

IASA's 10-Year Celebration

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Sensory Information Sensory Integration and Strategic Functioning.

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Plenary talk

Our eight sensory systems provide us with information about the body self and the environment. The brain constantly selects which information it attends to, enhances, and inhibits, to enable us to function. How we process this information determines our behaviour and affects our capacity to engage with others. Sensory processing dysfunction may result in problems with detection, modulation, and interpretation of sensation. This in turn leads to the emergence of behavioural patterns and strategies. Consideration will be given to strategic functioning from a sensory processing perspective, and for the need to differentiate sensory-based behaviours from attachment-based behaviours in our assessments and interventions. The current practice is to assess sensory processing and attachment patterns separately. The emergence of integrating sensory coding and attachment coding into the same assessment is leading to a broader understanding of presenting behaviours of both parents and children. It is also helping the clinician to more accurately predict which activities dysregulate and which promote regulation.

Éadaoin Bhreathnach has developed an integrative model 'Sensory Attachment Intervention' (SAI) for children and adults who have suffered trauma and abuse. SAI focuses on the capacity to self regulate and co-regulate with others. It primarily draws from The Dynamic Model of Attachment, and from neurodevelopmental theories such as Ayres Sensory Integration, to inform clinical practice.

How it uses the DMM

The Dynamic Maturational Model is a key component in SAI as it looks at information processing from an attachment perspective. It provides a framework for assessment and intervention. The DMM patterns of attachment inform parents how the child organises his or her behaviour, in an attempt to predict and control the source of danger. This information helps to shift their dispositional representation of their child. Parents are invited to recall their own attachment history and discuss how they respond when their child is distressed or in need of comfort. This supports reflective functioning and the development of new adaptive behaviours

What it can contribute to DMM

DMM training is mandatory for professionals who wish to become certified practitioners in SAI. This has led the DMM to be introduced to new groups of professionals working in the fields of Health, Education and Social Care in Europe, Australia, USA and South Africa. SAI encourages an integrative transdisciplinary approach to analysing behaviour. Trained DMM coders have recently begun to consider how sensory processing disorder contributes to the child's behaviour during DMM assessments. Joint analysis of assessments is now taking place to ensure parents and children's behaviours are not misinterpreted. Correct analysis is vital when deciding choice of intervention.