

Is it Sensory or is it Behavior?

By Amy Bornhoft

Just when I think I have Madison figured out....Kaboom.....she changes. It is like I have read many times, you need to be a detective to understand and correctly parent a child with Sensory Processing Disorder. I had hoped that once we got through the first year or two, I would have a working knowledge of Madison and her Sensory Issues. Little did I know that not only can they change daily, but at developmental milestones, new events, new experiences, etc.....

I find myself asking, "Is this a sensory issue or just her personality/age?" When she acts out, over responds to something, or has a fit, how do I respond? For the most part I know how to react with my other children and they know what response to expect from me. Madison and I confuse each other. Sometimes when she is over reacting I know it is a sensory issue. I think back to our day and what she has experienced, what we have done, how much sleep/food she's had. Then I look at the current situation and "Aha", she is done...she needs a break. I then respond with understanding and empathy knowing she is just as frustrated with her response as I am. We have both recently learned when we are upset to take a deep breath and blow it out of our mouth. It often ends up in a game of who can blow the others hair the most. But it works; we both calm down and begin again. In other situations, I just don't get it. Why is she screaming...having a breakdown...acting like this? It is morning, she slept well, she just ate, we have had little activity, everyone else is behaving, etc. So, is it sensory or behavioral? In these scenarios I mostly go with behavioral and respond as I would with the other children. At some point, soon after my reaction I ask myself, "Am I doing the right thing, Is this just typical?" It can be so exhausting!

For example, today, Madison touched a burner on the stove. Thank God it was just warming up so the wound was minor. Her reaction on the other hand was mind blowing. She screamed and cried for a good hour. I cared for her wound and then held her until she was calm. We did our breathing and bear hugs and tried diversions. She had moments where she could be consoled but they were few and far between. The moment bedtime was mentioned it began all over again, even though she had been calm at least thirty minutes. I looked at her burn and could barely see it but there was some redness so I treated it. I was sure to her it was awful and intense and she was "feeling" it more than, say I would. So, it was a sensory response, and I reacted correctly? Then why did she return to panic when bed time was mentioned? Had I fallen for it and she just milked it for all she could get? Either way, I questioned myself, but in the end, she was fine. I responded as a mom and helped my child who was hurting, no matter why.

It is also hard around others to explain or not explain why you are not responding or reacting the "accepted way" – whatever that means. Reactions to children's behaviors vary from person to person and child to child, but everyone has an

opinion even if they don't express it. That is why it is so much easier and relaxing to be with others who know some of the issues Madison has, and have an idea why we are responding the way we are.

Sensory response or behavior, she needs me! It is my job and privilege to take care of her and teach her the best I can. She has taught me so much about so many things. She is brave, outgoing, resilient and amazing. I love who she is and who she helps me to be. She would not be the same beautiful, wonderful girl if she didn't have Sensory Processing Disorder.

I love you Maddie, be patient with me.

AMY BORNHOFT lives in Virginia with her husband, son, and twins (boy and girl). She works for Soulcial Solutions, developing new buisness and Child Development Resource Center, raising awareness and funds. She also facilitates a support/resource group through Parent Connections at the Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation. She would like for readers to identify with her families experiences and realize they are not alone. She also hopes parents will open up about the positive and negative impact Sensory Processing Disorder has on their lives.

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