

00:00.00

theautismhelper

Hi Julia thank you so much for joining me.

00:03.32

Julia DeNey

Um, my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

00:05.40

theautismhelper

So I'm excited to chat about this topic today and we're going to talk about sensory needs related to clothing and behavior and really kind of go down that road but to kind of get us started. How would you. Define really what sensory needs are going big picture here.

00:23.71

Julia DeNey

Yeah I think the term can be almost intimidating or people think they don't know what it means but really to break it Down. It's about your senses. So It's about how sensitive you are to the input you're taking in so to sound. Visual the tactile you know all the senses everyone knows about sensory needs. Really just means that the person is experiencing those differently or taking in that input differently and that could be that they're too sensitive to it. So The noise is too loud or they're undersensitive to it so they're seeking more physical touch to. Feel regulated in that way.

01:03.19

theautismhelper

And how does this relate to the clothing that we wear.

01:09.16

Julia DeNey

Absolutely yeah I think a big sensory system that is often forgotten is the tactile. So ah, our clothing is 100 % that you know the tags digging into you. Is really bad for people who are really sensitive to that tactile input. You know the tag that might just seem a little annoying to you might be causing them a lot of pain. Um I also think it's the material. The clothing is made of it's also you know temperature regulation that's caused by clothing. You know if you're overheating. That's a really distressing sensory feeling. So there's a lot that goes into clothing that really affects your daily life. Ah from your sensory standpoint.

01:52.00

theautismhelper

I mean I think about this you know for our own behavior like I found myself yesterday digging into my laundry hamper to find this certain pair of leggings even though I have other leggings that are the same color I was like these ones are like the most comfortable right.



02:03.10

Julia DeNey

Um, yes, yes, totally? Yeah I think there's so much that even if you don't think you know you have sensory needs or you're not overly sensitive in that way. There's so much about our clothing that just is sensory to us. We have the things that are more comfortable or you know people avoid certain materials like oh I can't stand wool sweaters because they're too itchy. Um, things like that that definitely if you were forced to wear a wool sweater all day you know you would be thinking about and bothered by.

02:33.60

theautismhelper

Yeah, exactly so what you know you've mentioned a few kind of examples like the wool sweater but 1 other specific for you know some of our students and kids what types of clothing can be challenging and especially bothersome that you've seen.

02:49.79

Julia DeNey

Absolutely yeah I think some of the biggest ones I've seen especially with my students was um, collars or necklines that are too tight and that can really give almost like a suffocating feeling to a lot of kids or just that restricted feeling. That's really uncomfortable and I think along. Those lines is that restriction of movement. You know if you're in really unforgiving khakis or jeans and they're not really able to move around in play in the way they'd like to that can be a really distressing feeling and then I think some of the other things I already mentioned that were big like the tags or even the seams inside of clothing that if they're. Rubbing against them all day and causing pain or discomfort that's going to be really distressing and bottle up over the day and maybe lower their tolerance for other things like the noise level in the classroom or you know, whatever it is else going on at school. And that can really build up and disregulate them throughout the day.

03:47.83

theautismhelper

Yeah,, that's an important point that you know sometimes these kind of seemingly small things just build and then yeah decrease your tolerance level in other areas which you know I think we've all had that experience too where we're just like not as patient of a parent or as nice of a friend as we'd want to be because. Were irritated about other things.

04:07.61

Julia DeNey

Absolutely yeah I and I think that's something that is often why sensory needs especially around clothing can be overlooked if you're



saying hey well they're fine with their clothes every day you know I've never noticed them pulling at the tags before maybe it's other stuff in the day that's. Distressing them and it's built up like maybe they're usually able to tolerate it because it's not as loud or the fluorescent lights are usually off or whatever else is going on. It can be a smaller thing that builds up and can really be a problem one day and maybe you don't notice it the next. But that doesn't mean it's not necessarily not bothering them.

04:48.20

theautismhelper

Yeah, exactly And what are what are you kind of given some good examples of like you know if they're pulling on the tag or other things. But what are some you know clues that you've been able to pick up on. That clothing could be an issue and a contributing factor. What's like some ah you know relevant behaviors that you see.

05:08.64

Julia DeNey

Yeah, definitely yeah I think a big one that a lot of parents talk about is their kids really not being able to put on their clothing and ah you know, really struggling to get dress in the morning and also taking their clothes off. Um I saw that even in our classrooms I worked with 3 and 5 to five year olds so they were really new to school and when they got really upset or something else may have been bothering them. Maybe the first thing they do is try to strip off all their clothing which obviously at schools and things like that we need to teach them. They need to be in clothing. But. That was a big indicator to me that maybe there's something in the clothing that is bothering them that they can only tolerate so much that when something else is distressing them or they're you know, being sent into maybe a meltdown by something else and they go to take off their clothes. It might be because there is something in the clothing. That's already bothering them and is already distressing that they can no longer handle. So I think those are the other really obvious ones are just taking off the clothing but otherwise yeah, just the pulling edit the pulling fthe tags. Um, even the seams on the inside a lot of kids will just like. Flip it up and they'll kind of be tugging editor exploring it and just like trying to figure out themselves. What is bothering them.

