Sensory Processing Issues Explained

Oversensitivity, tantrums, clumsiness: all could point to problems taking in the world

By Beth Arky

Sensory processing issues are often first recognized during the toddler years, when parents notice that a child has an unusual aversion to noise, light, shoes that are deemed too tight and clothes that are irritating. They may also notice clumsiness and trouble climbing stairs, and difficulty with fine motor skills like wielding a pencil and fastening buttons.

More baffling — and alarming — to parents are children who exhibit extreme behaviors:

- Screaming if their faces get wet
- Throwing tantrums when you try to get them dressed
- Having an unusually high or low pain threshold
- Crashing into walls and even people
- Putting inedible things, including rocks and paint, into their mouths

These and other atypical behaviors may reflect sensory processing issues — difficulty integrating information from the senses, which may overwhelm children and result in confusing behavior. Parents of children with these issues often call it Sensory Processing Disorder, or SPD. Psychiatrists, however, are quick to note that SPD is not a recognized disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

Sensory processing problems are now considered a symptom of autism because the majority of children and adults on the autism spectrum also have significant sensory issues. However, most children with sensory issues are not on the spectrum. They can also be found in those with ADHD, OCD and other developmental delays — or with no other diagnosis at all.

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by Meghan Walbert

Even after being placed with a family — or even when chosen — it is a struggle becoming comfortable with where you are. Without proper guidance or help, becoming a productive member of society can be one of the hardest things a foster care youth can accomplish. From someone who has been in the system, as well as been homeless, I can whole-heartedly sympathize with those who are in the current predicament.

I think that the issues begin and root themselves before we as foster youth turn 18. Without education or workshops on how to be financially stable, programs to help us with figuring out what to do when the support is no longer there, there is a much lower percentage for success in the cases of those youth who are or have been in the system.

I personally know few if any of the children that I was staying with that have gone on to achieve a bachelor’s degree or another form of higher education. Lack of guidance and education on the things that lead to a good-paying job, benefits and a good credit score can ruin adulthood.

When I was 18 (I’m now 23), I was just being given back to my family. I had just graduated high school after switching through about 4 to 5 programs. While I was in one of my stays (the children’s home), I completely stopped going to school. I would walk with the rest of the kids each morning, then ditch to spend time by myself. And before that, before coming to the children’s home, I was with an abusive family who wouldn’t feed me and would not help me get to school, unenrolling me and placing me with their family members during the day in a neighborhood not too far from the one I grew up in.

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Recap: “This is Us” Addresses Complications of Birth Parent Relationships

“This is Us” never fails to drop adoption wisdom, whether it’s exploring Randall’s journey as an adoptee from birth or Deja’s journey as a foster care adoptee. This week’s episode focused on the latter, reminding us once again that adoption is a lifelong journey for all involved.

*Spoilers ahead!*

Last week, we saw a teaser with Deja becoming upset after her new boyfriend Malik pressured her during their supervised date. As her adoptive mother Beth soon found out, Deja wanted to see her biological mother — but had held back her desires to avoid upsetting Randall and Beth.

Seeing how important the topic was to Deja, Malik told Beth about their conversation — and the fact that Deja had asked before about seeing her mom. He helped Beth realize that she and Randall had been too focused on their own lives to make the effort to schedule a meeting, to the detriment of Deja’s well-being.

When Beth approaches Deja about seeing her mom, Deja attempts to blow it off as “no big deal.” And thus follows a conversation that will be all-too-familiar for many adoptive parents and adoptees.

“Yes, it is. It’s a very big deal,” Beth responds.

Visibly torn, Deja finally admits, “I don’t want you to think that I’m ungrateful for everything you and Randall do for me. That’s why I didn’t want to say anything.”

Despite her biggest desires, Deja chooses to protect the feelings of her adoptive parents rather than stand up for what she wants. It’s a decision that many adoptees — whether adopted as infants or through foster care — unconsciously make when the time comes to visit or find their biological family.

And, although Beth quickly shows enthusiasm for inviting Deja’s mom to dinner, the storyline teaches us, once again, an important lesson about adoption.

So, let’s dive in.

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