

MARC'S SENSORY OASIS

Sensory-based Occupational Therapy

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Sensory Overload
and being sensory sensitive

PRECIOUS!

CHILDREN ARE



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*Sensory Overload a
21st Century Disorder*

SENSORY STRESS - SUBTLE & SERIOUS

Are you a victim of an environment that is too loud,
too bright, too fast, and just too much?

Put you in a "pod" surrounded by workers watching YouTube videos, looking at wedding pictures and real estate, phones ringing and people talking all around you, hostile fluorescent lights overhead, and then tell you that you do not have the right to do your work elsewhere, you do not have the right to expect a calm work environment or one that focuses on work, then add a management team that criticizes your actions, and tells you that fitting in is more important than getting your work done, then flips that around daily. Then add

the disgusting smells of peoples' lunch when they don't have time to go to the lunch room to eat their dead animals. Then impose the near constant interruptions of the workplace. Now I understand why productivity is so low in teams at Vancouver Coastal Health and why conscientious workers are under assault every day. Over time this starts to wear you down, it over-activates the brainstem processing pathways, triggers release of stress hormones, increases fight/flight reactions. What's the result? For me it

SENSORY SENSITIVITY IS A GIFT, IF UNDERSTOOD AND RESPECTED

was uncalled for and hostile disciplinary meetings and eventually, the joy of self employment and controlled, calm environments. Recently, I had the opportunity to spend some time in a work pod at Langley Child Development Centre, and observed how sensory factors could be mitigated to create a calm and sensory friendly work environment. The fact is that in a large organization like Vancouver Coastal Health, policy is driven by what works for upper and middle management, and front line workers/front line service is not important, although it is their reason for being. When you don't have to focus on serving the public or getting work done, stress can be reduced. But when there are work demands on top of sensory hostile environments, sensory sensitive individuals will suffer degrees of stress that are not recognized nor understood. These are compounded if they are conscientious and ethical.

I just observed a young boy in a stark kindergarten class that is too bright, and of course, very busy. When he came in on Monday morning, the skin on his face was clear and smooth. Within a few hours, his skin became more red and irritated, though he did not rub his face or lick his lips at all. Many conditions are exacerbated by sensory stress. We live in a society that treats symptoms and not causes, and so, sensory conditions like this can impair the comfort level and ability to function of sensitive individuals to the point where they have headaches and skin irritations, are grumpy and irritable and not exactly sure why. If we fail to assess and remedy sensory factors, then we never remedy the underlying problem, and we end up labeling and judging others for their sensory sensitivities. Schools and employers who have too much to do and expect all people to be the same find that they have problem workers and problem students, and these are replaced as quickly as they are excluded.

Chronic Sensory Overload creates Sensory Stress. This is very often mis-diagnosed and mis-treated, creating additional stressors and additional problems. And there does not appear to be a diagnosis or a support system for helping people who experience these debilitating conditions. What we see is the resultant frustration, internalized stress and anxiety, and social-emotional problems that occur when stress is not addressed. Over time, this is traumatic to the nervous system, especially the more primitive reptilian brain which regulates our stress hormones and fight/flight reactions. When this becomes chronic and untreated, small factors in the environment can trigger reactions that are disproportionate to the situation. As in childhood victims of trauma, this creates a dissociation or withdrawal. If you bury your head in your smart phone, cover yourself with a hoodie, and avoid activities and people that give you joy, this may be part of the problem.

Do you experience:

- 👉 headaches
- 👉 sore or tired eyes
- 👉 irritability
- 👉 inability to focus
- 👉 increased distractibility
- 👉 increased impulsivity
- 👉 reactions that are out of proportion
- 👉 deterioration as the day goes by
- 👉 muscle tension, tightness in shoulders, forearms, legs, backaches
- 👉 increased fidgeting, including movements in extremities, biting nails, chewing lips, etc.
- 👉 less patience
- 👉 hypersensitivity to small things that didn't bother you in the past

This list could go on and on. One thing is apparent, none of these symptoms are unique or distinctly evident with sensory stress. This serves to guarantee that chronic sensory overload will continue to be overlooked and ignored. Generalized stress, relationship problems, substance abuse, and a bad attitude can be all

that upper management sees, when they look with corporate eyes. And so, just as we are doing with our youth in school, we will see more and more people thinking there is something wrong with **them**, and that they are not able to do what they should be able to do. Leading to more internalized criticism and depression.