06:28.97

theautismhelper

Yeah, those are good examples I mean I've had several students and clients that have taken clothes off and for sure that had to be this contributing factor of yeah maybe it doesn't bother me every day but when I'm already upset and there's all these other things going on this is like the last thing I need kind of thing. Um and a lot of. Take shoes off I see that a lot too like get in the room take off my shoes like and that's probably something that's uncomfortable to them.



06:49.98

Julia DeNey

Yeah, yeah I think socks is a huge one. That's also talked about um and I think that can play a big role like if it's rubbing in the shoe the wrong way they're just going to want to take the whole shoe off the whole sock off and. Done with it. Especially for our younger kids that aren't able to communicate exactly what it is. You know they're not going to be able to come up with you and say like oh my sock feels badly. That's why I want to take off my shoes. You know they might just be chucking it across the room and.

07:10.59

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

07:24.89

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

07:24.97

Julia DeNey

That's their way of communicating to you. There's something going on whether it's the shoe or the sock.

07:28.68

theautismhelper

Yeah, exactly So what? what you know? let's problem solve this and obviously that is what you do right now. What accommodations can be made to clothing items to really help overcome these challenges.

07:43.88

Julia DeNey

Totally yeah I think a big one that we were talking about the tags so universally hated cutting them out is a great option. It can be hard depending on the garment and the way they're made and the way the tags made I know um, some people have said it's. More distressing if you cut them out and leave a little bit because then it's such a sharp edge. Um, so you can also try to get a scene ripper and rip it out but also just trying to buy tagless clothing um is an easy fix there even if it's you know an undershirt So Their base layer is. More sensory-friendly and more comforting to them.

08:23.81

theautismhelper

Um, yeah, that's a great point. What benefits does really look oh sorry, go ahead.

08:28.37

Julia DeNey



Yeah, and I think oh no, no I was just going to say like that's definitely um Baseline and then from there. It's so many kids have like their own preferences in terms of materials and things like that that really come from. Just observing your child and giving them choices as much as possible. Even if they're not able to speak yet giving them different materials or different garments to hold in the morning and make a physical choice out of that's a great way to figure out. Um, the best materials to buy for them that would accommodate their sensory needs on that end.

09:03.41

theautismhelper

Yeah, they're just like laying out a few things and seeing what they gravitate towards.

09:08.97

Julia DeNey

Yes, exactly.

09:11.59

theautismhelper

So what benefits does adaptive clothing have and maybe actually even if you can define what adaptive clothing is for those of those listeners that that is new to.

09:23.12

Julia DeNey

Absolutely yeah, so adaptive. Fashion is clothing that's designed specifically for different disabilities in mind and to meet specific needs. So in my case I'm designing adaptive fashion specifically for sensory needs and for autistic kids and that really means just looking at their needs from a lot of different angles and trying to meet as many of them through clothing as possible. So if they really struggle with dressing themselves because of fine motor skills. You know we have magnetic closures and elastic waistbands if they really struggle with the tags and the seams. All our clothes are made with no tags and seams that are flat on the inside and out. So there's nothing rubbing against them. Um, adaptive fashion really has so many different facets I think so many things can be actually universal. So even if a kid doesn't need magnetic closures. They can just be fun and it can be for everyone still um, and then there's certain designs in adaptive fashion that are really specific. So if we're talking about sound sensitivity. You know we made a hoodie that has sound reduction built in and that has a more specific adaptive function um to meet that need. So it's pretty general and everyone goes about it differently and every design is unique, but overall adaptive fashion really meets.

10:55.10

Julia DeNey

Specific needs but also can be for everyone. You're just including



those that can't utilize other fashion maybe like can't stand using tags or is unable to operate zippers.

11:08.61

theautismhelper

That's a great definition and I think is super helpful to think about it and like it's broad but it also can be really specific. Um, tell me about this hoodie This sounds amazing.

11:16.40

Julia DeNey

Yeah, so the idea behind it was really that so many of my students you know were sensitive to sound or sensitive to light but couldn't tolerate wearing headphones or wouldn't tolerate them wearing them yet or as they got older didn't want to wear them. Around peers in certain situations. So We added material into a hood to help block out some of that noise right in the hood of this hoodie and also added an eyemass that could pull down when needed to create just a full sensory Break. So if you. Aren't really able to get somewhere especially in school away from the fluorescent lights away from the chaos of the other peers in your class. You're at least able to go into a corner sit at your desk and pull up a hood pull down an eye mask and just take a break and just try to regroup. And reregulate yourself.

