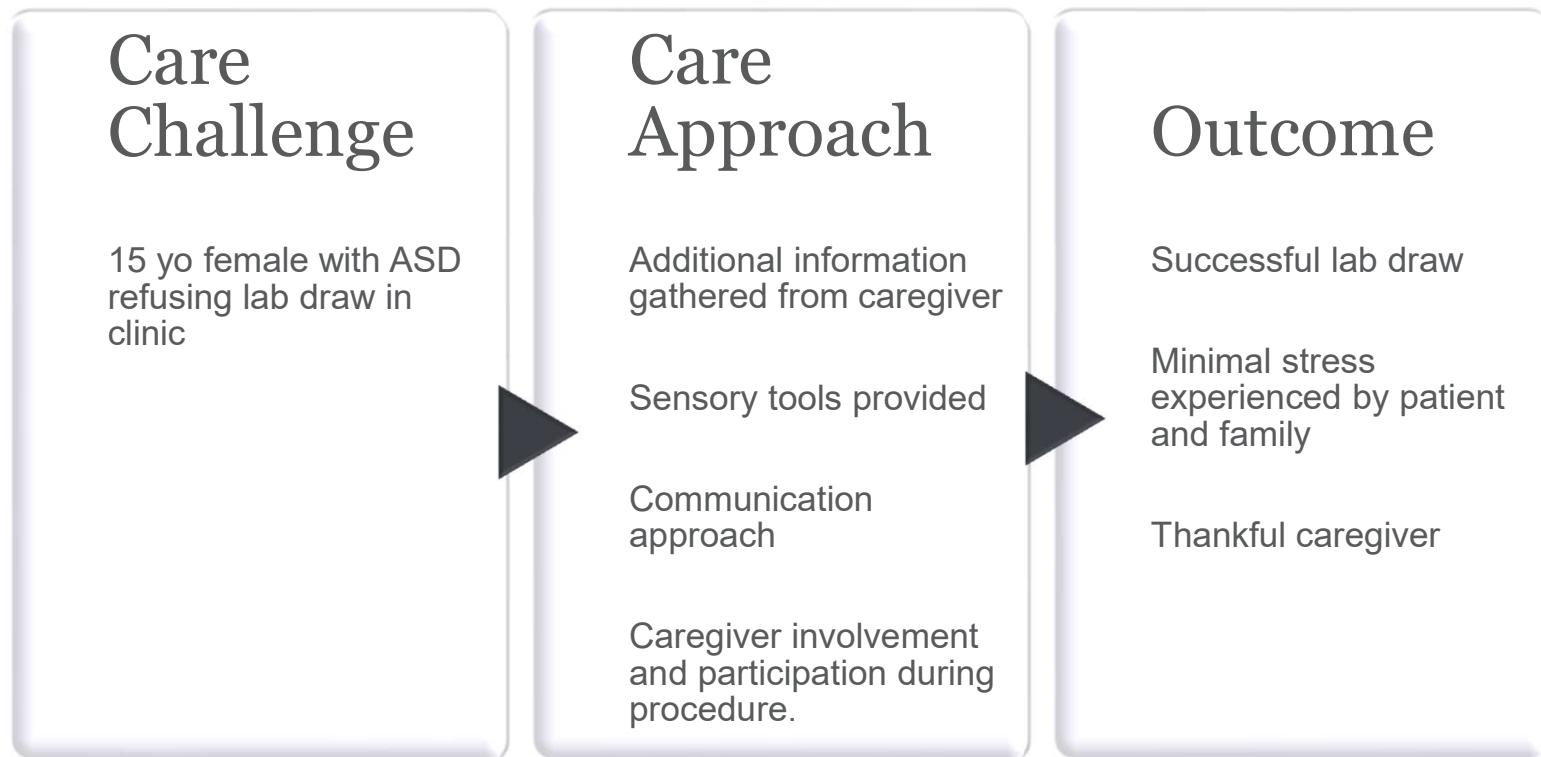
Onboarding Process for New Areas



Patient/Family Experience Workflow



Case Study #1

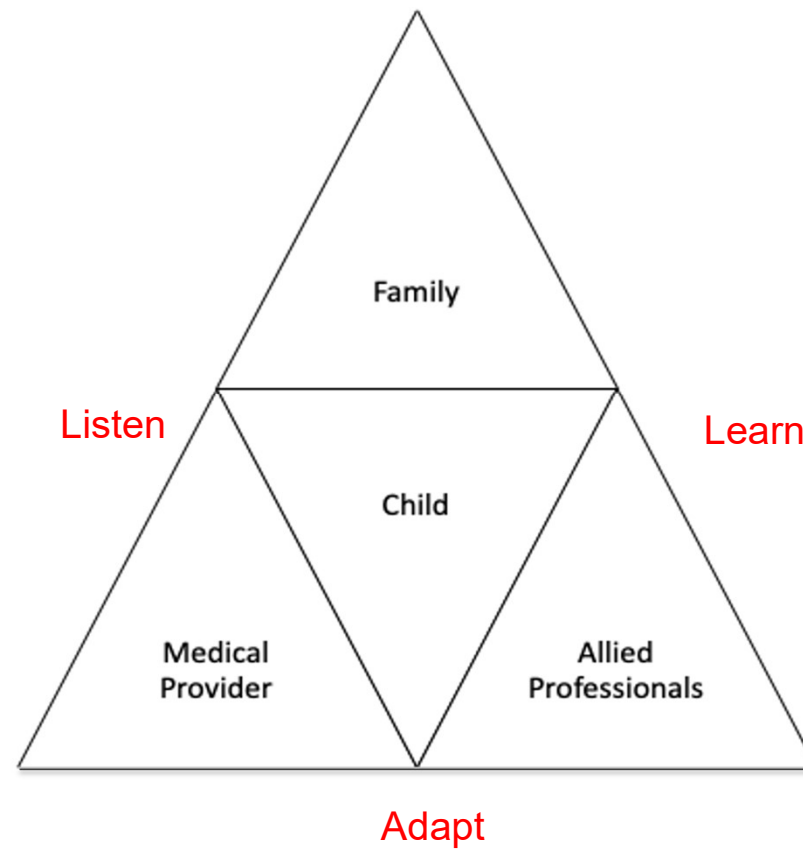


Case Study #2



What Joe Taught Us

Child Focused
Family Centered



Emerging Themes from Caregiver Feedback



1. Additional support specific to their child's sensory needs
2. Feeling of comfort
3. Improved overall experience

NRC Patient Experience Feedback

“From the time I hit the door I think the staff was not only **welcoming** but paid **close attention** to my son’s **sensory issues**. They put us in a separate room and truly catered to him in the situation that we were in. I am very **grateful** for that and would highly recommend them.”

“My daughter has autism and is non-verbal. She’s 3 so she’s very unhappy at any healthcare facility. Children’s **went above and beyond** to provide us with the best possible care to keep her **comfortable** with her **sensory sensitivities** and to a mom **that means everything**.”

“The staff working to make sure that my child’s **sensory sensitivities** were **respected** made a **huge difference** in our visit which meant it was a much more **positive experience** for my child.”

NRC Patient Experience Feedback

“My son has autism and everyone was SO incredibly **accommodating** and very understanding of his **sensory issues**. I appreciate the kindness SO much!”

“It was a very good experience. My child has special needs and they knew how to deal with him, his **sensory issues**, and his autism. I was very, very pleased with how everybody **worked with him** and **worked with me**. Thank you!”

“My child has autism and is non-verbal so he usually gets really anxious coming to the hospital. We live out of town and chose to drive an hour to come to Children’s, and I am really glad we did because all of the staff was very **accommodating** to him and understood all of his **sensory needs**. We were really, really **grateful** for that because it made our visit so much **easier**.”

Take Home Points

- Sensory processing challenges are common in special needs children
- Sensory overload can exacerbate symptoms and become a barrier to assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and positive experiences
- Altering communication strategies and making environmental modifications can help guard against sensory overload

Acknowledgements

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Our Patients and Parents



Thank You

Questions?

