

SUMMER VACATION WITH SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER

The time has come for many of us to begin planning summer vacations, daytrips, camps, and activities for our kids. Although these activities can be very educational and beneficial for kids, keep in mind the amount of stimulation your child can tolerate. A common mistake is to overdo these activities for our sensory sensitive kids. If your child has environmental sensitivities (i.e., to noise, touch, sights, and smells), you will want to be very selective in your vacations, day trips, and especially short-term camps. Decide with your family which trips and activities are the most meaningful and go for quality rather than quantity of activities. Bear in mind that changes in routine, travel, out-of-town company, groups of new kids, and new teachers with different demands/expectations, can all be very overstimulating.

Here are a few suggestions to help the summer go smoothly while keeping kids organized:

---Be consistent in attending therapy sessions. Remember that the time actually spent in direct treatment is relatively short, but will produce big pay-offs in years to come. We want to prepare kids for the increased demands required in the coming school year.

---Set aside time for consistent home movement programs. Remember to provide movement input before and after very stimulating activities (i.e., trip to an amusement park, birthday party, large crowds, etc.).

---Pack a brush. If your child is participating in the Wilbarger Brushing Protocol, brushing can easily be incorporated during travel and daytrips.

---Take along earplugs and sunglasses. This can be particularly helpful in cutting down on stimulation while visiting amusement parks.

---Bring a stroller for younger children. A double stroller can allow a place to rest, and one with a hood can cut down on extraneous sights and sounds.

---Bring your own towels, bedding, and toiletries if your child is very sensitive to textures and smells.

---Limit screen time (TV, video games, computer, and gameboys). These activities tend to be more stimulating and disorganizing. They can discourage kids from seeking movement that they need to improve sensory processing.

---Provide quiet time. This might be accomplished by playing alone in one's room. May be particularly helpful with larger families and during visits from out-of-town guests.

---Pace yourself. Alternate more stimulating activities (i.e. trip to Disneyland, family reunions,

outdoor fairs) with calming ones (days at home playing outside, hiking, trips to the playground).

With some careful and selective planning, we can expect a summer that is both satisfying and organizing for our sensory sensitive kids. Enjoy!

Submitted by Cindy Iida, MA, OT

Reference: "Disney is Doable...Even with Sensory Processing Issues" by Deborah and Emilee Mason. S.I. Focus Magazine, winter 2008