

Understanding Sensory Processing Differences:

Tools for Effective Support

with Occupational Therapist Elen Nathan



Sensory processing difficulties, where individuals process and integrate sensory information differently, often underlie behavioural and participation concerns for many children and young people. These challenges are particularly common among neurodivergent children, such as those with ADHD, autism, sensory processing differences, ARFID (Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder), and those with developmental trauma. When sensory processing differences are not fully understood, they can lead to exclusion from education and increased interaction with mental health and other tertiary services.

We now understand that the brain develops sequentially, organising and processing from the bottom up, with sensory processing being the first area to develop. This foundational development impacts all future brain functions, including learning, impulse control, social skills and behaviour. This insight is driving a paradigm shift away from top-down behavioural approaches toward bottom-up, relationship-based, sensory-aware interventions.

There is significant harmony between sensory-based approaches, trauma-informed care, neurodivergent affirming care and modern relationship-based strategies for supporting children, young people, and their families through behavioural and mental health challenges. Often the challenge comes from the system and people around the person not understanding their needs, rather than from the person themselves. This seminar will integrate the evidence for these approaches and offer practical recommendations for facilitating meaningful change for those with sensory processing differences, neurodivergence, and developmental trauma.

Key Topics Elen Will Discuss:

- **Sensory Systems:** Understand the nine sensory systems and their impact on behaviour, participation, relationships, and well-being.
- **Causes of Sensory Differences:** Explore different reasons for SPD such as neurodivergence, trauma, prematurity, and brain injury. Identify which populations require greater screening and care, and why.
- **Sensory Processing vs. Sensory Preference:** Learn to distinguish between clinically significant sensory processing differences and personal sensory preferences.
- **Sensory Screening:** Discover methods for screening sensory processing differences to better inform individualised responses.
- **Sensory Interventions:** Explore different types of sensory interventions, appropriate populations for each, and common mistakes when working with individuals.
- **Behavioural Approaches:** Understand why traditional behaviour-based solutions like sticker charts, detentions, or earning & withdrawing privileges often fail for those with sensory processing difficulties and neurodivergence and learn effective alternatives.
- **Supporting Participation:** Learn strategies to support, treat, or adapt when sensory differences impact participation in everyday life activities.

This seminar is designed for social workers, educators, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, GPs, nurses, dieticians, care and support workers, ACC sensitive claims providers, play therapists and others working in the fields of neurodevelopmental conditions, behaviour support, and trauma. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of sensory processing differences and evidence-based interventions, enhancing their ability to screen and assess unique sensory profiles and implement individualised, respectful & safe sensory interventions.



Elen Nathan is a specialist Occupational Therapist with advanced qualifications in sensory integration from Sheffield University, UK. With 20 years of experience across various sectors, Elen specialises in neurodivergence, neurodevelopmental conditions, and developmental trauma. She leads a specialist therapeutic service for children and families, focusing on sensory-based therapies such as sensory modulation, sensory integration, and providing supports for sensory processing differences. Elen is a sought-after trainer in New Zealand and Australia, known for her engaging and practical presentation style.

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Tour Details:

- 📍 **HAMILTON 29 August 2025**, Novotel Tainui, 7 Alma Street
- 🕒 9:00am - 3:00pm
- 💰 \$310 (incl. GST). Price includes lunch and tea break catering and presentation notes
- 📞 Contact the Compass Seminars team on 06 7591647 or office@compass.ac.nz

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