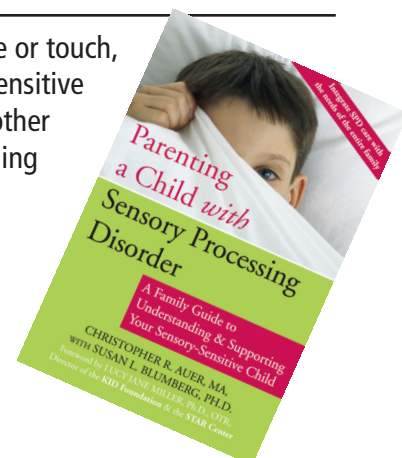


*“Auer and Blumberg have lent their insight, passion, and compassion to this workbook. In so doing they have also provided a guidebook—and a preamble of advocacy for children and their families.”*

—Morton Ann Gernsbacher, Ph.D., Vilas Research  
Professor and Sir Frederic C. Bartlett Professor  
of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Do you have a child in your life that is picky and difficult? Are they unusually sensitive to noise or touch, or perhaps cannot enjoy the television unless it's blaring loud? Or they may seem extra sensitive to physical sensations, light, and sound, and react strongly to sensory events that adults and other children take in stride or totally ignore, like hearing a choir sing. These children may be struggling with a little-known condition called *sensory processing disorder* (SPD).

Having SPD can lead to difficulties in school or in social events, and can make it difficult to live peaceably with other family members. Until now there have been only limited resources for parents of kids with this little-known condition, but now a child advocate and child psychologist offer this comprehensive guide to parenting a child with SPD and integrating his or her care with the needs of the whole family.



*Parenting a Child with Sensory Processing Disorder* (New Harbinger; \$15.95) introduces SPD and offers an overview of what it means to advocate for a child with the condition. It describes a range of activities that help strengthen family relationships, improve communication about the disorder, and deal with problem situations and conditions a child with SPD may encounter. Complete with case stories that demonstrate how the book's ideas can play out in daily life, *Parenting a Child with Sensory Processing Disorder* stresses the importance of whole-family involvement in the care of a child with SPD, especially the roles fathers play in care-giving

**Fact** ⇒ Sensory processing disorder (SPD) affects approximately 5 percent of all children; many children with autism, ADHD, and fragile X syndrome also have sensory-processing issues.

**Fact** ⇒ Something really is wrong when a child has SPD — the symptoms aren't just figments of the imagination.

**Fact** ⇒ Early identification of SPD is critical to prevent the occurrence of secondary problems, such as poor social participation, poor self-regulation, and poor self-esteem/self-confidence.

**Fact** ⇒ Something can be done if the disorder is accurately diagnosed.

*“This book, the first of its kind for children with SPD, will give power and knowledge to the parents of children with SPD. It is a must-have reference for all of those parents.”*

—Lucy Jane Miller, Ph.D., OTR  
Author of *Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder*

*Parenting A Child With Sensory Processing Disorder: A Family Guide To Understanding & Supporting Your Sensory Sensitive Child*, by Christopher R. Auer, MA, with Susan L. Blumberg, Ph.D.  
Published in December 2006, New Harbinger Publications, ISBN (10): 1-57224-463-1; ISBN (13): 978-1-57224-463-4, \$15.95, 224 pages,  
Call 800-748-6273 or visit [www.newharbinger.com](http://www.newharbinger.com)

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## About the Authors

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Susan Blumberg, Ph.D. and Christopher Auer, MA

**Christopher R. Auer, MA**, is the disabilities and mental health administrator for Denver's Great Kids Head Start in the Mayor's Office for Education and Children. He is the parent of three children, one of whom is diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mood disorder, and sensory processing disorder.

**Susan L. Blumberg, Ph.D.**, is coauthor of six books. She has more than twenty years' experience as a family advocate for families with children with special needs, helping families navigate through the system to obtain services and supports.

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## *Praise for Parenting A Child with SPD*

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"It has been said that a family of five is akin to five people lying side-by-side on a waterbed: whenever one person moves, everyone feels the ripple. A child with sensory processing disorder can have a devastating impact upon the day-to-day functioning of a family...Auer and Blumberg have written a valuable book that finally provides parents with specific strategies and practical solutions to the daily challenges faced by these special children and their families...I strongly recommend this book..."

—**Richard D. Lavoie, M.A., M.Ed.**, author of *It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend* and executive producer of *How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop*

"Finally a book that treats SPD in the full context that it deserves: not as a co-condition or as another obstacle but as a full fledged challenge to the complete inclusion of individuals with unique learning styles.... Auer and Blumberg walk you through how that process is both derailed and rekindled."

—**Rick Rader, MD**, editor-in-chief of *Exceptional Parent* magazine and director of the Morton J. Kent Habilitation Center

"Read this with a highlighter in hand, because you will want to refer many times to the wise and wonderful ideas in this splendid how-to book. The authors are not only sensitive and resourceful parents of kids with SPD, but also articulate, honest, and sensible writers."

—**Carol S. Kranowitz, MA**, author of *The Out-of-Sync Child*

"In raising children with or without special needs, nothing is more important than the family unit. This book will enable you to enhance your child's sensory development. Additionally, it will help you ensure that your child and all family members not only survive, but, indeed, thrive! When your whole family thrives, you can best ensure your child's optimum development over the short and long range of life."

