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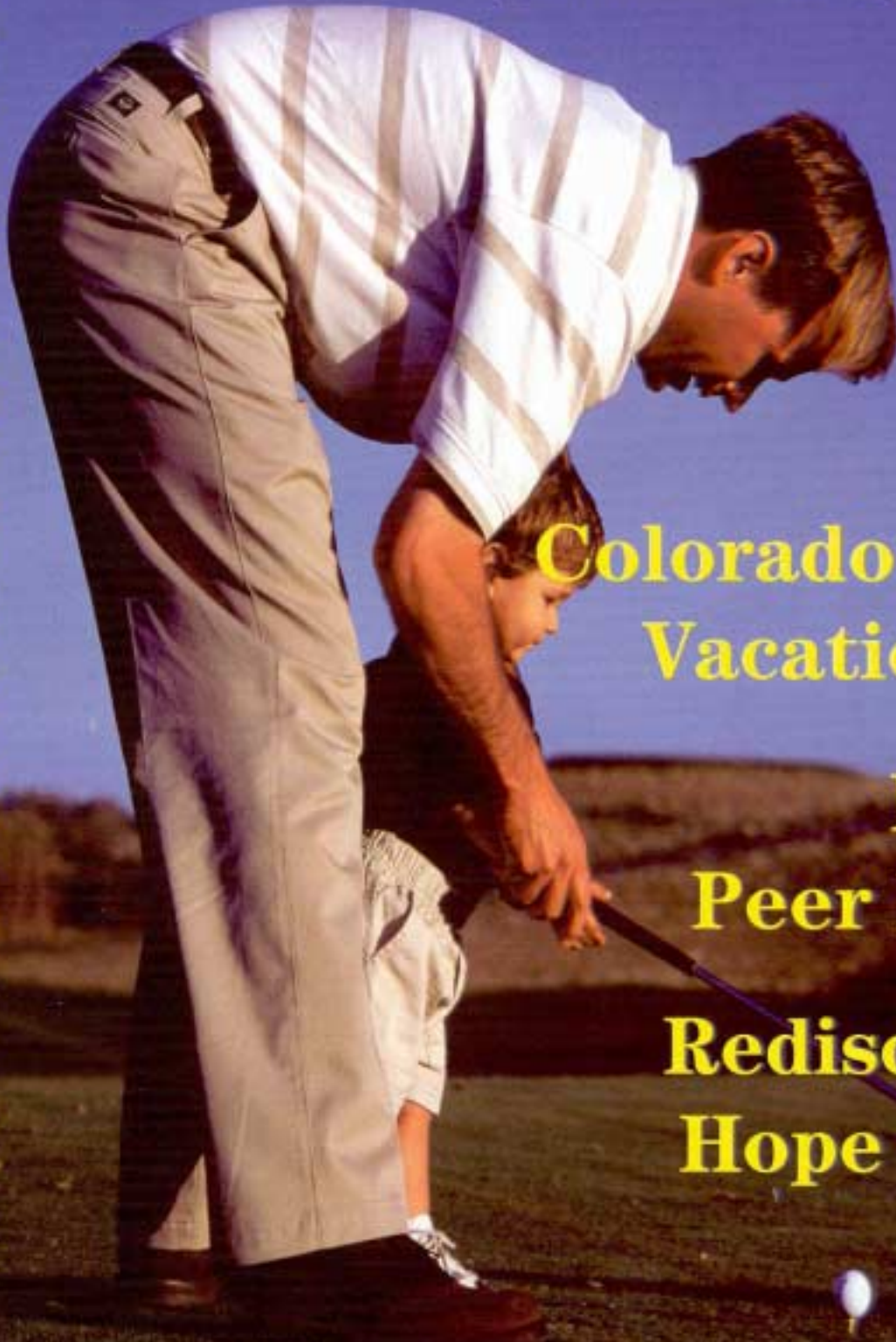
August 2005 Volume 1, Issue 8

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**Colorado Summer
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**Handling
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**Rediscovery of
Hope - Part IV**





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The following article has been presented in cooperation with Front Range Family Magazine. Front Range Family Magazine is a monthly publication distributed to families along the Front Range in Colorado. For information, please contact FRF Magazine, P.O. Box 3710, Englewood, CO 80155, 303-639-9000. Reprinted in full with the permission of Front Range Family Magazine.

The REDISCOVERY of Hope

The Riddle of Learning and Behavior Problems

by Charlie Meberhoff

Languages of the Brain

“To see, hear, and feel more clearly is to live more fully.”

In our March issue we told the story of Nate, a seven-year-old boy with severe learning and behavioral problems. Nate's troubles were the result of a brain trauma he suffered as an infant. Yet, subsequent to his visits to Sensory Learning Institute (SLI), Nate's major obstacles have been overcome. His life has been enriched. His future is full of promise and unlimited potential.

