



Guiding Grandma To "Get It" About SPD

Lists adapted from *The Out-of-Sync Child Grows Up: Coping with SPD in the Adolescent and Young Adult Years*

by Carol Stock Kranowitz, MA

Grandma comes for the weekend and soon gets grumpy. She adores Junior, her smart and funny grandson who plays the violin like Paganini and draws like da Vinci, but his quirky behavior bothers her.

She has learned not to hug him, but he won't even return her high five. She knows he is a picky eater, so she has baked her famous applesauce muffins without a single raisin or walnut, but he won't take a bite. He thumps around the house in the middle of the night. Furthermore, he smells.

At Sunday breakfast, Grandma silently nibbles on a muffin. She clears her throat and says to her daughter Gina and son-in-law Joe, "As I have said before, in my opinion, Junior needs more discipline."

They exhale, pour another cup of coffee, and sit down. Patiently, they reiterate that understanding goes a lot farther than discipline. "You see," they say, "when Junior acts in unusual ways, the reason is not that he *won't* behave as expected, but that he *can't*." They explain, once again, that when he rejects hugs, raisins, and soap, or when he is restless at night, he is not willfully bothering his grown-ups. He is merely trying to survive.

Grandma listens attentively as they remind her that with occupational therapy and maturity, some of Junior's sensory challenges have decreased but still interfere with activities of daily living. They mention that changes in routine are hard, like when a visitor comes and shares the bathroom ... or snores in the next-door bedroom.

Grandma puts down her muffin.

Gina and Joe continue, pointing out Junior's progress since her last visit. He needs less time jumping on the trampoline and swaying in the hammock. He has added scrambled eggs to his brief list of acceptable foods. And he lets them hug him.

They, too, hope he will stop roaming the house at midnight and will start to enjoy crumbly food. Until that day comes, the family has settled into a sensory lifestyle that accommodates his sensitivities and allows them to live together in harmony.

Grandma nods and grabs Joe and Gina's hands. She has a glimmer of understanding. "Tell me more," she says, "so I can get it."

Her daughter gives her these lists of how sensory challenges can interfere with daily life. Grandma studies them gladly, as she gradually gets in sync.

SPD and Eating

Eating engages all eight senses simultaneously. Here are some sensory reasons that eating may be uncomfortable or even intolerable.

- **Visual:** Seeing certain foods may evoke previous bad eating experiences. Or foods on the plate may touch one another, or their color may be objectionable, or they may “just look gross.”
- **Tactile:** The feel, texture, and temperature of food matter greatly. Some overresponsive people won't eat soft and smooth food. Others won't eat lumpy, crispy, chewy, seedy, or grainy food, or hot food, or cold food. The person with underresponsivity or poor discrimination may be uncertain about what is in his mouth and whether he has chewed sufficiently to swallow it without choking.
- **Olfactory:** Smelling fried or aromatic food may make the overresponsive person gag or feel nauseated.
- **Gustatory:** Food that tastes too sweet, bitter, spicy, or “off” may be disgusting.
- **Auditory:** Hearing others take bites, chew, slurp, and swallow may be painful. This condition is known as misophonia, literally, “hatred of sound.” Many people with overresponsivity to sounds prefer to eat alone.
- **Proprioceptive:** Positioning the hands to use utensils to cut, getting food to one's mouth, and chewing may be difficult because of inefficient processing of sensations coming from muscles and joints.
- **Vestibular:** Staying seated may challenge the person if he has low postural tone and cannot process where he is in space and whether he is sitting up or falling off his

chair. Or he may crave movement and be unable to sit quietly for long.

- **Interoceptive:** Digesting food or even the anticipation of eating may be distressing. An overresponsive individual may dread the feeling of a full stomach, for example, or avoid foods that may cause an upset stomach or diarrhea.

SPD and Sleeping

Certain sensations may disturb sleep.

- **Tactile:** Pajamas and bed linens may feel scratchy. Blankets may make the person uncomfortably hot or not warm enough.
- **Tactile/Proprioceptive:** The mattress may feel lumpy (think of “The Princess and the Pea”). Blankets may feel too heavy or not heavy enough.
- **Auditory:** Sounds that may prevent sleep include someone's breathing or snoring; house creaks, air conditioning and heating noises; or rain, crickets, and traffic sounds outside.
- **Visual:** Street lights coming through the windows, lamplight, or light-emitting diodes (LEDs) of computers and other electronic devices in standby mode may keep the person awake.
- **Vestibular:** Passive, unexpected movement may bother the sleeper, as when a bedmate turns over and the mattress shifts.
- **Vestibular/proprioceptive:** The person's daily movement quota has not been met, so the body is not ready for sleep.
- **Olfactory:** The pillowcase may smell wrong, especially after its familiar, ripe scent has been washed out.

SPD and Shampooing

Sensory challenges may make these hair-washing steps problematic.

- Feeling the water's temperature

and pressure on one's body (tactile).

- Fiddling with the faucets and showerhead to adjust temperature and pressure (proprioceptive).
- Turning one's body in the shower to see, reach for, and grasp the shampoo—and not the conditioner (vestibular, visual, proprioceptive, tactile).
- Unscrewing the cap (tactile, proprioceptive).
- Squeezing the bottle for the just-right amount of shampoo (proprioceptive).
- Feeling comfortable with the gooeyness and scent (tactile, olfactory).
- Screwing the cap back onto the slippery bottle and returning the bottle to its shelf while positioning one's head to keep water and lather out of the eyes (tactile, proprioceptive, vestibular).
- Lathering the whole head (tactile, proprioceptive).
- Tipping one's head back to rinse out lather (vestibular, tactile, proprioceptive).
- Feeling (and even hearing) when hair is squeaky clean (tactile, auditory). ■

Carol Stock Kranowitz is the author of *The Out-of-Sync Child Grows Up*, a book in her “Sync” series. See www.out-of-sync-child.com to learn about workshops on SPD, and www.insyncchild.com to learn about fun and functional In-Sync Child activities.



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