

How sensory integration therapy can transform a child's daily life

Introduction

When Jamie joined Sunfield, it was felt that he would benefit from sensory integration therapy to enable him to gain confidence and independence in certain daily tasks. Specific goals within therapy, which were established with Jamie, were being able to tie his shoe laces, improving his shoulder girdle stability, and improving his ideation in relation to the planning of movement – skills that could transform his everyday life.

Background

On Jamie's arrival at Sunfield, a comprehensive sensory integration assessment was completed by the Occupational Therapy team. The assessment involved sessions in the sensory integration suite, in which any strengths and difficulties in his processing of sensory information were observed, and the implications of these on his daily life were considered. Questionnaires were also completed by those around Jamie, to explore his functioning across different environments. Based on their assessment, the team developed a plan of sensory integration therapy for Jamie.

The Journey

Jamie's sensory integration therapy aimed to improve the way he processed incoming sensory information. It utilised intensive sensory input from different sensory systems - including those related to taste, sight, hearing, touch, smell, movement, gravity, and position - alongside integrative activities that motivated him, increased his engagement and improved his adaptive responses.

In addition to the direct therapy, Jamie was provided with a sensory profile, which detailed his sensory needs and presentation, and a sensory diet: a set of sensory activities that provided him with the relevant sensory input that his body required in order to attain and maintain a calm alert state. These could then be used to pre-empt the need for input, or in response to behaviours that indicated sensory input was required.

Jamie and the therapist worked together to create a visual guide to his sensory diet activities, with photos of him doing the exercises, and written guidance to prompt each step, for Jamie and the adults working with him. Jamie now uses his sensory diet activities in both care and education settings, and is able to communicate to staff, when he needs the relevant input to help him to stay calm and engaged.

The Conclusion

Jamie is now fully independent in tying his shoe laces, something he could not do at all when he started the therapy. He is also able to hold a position that challenges his shoulder girdle stability for 120 seconds, from 20 seconds at the baseline. Jamie is able to more independently formulate and complete a motor plan, when compared to his initial performance, based on a reduced number of prompts required to complete the task. By addressing the underlying sensory functioning, Jamie's fine and gross motor skills have improved, allowing enhanced performance and engagement within his day to day functioning.