

Wilbarger Protocol for Sensory Defensiveness

For more information please go to:

http://www.childdevelopmentmedia.com/avanti_educational_programs.html And

Building Bridges Through Sensory Integration by Ellen Yack, B.Sc

The Wilbarger Protocol is a therapy program designed to reduce sensory or tactile defensiveness. Children who exhibit symptoms of tactile defensiveness are extremely sensitive to touch. This can cause a fear or resistance to being touched, difficulty transitioning between activities, and/or lethargy. The therapy was developed by Patricia Wilbarger, MEd, OTR, FAOTA.

This protocol involves deep touch pressure throughout the day & is designed to reduce sensory defensiveness. Although there is no documented research to validate this technique, there is strong anecdotal data. It has been used by many OTs who have noted positive results with a variety of populations and many parents have reported a reduction of sensory defensiveness in children with autism when this protocol was used.

It is highly recommended that this be taught and supervised by an OT. If the technique is done incorrectly it can be uncomfortable for the child and yield undesired results.

The first step is to provide deep pressure to the skin-arms, legs and back with a spacial surgical brush. (See link above.) You are not merely ‘brushing’, rather you are giving a deep massage using the bristles of the brush to stimulate the deeper tissues of the skin where the nerve endings are located.(The face and the stomach are never brushed.)

Next, the child receives gentle but firm compressions (proprioceptive muscle input) to the shoulders, elbows, wrists, fingers, hips, knees, ankles and sternum (breastbone). This step-applying pressure on the joints should be always be done after brushing. (Do not do the compressions without first brush massage.)

These steps should take about 3 minutes and is to be repeated every 90 minutes. After a period of time determined by the OT the frequency can be gradually reduced. Some children will resist this at first, and others will welcome it. (You can allow the child to play with a favorite toy-and even keep this toy as restricted access & especially for use with this protocol.) If a child continues to resist, as is rare, discontinue & contact your therapist.

This can be done in addition to your child’s OT activities & other sensory diet.

The following Calming Techniques can also be used for a child who is sensory defensive:

warm or tepid bath

deep pressure massage (making “pizza” with the child, using them as the ‘dough’)

Calming Techniques (Continued)

joint compressions
stretching
snuggling in a beanbag
rocking or swaying
weighted vest or collar
bear hugs (with child facing away from you)
finger hugs and tugs
sand bag for lap
reduced light/noise level
lavender, vanilla or other soothing smells
a tent or blanket 'fort'

Activities for focus: (for under or over responsive children)

sipping from curly straws
sucking on hard candy
vibrating pillow
lifting, pushing or pulling books or other heavy objects
chewing fruit leather or taffy
blowing soap bubbles or cotton balls
adding drum/clapping/rhythm to activity

Alerting techniques (Use with caution & supervision to avoid over-stimulation. These are for children who are under-responsive, passive or lethargic. If the child is in 'shutdown' mode in response to sensory defensiveness, these techniques should not be used.)

bright natural light & fresh air
mini trampoline
quick unpredictable movements-bouncing a ball
ice water or carbonated drinks
cold water play
fast music
tag, hide and seek
balance ball
misting with water on face & arms
colorful art-stimulating books
strong (natural) odors-(peppermint, cinnamon, coffee etc.)

These techniques adapted from the book:

Building Bridges Through Sensory Integration by Ellen Yack, B.Sc

For more information contact Barbara@bodylogique.com

