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## Occupational Therapy Speech Therapy

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# The OCD – Sensory Correlation



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Founder / Director

A study recently pre-released by *Journal of Behavioral Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry* shows a strong correlation between sensory hypersensitivity and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Dar R, et al. The Relationship between sensory processing, childhood rituals and obsessive-compulsive symptoms. *J Behav Ther Exp Psychiatry*. 2012; 43(1): 679-84). Using a number of screening tools related to anxiety, sensory hypersensitivity, and obsessive-compulsive behavior, researchers surveyed the parents of 61 children ages 4 to 6 with OCD, and they surveyed 314 adults with OCD. Even after adjusting for anxiety, strong reactions to everyday sensory events correlated highly with childhood ritualism.



Specifically, it is oral and tactile hypersensitivity that correlate with OCD symptoms. Signs of ritualistic / OCD behaviors in children include:

- Child's daily separation from a parent involves a ritual
- Child's preparations for bed involve a rigid ritual
- Child must be beside a parent to fall asleep
- Child doesn't like to place trash in a public trash can
- Hateful statements followed closely by loving behavior
- Child requests things be stated a particular way (e.g. "baby doll" vs. "doll baby")
- Child repeats certain movement such as touch and retouching a chair or light switch

It is suggested that improvement of oral and tactile hypersensitivity through sensory integration programs could be one pathway toward modulating OCD symptoms in pediatric patients. In fact, some of the behaviors characteristic of childhood OCD overlap specific behaviors addressed in pediatric speech and occupational therapy. At EmERGE - A Child's Place, each child can receive individual evaluation encompassing both occupational and speech therapy domains. Programs are then developed to address each child's individual challenges and to train and involve parents in each child's plan.



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