It was as a result of Nate and similar success stories from those who visited the institute that *Front Range Family Magazine* chose to sponsor the visits of several other children. Our April/May issue told of Shawn and Milia, and of the positive changes they realized, as a result of their visits. Our June issue covered Kristian's turnaround. These three children continue to grow in positive directions. Brandon, the fourth child we sponsored, unexpectedly relocated during the time of his visits, thus we were unable to bring you any further information regarding his progress.

Sensory Learning Institute first came into being to work with children, who have developmental delays, however, over the course of the past twelve years, SLI has evolved into a much more comprehensive treatment center. They have helped adults

and teenagers with mild traumatic brain injuries and with closed head injuries.



Kristian and Baxter, the dog

These types of problems often result from falls, sports injuries, or from automobile

accidents. SLI has also worked with those who have issues with the Central Nervous System. They have enhanced the lives of elderly individuals who have required rehabilitation after suffering strokes, as well as those suffering from dementia and Alzheimer-like symptoms. They also work frequently with individuals who have suffered an emotional trauma, and experienced success with those experiencing the troubling effects of depression.

Often a trauma has impacted a person so severely they cannot bring themselves out of it with sheer willpower or with intellectual, rational thinking. This is because the senses have been affected and sensory issues are bigger than the individual. Additional efforts aren't going to make things get any better; sensory systems respond effortlessly when the individual is relaxed. Everyone around a person with sensory issues may be telling them to try harder, even though the person is already doing just that. The lost skills that one is attempting to regain do not come back automatically. This is directly related to one's perception and the fact that they're dealing with blocked regulation. In terms of basic analogies, let's compare the senses to the windows of a house, the body being

the house. When the windows are dirty and streaked, sunlight does not clearly come through the glass. In looking out from the inside, we see the streaks of the window superimposed over it. Conversely, when the windows are clean the light enters without shadow or interruption. The world we look upon is untainted.

In our culture we tend to divide everything up and specialize. We frequently lose the forest for the dissecting of each tree.



Milia

Our views are often one-sided inasmuch as we look for the one magic pill or the one ideal type of therapy. We must remember that little occurs in the natural world on a singular basis. Light, sound, and motion are the primary languages of the brain. Through the blending of these three powerful therapeutic systems, SLI has been successful in situations where little else has been effective. By utilizing their unique, noninvasive approach, visual, auditory and vestibular stimulations encourage the brain to learn or relearn essential sensory skills. This process is referred to as SMILESM: Supra-Modal Integrative Learning Experience.

Within every living species there are instinctual patterns of development. Sensory stimulation and interaction with the environment are what unfolds these patterns. Through the creation of a resource state a unique sensory experience is created. It is so unique that it gets the attention of the nervous system. It challenges it and encourages better organization while at the same time integrating the messages into a whole experience.

This idea for integration of sensory

therapies is supported by studies. In the late 70s, at the Center for Perceptual Disturbances in Switzerland, Dr. Felice Affolter conducted research with visually impaired children. These children were expected to perform better than typical children in auditory functioning. It was assumed their auditory systems would have developed more strongly in order to compensate for their visual impairments. Surprisingly, the children were found to have poorer auditory processing than children with normal eyesight. Dr. Affolter then went on to work with brain injured adults. As with the children, she found that when one's overall perceptual performance was compromised, so was one's life experience. We now know that when one sensory area is limited, the abilities of the sensory systems to work together may not develop appropriately. She found that sensory therapy must work with more than one sensory modality simultaneously in order to promote a complex level of perceptual development.

We often make the assumption that others perceive the world in the same manner that we do. However, it is difficult to know just how someone else assimilates their environment. Many people, following a brain injury will develop visual balance disorders. Many live with constricted visual fields. How can we expect them to see the world in the same way we do? Bear in mind, vision is only one modality. What we do know for certain is that the brain is processing information through auditory, visual and vestibular sensations. We also know that one is able to perceive more clearly after all three modalities have been brought together in harmony.

Auditory therapy alone has helped a number of people, as has vestibular stimulation. Through allowing people to be touched by their worlds in a more balanced manner, many breakthroughs have been enjoyed. Visual therapy, has been the most significant in its benefits. Yet when all three are focused together we truly begin to see some emergent properties coming forward.

The brain must be capable of responding to more than one sensory input, enabling it to develop a more complex strategic level. Unfortunately, this does not always occur. Victims of perception occupy a frustrating space, due to the fact that their senses are operating on separate planes. Many are unable to trust their own

sense of touch. They feel unsafe and out of sorts. When an individual doesn't feel safe, it becomes quite difficult to relate to people, places, and things within their environment.

