

Hey! My Brain Doesn't Work That Way!

Using The Body to Lead the Mind – Exploring Brain Differences, Understanding Sensory Processing, Promoting Self Regulation, Supporting Stress Management

I've worked as an occupational therapist for over 26 years. I have a private practice in and around Vancouver, where I provide OT services, workshops, and consultation. I most recently worked for Vancouver Coastal Health providing Occupational Therapy for children in Vancouver schools. I trained and worked in Connecticut for 13 years before relocating to Vancouver. I've always worked with children, in a variety of settings including public schools, preschools, families' homes, daycares, and institutions. Much of this experience was with children with autism and sensory processing disorders. I have also worked to educate OT's, parents, caregivers, and other professionals. I have one grown son and a 2 year old grandson who also live in Vancouver.

Title: ***Hey, My Brain Doesn't Work That Way! Using the Body to Lead the Mind***
Understanding Sensory Processing, Promoting Self Regulation, Supporting Stress Management

I have presented this workshop through many agencies and organizations over the past 6 years. I've been proud to present my work many times for the Langley Child Development Centre, for the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health, VCC, Langara College, and for many community organizations. I have done my workshop extensively in BC, and have traveled to the Yukon, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Connecticut. I make changes to the presentation over time and based on the ages of children discussed and needs of the audience. I have presented to educators, support workers, parents, and others. I also have developed related and shorter presentations to reinforce the content of the main workshop, and can present a shorter overview.

We begin by exploring the concepts of brain differences, whether because of sex or toxic exposure. We look at various areas of the brain and how differences in those areas affect behaviour and learning. Some common brain differences between sexes and in brains affected by autism are discussed in terms of how we can help to improve function and learning for all. In today's world, the failure to respect and teach to these differences results in 'teaching disabilities' which means that some children are not taught in a way that helps them learn. Ideas and strategies are offered to make learning easier for all. We also talk about some basic ways to reduce toxic exposures and promote healing.

The human stress response system is explored. We see how different pathways can activate this system and how it can interfere with learning and behaviour. We can understand and discover approaches that will prevent stress responses and that will help to diffuse stress reactions when they occur. We also see how different people have different triggers for the stress response system. We touch on the impact of neurotransmitters on arousal and attention. Arousal is explored, as well as how it is influenced.

Everyone has different sensitivities and sensory preferences. Sensory Processing is complex and individualized. Learn how sensory processing works and how we use sensory input to maintain our level of alertness. Discover how you can help children, through a sensory/motor approach, to be calm and alert. Sensory Diet is a term to describe the process of using sensory and motor input to help regulate level of arousal. Using simple concepts, help children learn to be aware of their own levels of arousal, and what they can do to change or maintain levels of arousal.

When environmental factors are accounted for and self regulation and sensory calming is used, principles of Collaborative Problem Solving™ (Dr. Ross Greene) can be used effectively to solve problems and improve flexibility.

Now, all this information can be put together and used as an approach to deal with stress and anxiety. In my model, a language based approach to stress and anxiety is used, with a lot of visual supports. Preparation, rehearsal, and positive self talk are used about real situations, and children learn to stay motivated and reduce anxiety. This workshop puts together and looks at strategies we have all used through life to differing degrees. Once you understand how the pieces fit together, you will be able to use them and teach others to approach life more positively and confidently.

This workshop incorporates years of clinical experience with Winnie Dunn's Model of Sensory Processing, The Alert Program for Self Regulation, and the Stress Management program of the Groden Center, Inc. Much of the information on brain differences comes from the work of Michael Gurian, educator and author of the book *The Minds of Boys – Saving Our Sons from Falling Behind in School and Life*. The work of Norman Doidge, Bruce Perry, Peter Levine, Ross Greene, and Simon Baron-Cohen have also contributed greatly to this workshop, to name a few. A useful bibliography will allow you to further explore any of the areas we discuss. The sensory part of the workshop was originally developed with autism spectrum disorders, sensory modulation disorders, anxiety disorders, and attention disorders in mind. However, all people are affected by the sensory environment and this information can be generalised to most environments. Adult participants will also learn about their own sensory needs and sensory preferences, and how these affect daily life if not attended to.