



Meeting the Sensory Needs of Complex Children Receiving Community Mental Health Services

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PURPOSE OF PROJECT

- To consult with, educate, and provide resources to community mental health providers to help them identify and meet the sensory processing needs of their pediatric clients.
- To develop a screening tool and referral process that links community mental health providers with local Occupational Therapists when needed.

COMMUNITY PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC

CPC is a Seattle-based, non-profit mental health care provider that serves pediatric clients with complex mental health needs. Mental health clinicians identified a need to understand co-occurring sensory processing needs among their clients, and a screening and referral process for clients in need of Occupational Therapy services. A consultative, partnership-based approach was used to identify strategies that would meet the clinic's specific needs.

CO-OCCURRING SENSORY PROCESSING AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

- Demonstrated links between sensory processing dysfunction and specific mental health diagnoses: Autism, MDD, OCD, ADHD, PTSD, and others.¹
- These diagnoses may have highly variable clinical and behavioral presentations.¹
- CPC provider survey identified the following behaviors as most commonly observed in pediatric clients: hyperactivity, distractibility, discomfort with sound, irritability, impulsivity, and emotional outbursts.
- Regulatory strategies can be used to manage sensory-related needs in these diagnoses.²

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

TWO SURVEYS CONDUCTED:

- Survey of 21 OT providers to gain an understanding of sensory-based treatment methods, diagnoses being treated, and insurance plans accepted.
- Survey of CPC staff to assess existing utilization of sensory related modalities, identifying potential sensory-related training opportunities.

OBSERVATION: We participated in and observed mental health therapy sessions at CPC to gain understanding of physical environment, interactions between therapists and clients, and potential need for sensory-related supports.

NEEDS IDENTIFIED → PROJECT OUTCOMES

Process for OT Screening and Referral

- Identify clients with sensory issues
- Create list of OT providers accepting Medicaid reimbursement
- Develop an OT referral process for clinicians at CPC

Mental Health Provider Education

- Increase knowledge regarding sensory needs for children with mental health challenges

Sensory-Based Strategies

- Use mental health provider feedback and observation to identify appropriate tools for use during mental health sessions

OT Screening and Referral chart and Provider List

- Surveyed OT providers to create referral base
- Sourced and modified a sensory screen to identify sensory issues
- Developed screening and referral flowchart

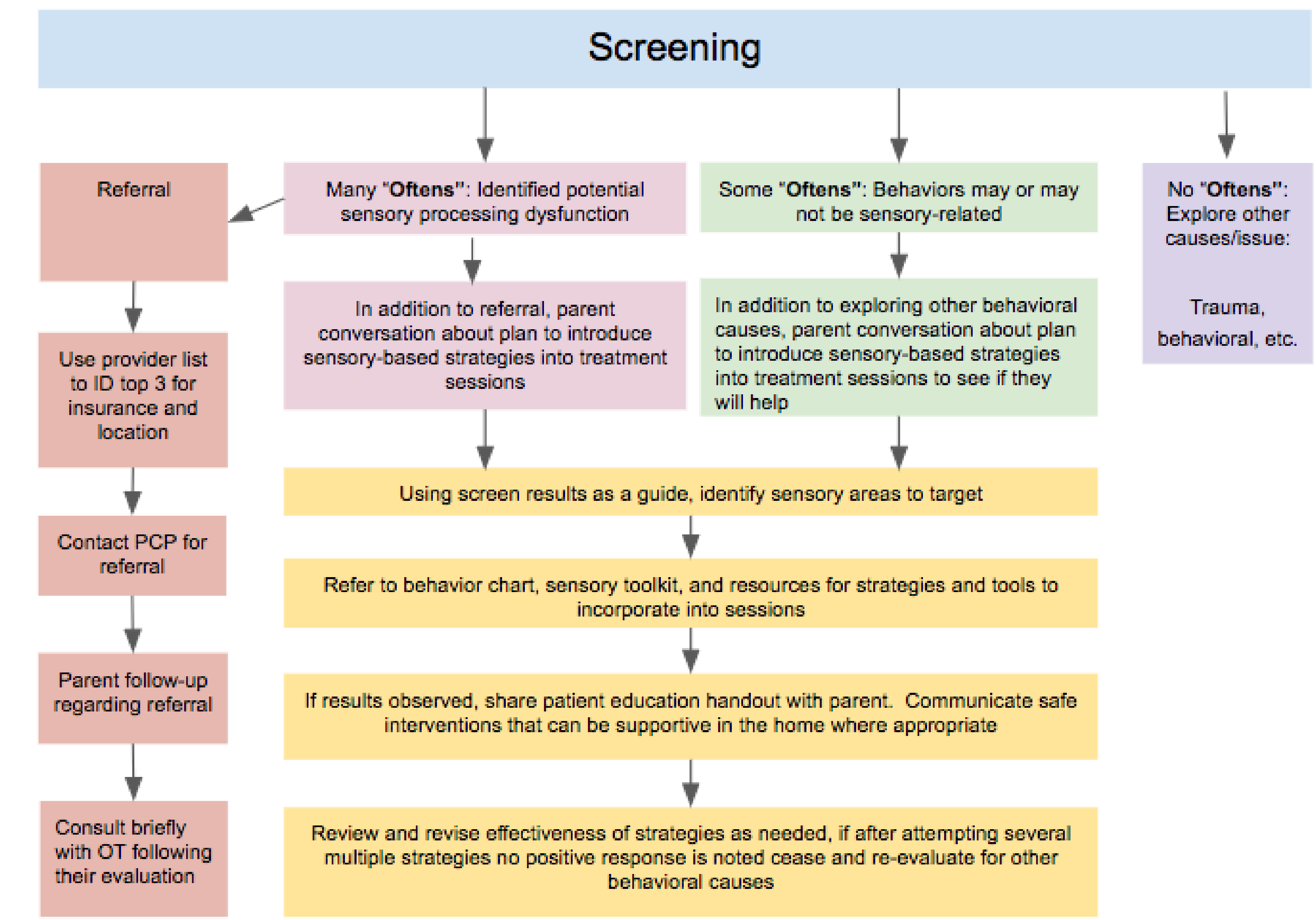
Sensory Processing Trainings at CPC

- Implemented training to inform community mental health providers about sensory processing and mental health

Development of Sensory Toolkit

- Assemble sensory tools for use during mental health therapy sessions at CPC

SCREENING AND REFERRAL PROCESS



MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER EDUCATION

- Two educational trainings, each 1.5 hours in length, were conducted at CPC with 15 mental health therapists.
- Trainings focused on theory and background of sensory processing, co-occurrence of sensory processing issues in children with mental health challenges, and the OT screening and referral process.



SENSORY TOOLKIT



- Toolkit designed to offer means of addressing client sensory needs during therapy sessions.
- Items classified as having alerting or organizing effects on the client levels of sensory engagement.
- Guidance and suggested rules provided for therapeutic use of toolkit.

DISCUSSION

- Children with complex mental health needs receiving mental health services are at high risk for sensory processing differences.
- Interprofessional trainings provided by OTs may enhance mental health provider knowledge and awareness of co-occurring sensory needs.
- OT direct consultation to community mental health care clinics is currently hindered by a lack of viable payment structures.
- Access to OT services for children with complex mental health and sensory needs is limited by current reimbursement issues in the mental health system.
- An informed screening and referral process to OT may help mental health therapists link children to Occupational Therapy services.
- Opportunities for OTs to provide training to and consult with mental health providers warrants further exploration.

REFERENCES

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