

A Closer Look at Behavior: Aiden's Story

We want to thank Aiden's mom, Jackie, for sharing Aiden's story with us.

Aiden's aggression and defiant behavior increased after starting Public school (pre-K), and seemed to worsen as he got older. Some behaviors that Aiden has exhibited are: hitting, running away from adults, throwing himself on the floor, laughing uncontrollably at inappropriate times, slamming doors, running around the room/classroom, taking off his clothes, throwing toys, shoes and food, locking and unlocking doors, putting non edible objects in mouth, jumping off furniture, grinding teeth, and becoming frustrated quickly and easily with puzzles, dressing, etc.

Aiden started Occupational Therapy (OT) at age one, and sensory overload was mentioned at that time. The therapist performed and taught activities to help decrease sensitivity to outside stimuli, but that was as far as the teaching went. I did not relate his abnormal behaviors as he got older with Sensory Perception Disorder (SPD). He started private outpatient OT again this summer and they again mentioned how he craves sensory input, such as putting feet in a bowl of dried corn, swinging and playing with play dough.

As Aiden grew, his behavior at school and home worsened. I searched aggressive behavior, autistic behaviors, etc. and started reading about SPD. "Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is a condition that exists when sensory signals don't get organized into appropriate responses." (SPDfoundation.net)

My knowledge prior to this was that Aiden liked to swing and run around barefoot because it felt good. In reality, almost every behavior was sensory input seeking, such as: sucking his thumb (or fingers), stomping his feet when he walked/ran, giving bear hugs, liking tight clothing, falling on the floor intentionally, enjoying jumping (especially on a trampoline), hitting other children and not crying when being hit or falling down and having an injury (high pain tolerance).

One thing that really got my attention was Aiden's hitting. I was thinking he was hitting to be mean or mischievous, when in actuality he hits because it gives him strong sensory input to his hands. When he is hit by another child it most likely feels like craved input, therefore hitting feels good to do and, in his mind, must feel good to others. When he goes on a hitting spree, I know it's time for "Heavy Work."

Some "Heavy Work Activities" that work for Aiden are joint compression, spine compression (pushing on shoulders while seated), squeezing in between two pillows, deep massage to feet, tight bear hugs,



tight clothing (like compression shirts or footy pajamas), weighted vest (especially at school), pulling rubber band, rolling on large ball or rolling large ball over body.

I was told by his Occupational Therapist that sensory input activities should calm the nervous system for approximately two hours at a time, and Aiden would benefit most from a “Sensory Diet.” We have not mastered this, but it has significantly changed the way we react to Aiden’s behavior, and lets us inside his head just a little bit. We are learning every day and are open to any input from parents that have older children and interventions that have worked for them.

Learning about SPD honestly changed our lives. I have tools that I can use to help calm Aiden’s nervous system and help him function more easily in life. This is not a magic tool, and it does not work exactly the same every time. We have good days and bad, but the good definitely outweighs the bad.

Published First Quarter 2014