How can you tell if you are a victim of sensory stress? There is an adult sensory profile assessment that will help you to see if your sensory processing is what is getting in the way of your meaningful occupations. One of the hallmark features of sensory stress is that it can occur when you are happy and calm as easily as when you are angry. Of course, it may be exacerbated when you are anxious, unhappy, or depressed. But it is the negative symptoms that come up when everything is going great that can really make you think you are crazy. And they are often not consistent.

When you have had a really good spell and you are happier than you ever imagined you would be (for the right reasons), the onslaught of sensory stress might be easier to withstand, and this further reinforces the notion that it is just "you" and how you handle stress.

Sensory sensitive people are more susceptible to sensory stress, but we are all at risk, unless we excel at self care. See my handouts on sensory sensitivity and sensory avoiding on the handout page of my website, or look over the books on page 5 of this newsletter. (When you look

at them at Amazon.com, you can look inside the books.)

For me, self employment was the best coping strategy, but that does leave a social gap, and it may not work for everyone. So what are some things you can do to minimize sensory overload and sensory stress?

1. **Talk to others** and let them know this is an issue for you. This may open the door to some small accommodations, but will also be a great heads up to those who care about you so they don't take it personally and can be your ally.
2. **Stand up for yourself** and acknowledge that your mental health is of primary importance. Have the willingness to be your main support and the integrity to self love.
3. Read one of the books on the next page and discuss the condition with **your doctor**. Help your doctor to understand you and be on your side. Drugs are not likely to be the answer, but when you can tell your doctor what kind of support you need, s/he may be able to help. For example, my doctor wrote a letter to my employer stating that I needed 11 days off of work for health reasons. I used the time to attend a 10 day Vipassana retreat (I had discussed this with my M.D.). This was the best self care I could have done, and was able to use sick days for this. Without thinking about it, this break allowed my body and mind to "know" the solutions for me! Your approach might be a little different, but having a doctor who you know well may be an important step in being able to do this.