12:10.14

theautismhelper

I Love that idea and like looks like so ageappropriate and just you know you're wearing a hoodie just like everyone else.

12:18.10

Julia DeNey

Exactly yeah I think especially as kids start getting older and more aware and you know you see it so young you know I was teaching 3 and 5 year olds but already kids on the playground I was in a like autism subs separate classroom and. We'd hang out with the gen ed classrooms on the playground and you could already tell that they're already noticing differences. They're already commenting on them and sometimes as kids get older like they just don't want anything else drawing attention to themselves and sometimes that is the headphones. Even if they. Really need them or it might be a weighted vest that they love but don't like the commentary on so really tried to find solutions through fashion that you know provided support in these areas that they needed while making them discrete and fashionable.

13:04.72

theautismhelper

Love that So you've kind of already been telling us about your kind of company. But why don't you formally introduce your company and really where how it came to be.



13:15.81

Julia DeNey

Yeah, absolutely so. My company is called Sensational you a little play on words and yeah, we make adaptive fashion for um, autistic children and anyone else who needs sensory supports in that area. And it really came about because I was studying fashion design at Cornell and at the same time started volunteering with a local autism preschool and a lot of the teachers and parents just brought up a lot of clothing struggles with me that you know they had a hard time finding clothing their kids would wear or they. Keep cutting holes in their shirts trying to take the tags out and so it started as a research project really to help some of these families and I realized how little was actually out there and available for them. So I started creating different solutions and. Talking with therapist to really take things a step further and integrate some of these sensory tools right into the clothing as well. So we have just sensory-friendly, comfortable clothing as well as some of these adaptive designs from sound reduction to built-in compression linings to having fidgets built in through the magnetic closures. Just. Subtle things that can help support kids and their sensory needs throughout the day without having to remember separate things to carry around having to put on different things and as we talked about having it be fashionable and discrete. So no one has to know if you don't want them to.

14:41.98

theautismhelper

Oh my gosh. That's so incredible. What are some of your what are some of your best sellers.

14:50.26

Julia DeNey

Yeah I think our top 2 bestsellers for sure are our compression line t-shirt which um I was sort of mentioning. It's kind of like a compression vest built in but underneath the shirt so it can be adjusted on both sides just by lifting up a shirt. You don't have to put on a separate vest or take it off throughout the day. Our other bestseller is that sound reducing hoodie that has the eye mask that just creates a sensory break wherever kids are it really helps with transitions and just anywhere you really could need it the store on the school bus in the classroom. I think people love it for how universal it is and how much it can support their kids no matter where they are.

15:33.29

theautismhelper

That's kind of the great idea about all of these things being built into clothing like the idea of a fidget being built into clothing is so great and like the the vest and the you know I mask all that is it's always with you. You don't have to remember another thing I mean there's already so much like every child has to remember every day.



You know, a lot of our students also have like an Ac device or you know something else they need so it's it's not like 1 more thing. It's just on them already.

15:53.20

Julia DeNey

Um, yeah, exactly Yeah I think that can be really challenging one for parents to always have to be remembering all the things and making sure you have everything they could need. But also in schools as an educator you know, even if you have a weighted vest. It might be in the classroom when you're out on the playground and you don't have the staff to run back and try to get it when a kid might need it and that can be really challenging so just making sure that it's something that kids always have on them so that. They always have the supports they need and are never left without it even though you know that's what they would have needed in that moment.

16:30.23

theautismhelper

Yeah, just making it easier which means you're going to use it more consistently and have better success with it.

16:38.75

Julia DeNey

Um, exactly yeah, that's definitely our goal.

16:39.74

theautismhelper

Well thank you so much for sharing all about this. This was you know, very like eye opening to think about you know I think that point you made on like it just being this. You know, build up effect is so key and we probably see so many students and kids. Have the same issues. Um I'm with that. So. Thank you so much for doing this great work for the community and sharing all about it today I will link your website in the show notes. So everyone can check it out.

17:04.17

Julia DeNey

Awesome! Yeah, my pleasure. Yeah I Love sharing just more about sensory needs I think it's something that sometimes gets overlooked especially in school settings that get really chaotic and you know we're focused on a little a lot of different things and a lot of different goals and. I Think yeah, knowing about that buildup effect can sometimes be key my pleasure. Thank you.

17:22.94

theautismhelper

Well thanks so much. Julia.