

## Eli's Rehab Report

### Clinical Rehab Roundup: Dish More Creative Servings of Play to Your Pediatric Patients' Days

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Children with sensory processing disorders (SPDs) generally aren't as social as other children. But this doesn't mean these children don't like -- or won't benefit from -- play. Connecting to the social aspects of daily life is crucial to children's development; thus, a group of occupational therapy researchers from the University of New Mexico and the University of Utah-Salt Lake City decided to examine play patterns more closely and how SPDs (such as autism) factored into the picture.

Researchers examined the social participation patterns of two groups of children ages six to nine: children with SPDs and their typically developing peers, according to a press release from the American Occupational Therapy Association.

Findings: The two groups of children demonstrated similar patterns of activity preferences and use of free time. However, the groups differed significantly in areas related to intensity and enjoyment of involvement in their social networks.

The children with SPDs (aka they are either more or less sensitive to the stimuli around them) tended to have less enjoyment of the activities with rules and pre-determined outcomes such as organized sports, puzzles, and board games, than their typically developing peers.

"This is something people should be aware of for all children," said **Joanna Cosbey, PhD, OTR**, lead study author and assistant professor of special education at the University of New Mexico. "But it is particularly important for children who tend to over- or under-respond to the sensory input present in everyday activities."

Researchers also found that the children with SPDs had more limited social networks than their peers, potentially putting them at risk for social isolation, according to the release. The children reported spending most of their time with their immediate families or alone, whereas their peers reported spending most of their time with extended family and friends.

"Parents, occupational therapy practitioners, and educators should be aware of [children with SPDs'] limited social networks and provide structured opportunities for social interaction with age-appropriate peers," Cosbey said.

"Ideally, these interactions should blend the activities that the children with SPD enjoy and can feel successful at with the social component."

Researchers also noted that further examining the nature of activities children enjoy and don't enjoy would be beneficial to identify the prominent sensory features that support or limit their social participation.