Although singularly, many people have typical vision, non-symptomatic listening abilities, and adequate balance and physical coordination, they still cannot integrate the sensory message they're receiving into one cohesive experience. This is because they are receiving only a splintering of images that their brain requires. The timing of messages is off and does not permit the system to come together for accurate perception. This is where the breakdown occurs.

Individuals with perceptual difficulties have a tendency to manipulate themselves out of situations. Let's say that someone is very vocal but they have a non-verbal language disorder. This means they can hear and speak without difficulty, but their visual and vestibular systems aren't in sync. Such a person will have difficulty with hand/eye coordination. They can't catch a ball or sports are trying. Their handwriting may be illegible. In an attempt to cope, this individual will steer clear of his/her weak areas. They retreat deeply into their comfort zone. This robs them of the fullness life has to offer. They don't quite know



Shawn with Baxter

where their bodies are in space. They attempt to cover up their inadequacies, only to find themselves slipping further and further behind. Simple tasks seem impossible. They feel clumsy, inadequate, and develop low self-esteem.

They come to believe their problems are immense, yet this is all just a sensory issue. We must realize the senses can be trained to handle and adapt, enabling the

problem to change. Thus, an entirely different dynamic comes into play.

We also need to address the effects of these incidents on the family unit. When one member of the family is in constant conflict, struggling with the simplest of tasks, there is a natural tendency for stress to build among other members of the household. By bringing their pain home and being unable to deal with it, that pain gets passed along; irritability and anger result. Some people just shut down com-



pletely. These are several of the primal ways we humans have of letting others know we need help.

Brain injured individuals try to do what they used to do, only to find they have to work extraordinarily hard to accomplish what once came automatically. They are forced to use their cortex or higher brain to handle what isn't being handled adequately in the brainstem area anymore. Things seem jumbled up and different and the person is overwhelmed. Intellectually, they understand they should be able to do something, yet because all the regulatory buttons in their head seem "turned up", they become too high strung to cope.

Additionally, victims of perception often have limited goals or aspirations. It's difficult to cultivate a desire to contribute to a world that comes to one in fractions. There is a direct relationship between perception and skill development. When someone has difficulty in accomplishing basic tasks, behavioral problems are usually a direct result. Perhaps the problems are not manifesting themselves in the workplace or in school, but they are definitely apparent in the home. Having a person

with sensory issues in the household causes stress in other areas of life. One moment the person is fine and the next moment they're off the charts. Everyone else feels the need to tiptoe about to avoid an emotional explosion. Some, in more severe cases, lash out simply because when they're in conflict, it's the only time they're feeling anything. When they reach out for help at home, no one knows what to do. It is a powerless feeling. Life seems impossible. Family members often claim they're also in crisis. They don't know where to turn and they don't see any hope anymore. The entire family becomes dysfunctional.

There is an ancient saying that one pebble can change the course of an entire river. Quite often, the healing of a single individual will cure the entire family dynamic. When a family member has a cold, we don't say we're sick. We refer only to the person who's sniffling. Yet when there's someone in the home with ongoing emotional or behavioral problems, we say we have a family crisis. That's how much it affects the household. Our loved ones feel as though they should know how to respond — what to do to help, yet there is no quick fix. It is truly a crisis for all involved.

Many who live with those who are suffering from such perceptual difficulties feel

they no longer have lives of their own. Things that are taken for granted in the average home seem insurmountably difficult. Family members dare not verbalize their feelings that the individual with special needs is impacting the lives of everyone else whose lives they touch. They merely long for the re-introduction of some degree of normalcy in their household.

Sensory Learning Institute has worked successfully with individuals who have been traumatized emotionally, physically, and through various situations of abuse, accidents, or medical interventions. Their application of light, sound and motion teaches the brain to work through the trauma. In the future, when these sensations travel the brainstem the brain will know it can bring itself to a calm place and not respond inadequately. This is not an erasing of one's memory; rather it is allowing the system to know it is not truly experiencing a trauma. The emotional charge is lifted. People do not remain so hyper-vigilant.

SLI also works with those who are trying to move away from addictions of different types. Drugs and alcohol often stimulate or depress the system in various ways. This is seldom positive, yet for someone suffering from an addiction they cannot react typically. Without their drug, his/her system cannot respond in the manner to which it has become accustomed. A false comfort zone has been created; their body has become used to experiencing the world through a self-induced fog. Because of the integration of the entire system through their therapy, the addicted individual is able to rely upon a greater degree of support from within themselves. Sensory stimulation is the most natural stimulation, and is truly the way the mind and body prefer to work.

In conclusion, we must bear in mind; people are more alike than they are different. On the most elemental level, the brain is a sensory processing organ, and light, sound, and motion are the languages to which it naturally responds.



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