—**Ann Turnbull, Ed.D.**, cofounder and codirector of the Beach Center on Disability

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**Question: What exactly is sensory processing disorder (SPD)? What are some signs of sensory disorders to look for in children?**

**Answer:** Kids with SPD may over or under-respond to sensory information. They may crave sensory information, which they might seek to get by biting, spinning, or crashing into things. They may demonstrate difficulty discriminating sensory information, like the difference between something hard and soft. To some, kids with SPD can appear clumsy and uncoordinated.

**Question: What are some tips you can offer parents of children with SPD to help their children get the most out their school experience?**

**Answer:** First, it can help if parents understand how they themselves naturally cope with sensory information at work. Some adults chew gum when they read or listen to music. Others might need a quiet spot, away from distractions. We forget that children in school might benefit from the same strategies. We have a number of specific suggestions parents could recommend to their child's teacher that can enhance the child's learning experience. Kids might benefit from a slant board and raised-line paper on which to write. Writing or drawing might be encouraged by offering the child a variety of pencil grips, and he or she might benefit from sitting on cushions or therapy balls during class.

Most of all, children should have the opportunity to actively engage in their learning through manipulative or meaningful activities. Also, just like adults need to get up and walk to the watercooler now and then, children need to have the freedom of movement through recess. Free time at recess isn't a privilege; it's a critical component of their school day that enables them to regroup, so they can learn at their best. Finally, if their child has a medical condition that impacts his or her ability to learn (which may include certain aspects of SPD, such as developmental coordination disorder) parents can request specific accommodations through what is called a 504 Plan.

**Question: How can the family as a whole be affected by this disorder?**

**Answer:** Any significant disorder can have a devastating impact on the family if it is not addressed. Siblings may shoulder an unfair burden of responsibility for the care of the child with special needs. Medical expenses, even with insurance, can seriously impact the family's budget, limiting the resources the family has for respite. The stress of keeping peace in the family, working and juggling medical appointments, and the fatigue of dealing with challenging behavior can all impact the relationship between mothers and fathers.

**Question: What can parents hope for their SPD child?**

**Answer:** In the darkness of dealing with the challenging behaviors often associated with SPD, parents can sometimes forget that they and their children both have a natural resilience or capacity to navigate life well, as one of the contributors to the book describes. It's impossible for anyone to know what the possibilities are—both for parents and for children. When my older brother was recommended to be placed in the state mental institution at the age of three, no one, especially medical professionals recognized any ability for my brother to function well in life. Going against all the advice they received, my parents were determined to care for him in our home. They found intensive early intervention supports made an indescribable difference in his overall functioning. Today, he has a bachelor's degree from Indiana University and has received many awards at his place of employment. Many, including my brother, would say that he is not disabled.

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## Chris's Story

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Excerpt from *Parenting Your Child with SPD*

After I entered the lodge for our staff retreat, my supervisor took one look at me and doubled over with laughter. No, I hadn't worn my pajamas to work (my personal recurring nightmare). The cause of laughter was a thick dark circle around my eye, the result of an encounter with my then four-year-old son Brendan. It's safe to say that I lost that encounter. I wore my battle scar for about two weeks, to work, to the grocery store, to Sunday dinner with my father.

The encounter led to an emotional and painful awakening: we needed assistance. As a family, we were being pushed down a path none of us had volunteered for. But surely, it seemed, if any family was capable of meeting the needs of our child it was ours...

At the time we didn't know what was wrong with Brendan. When we mentioned the difficulties we were facing to our child's pediatricians (we changed several times out of frustration), the usual response was "Preschool-age children are normally very active," or "He'll grow out of it." We felt like grabbing a bullhorn and shouting as loud as we could, "Houston, we have a problem!" Many doctors we spoke to agreed that Brendan displayed some symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), but found additional behaviors not typically associated with this disorder.

Because he didn't fit the typical pattern, doctors were reluctant to make a diagnosis—or even give us a referral for additional assessment. Furthermore, they explained that a diagnosis of ADHD isn't usually made until a child is at least five years old. Finally, we managed to see a child psychiatrist, and—with Brendan literally climbing the walls of the office, hitting his sister, and throwing the psychiatrist's books on the floor—this doctor diagnosed him with ADHD. My wife and I felt a sense of relief and validation. It wasn't us. We weren't incapable parents. However, over time we recognized that there was really much more to Brendan's symptoms than just ADHD. He was constantly craving sensory input—his senses were totally out of whack. Brendan constantly gritted his teeth and would grab the arms or legs of anyone within a hundred yards (especially his siblings), squeeze, and press his lips against the other person's skin, blowing and sometimes even biting.

He was also over-responsive to smells and bright light. We felt like we'd given birth to a vampire: Brendan screamed inconsolably whenever the sun was on his face. Brendan also struggled with transitions, especially changing seasons. As summer turned to fall, Brendan would insist (forcefully) on wearing shorts and a T-shirt outside—even when it was thirty degrees. He didn't seem to notice or care about the cold. Eventually, with a lot of coaxing, he was able to transition to a turtleneck, snow boots, and sweatpants—until early summer, when again we faced a tough transition.

One beautiful warm spring day, as I carried Brendan in his turtleneck, snow boots, and sweatpants into church, he covered both ears with his hands and complained that church was too loud. I looked at all of the other children sitting with their families in the pews. While the other children seemed to be enjoying the music, Brendan was in pain. At this moment, it was clear to me that something was different with Brendan, beyond ADHD — so different that Brendan couldn't participate in daily activities. I realized then that we had to set out again to find help for Brendan and our family. [Continued in *Parenting Your Child with SPD*]

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