

The Just Right State – 4 day course

Children's and Parent's Programme

“The Just Right State programme looks at the use of sensory activities and foods, to help children learn how to self-regulate their emotional states and behaviour. It also uses cartoon characters called 'The Scared Gang' which represents the different survival and attachment patterns of behaviour. The different characters tell the children how they react to situations and what each of them does to achieve the "just-right state". The goal of the programme is to enable children become more emotionally aware of themselves and of others, to give them simple tools to enable them to self-regulate and achieve the just right state, whether it is to engage in academic learning, interacting with their peers, or to be able to get a good night's sleep.” Sensory Attachment Intervention website.

FPSA funded my attendance on the Just Right State training facilitated by Eadaoin Bhreathnach. Eadaoin developed this programme to support children and young people who live in foster care or who have been adopted, although it is now widely applied. The Parent Programme has been developed to support their families and carers and runs alongside the delivery of the children's programme.

The training pays attention to attachment theory, neurodevelopmental understandings of trauma and sensory attachment intervention. Sensory Attachment Intervention is an integrative approach used to support children and young people (and adults) who have experienced abuse or severe neglect. The attraction of this specific intervention to me as a therapist is that often we are asked to undertake therapy with children and young people whose emotional dysregulation is at such a level that they are operating in highly aroused states of fight/flight and/or freeze. SAI pays attention to the need to establish regulation or arousal states (autonomic nervous system) through a combination of regulating experiences. Eadaoin describes on her website how,

“SAI follows the neurological principle of use dependence i.e. patterned, repetitive activation of the neural systems (Perry 2009). This is achieved through changing daily living routines such as how to eat, wash, play and socialise, in ways that are regulating. For example briskly washing and drying the skin is highly alerting and can inadvertently add to stress levels. In the case of children, the sensory and attachment patterns of Carers are also addressed, as attachment is a co-regulation process.”

Attending the training is to experience the programme with regular practice of the sensory activities which form the basis of this 6 session intervention. This was a great way to become familiar with the sensory activities and to experience the impact on ourselves and begin to understand how different sensory activities and foods help us as clinicians to regulate, or stimulate our own systems – before we introduce these activities to our clients.

The programme offers practical tips from beginning to end and already within my practice I am including the activities and discussing with parents ways in which they will be able to support their children to regulate in rather easy, every day, accessible and valuing ways. In turn utilising these activities in sessions already leads to a more regulated client who more easily can attend to the affective and cognitive processes they engage in within therapy.

I have long held that within my work I need to link sensory integration with affect and cognition and this course has become the missing link for my own practice. Hopefully sensory regulation will become an integral part of our service delivery as we support children, young people and their families to achieve greater regulation and rekindle for them a sense of enjoyment of each other, even at times of significant and sometimes overwhelming challenge.

A great course, practical in focus, which I would recommend.