Groundbreaking Autism Research

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/02/140226110836.htm>

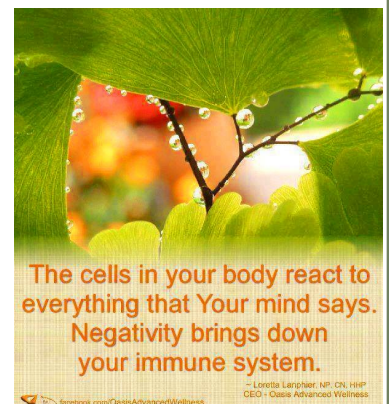
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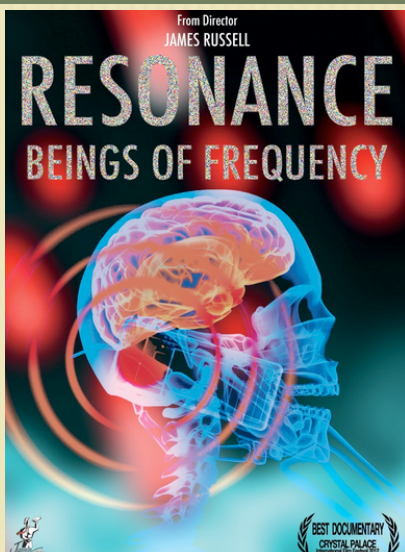
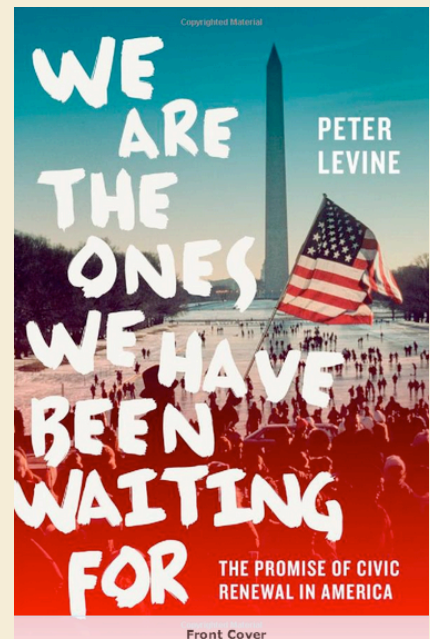
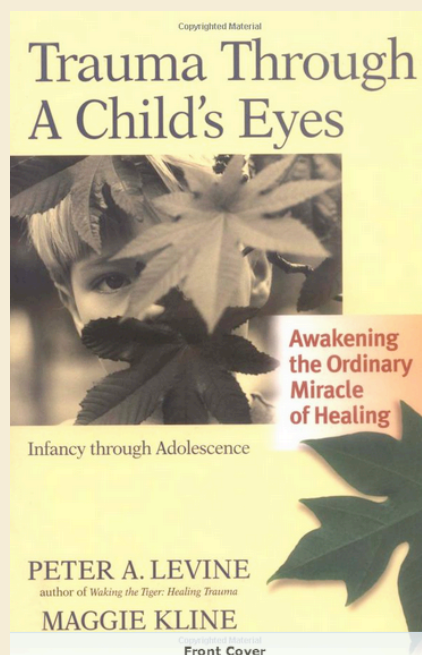
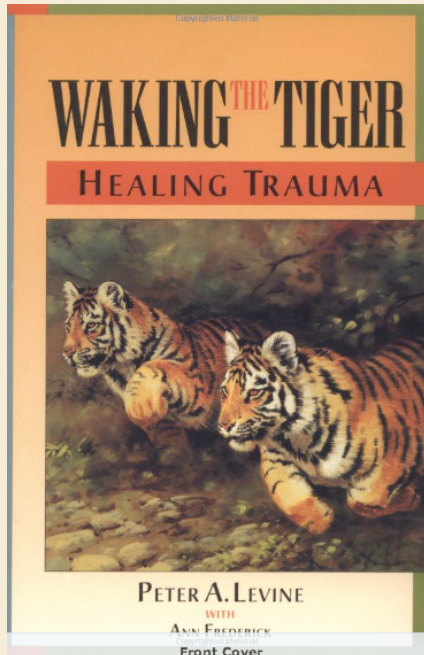
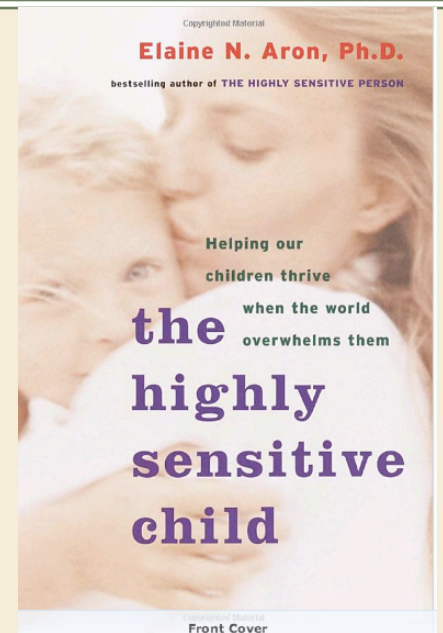
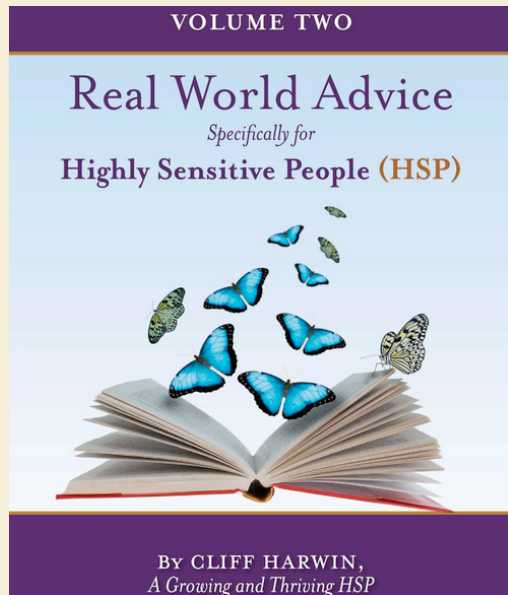
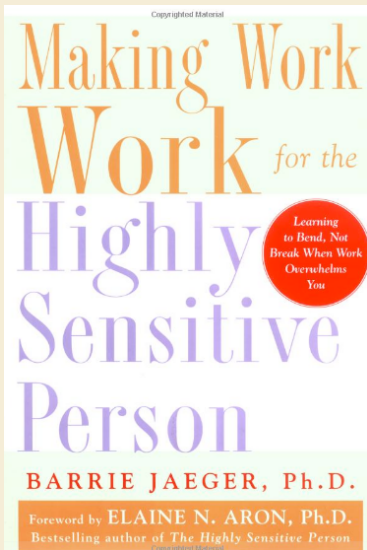
This research looks at the role of vitamin D precursor, tryptophan, and the serotonin balance.

