



Episode 25: Sensory Over-Responsivity and Sensory Diets

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder



LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

When we say a child is over- or under-responsive, we are usually describing their behaviour, not what their nervous system is actually doing. This episode pulls those apart, because the difference matters: a child who over-responds because they feel unsafe needs a completely different plan from one who over-responds because they are curious and just cannot land. Tracy makes the case that most of what we call sensory modulation is really the behavioural outcome of modulation and regulation working together, and that when our clinical reasoning is off, treatment can go wrong. We work through valence, the idea that a sensory response carries a positive or negative affective tone, and why a defensive over-response and a curious over-response can look alike but call for opposite plans. Cory and Michelle bring it to life with their own nervous systems, and we finish on sensory diets, reframed for the relational, polyvagal era as something deeply social and carefully timed, and on using STEP SI to build a plan that returns a child to safety until it becomes their new reference point.



Resources & Mentions

- STEP SI, Tracy Stackhouse's framework for reasoning across sensation, task, environment and predictability.
- Polyvagal theory and the concept of neuroception, Stephen Porges.



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1 Where in your current caseload have you been describing a child as over- or under-responsive, and what might shift if you named the valence behind it instead: defensive or curious, positive or negative?

- 2 Think of a recent session where a child's response felt sensory. How confident are you that it was sensation driving it, rather than autonomic state or a lack of safety, and what would help you tell the difference?

- 3 Reflect on a child who keeps over-responding without ever landing or recovering. What in your current plan targets recovery and habituation, not just the initial response?

- 4 Tracy reframes the sensory diet as a sensory-social diet, deeply relational and carefully timed. How relational and how deliberately timed are the sensory plans you set, and where could they become less of a checklist?

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Pick one child and map a STEP SI plan for them this week. What is the powerhouse that helps them find safety, and how will you build it into daily life rather than leaving it to chance?