Possible amelioration of symptoms with simple supplementation!

4. When you need a break, **take one!** Don't let anyone judge you. A walk, a trip to the mailbox, water cooler, or washroom might be enough to help you dissipate some tension. When you need a mental health day, take it.
5. **Explore lighting options.** If you cannot influence the lighting in your office, take more frequent breaks, wear a hat with a brim, try coloured lenses, and do everything you can to maintain visuals in your environment that are pleasing and grounding.
6. **Get an iPod** and good earbuds/headphones. Find calm music that works for you. The market has exploded for nature sounds, new age music, Sonic-Aid (brain friendly) music, and your old time favourites. At one time I made a little playlist of a few songs: "Don't Worry, be Happy" "Gonna Be Alright" and positive little favourites. I found that once I set up my environment, putting my music on allowed me to "leave" the environment and become absorbed in what I needed to do. (You might put up a little sign beside your desk to give a heads up to the buddy who might stand there and talk to you without realizing you can't hear!)
7. **LISTEN TO YOUR GRANDMOTHER!** Take time to smell the roses, and slow yourself down. Enjoying the nice things about the world around you helps you to shift gears and also provides a buffer that increases your tolerance.
8. Give yourself **fidget items** and sensory breaks. These help to dissipate your stress and allow your brainstem to more efficiently process information. Little gadgets, stretchy rings, kaleidoscopes all serve a purpose and can slow down the damage being done to you.

9. Engaging in preferred **crafts** and off-work activities also helps to create a buffer. In this world, it is even harder to keep work contained to the work day, but you owe it to yourself and those you love to do this! Yoga, meditation, walking, woodwork, etc.
10. Build **social buffers**, in and out of the work place. Let people know who you are and talk about what is going on for you. This will build self regard and advocacy skills while also buffering the stress.
11. Trauma occurs "when any experience stuns us like a bolt...overwhelms us,, leaving us altered and disconnected from our bodies". You need a break, you need to learn to shake it off, and you need to document the small traumas that are inflicted upon you by the workplace. Without developing a victim mentality, you need to be self aware, because these events are cumulative.
12. **Love yourself** and accept who you are. We have all experienced traumas in our lives that are activated from time to time. These do not make us less deserving than anyone else. Be your ally.





Young humans have cells that respond to magnetism, but these stop working as we age. Learn about how some sensory sensitive individuals actually notice the damage that occurs with cellphones and stronger wireless signals. Watch Resonance Beings of Frequency at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6n-fIHGia8&list=WLop2ZhuzC_xxyxDjDB5b6WuS5bDojht9