

Hi I'm Lisa Davis, Welcome to back to *It's Your Health* on thinking out loud on WUML 91.5 FM. April is Autism Awareness Month and joining us know is Roya Ostovar, Ph.D

Roya Ostovar, PhD, is a clinical instructor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the Fellowship and Training Program Director of the Center for Neurodevelopmental Services at McLean Hospital in Belmont, MA. In this capacity, she is in charge of the direct clinical supervision of fellows, interns, residents, and other trainees interested in learning about the educational and clinical needs of children with neurodevelopmental disorders.

She is a child and adolescent clinical neuropsychologist specializing in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of developmental and psychiatric disorders. This includes a subspecialty in the early diagnosis and evaluation of young children with autism spectrum disorder.

Ostovar is the author of *The Ultimate Guide to Sensory processing Disorder:*

Easy, Everyday Solutions to Sensory Challenges. Dr. Ostovar, welcome to *It's Your Health* on *Thinking Out Loud* on WUML 91.5 FM

Dr. Ostovar- Thank you so much Lisa. I am so glad to be a part of your show

Lisa Davis- Thank you so much I am so glad to have you on. Now Roya, in the introduction you tell us about a 5-year-old boy named Kaveh. Can you tell us about him and what his challenges were and what his parents were going through when they brought him in?

Dr. Ostovar- Sure. His case Lisa is unfortunately not atypical. In that we begin to see a lot of symptoms of sensory processing disorder very early on

and in most cases not diagnosed right away and is mistaken for a lot of other issues; mostly behavioral issues. So in the case of this little boy much like all the other kids that I see he was having a lot of difficulty really adjusting to all of the sensory information coming to him from the environment and reacting in a way that was very concerning to his parents. He was reacting in ways that seemed like he was being uncooperative, he is maybe a picky child, not going with the flow, being difficult or not able to follow directions. Once you see these kids and you are able to figure out that in fact it's the disorder, how their brains process information then you are able to step in and fairly quickly and in simple ways be helpful to these kids

Lisa Davis: Oh that is so important. You write in the book, "Behavior as a form of communication." "Instead of focusing on the behavior and what your child is doing or not doing, try to figure out what your child is trying to communicate to you through his or her behavior." Now a lot of that behavior again without the knowledge of sensory processing disorder is seen that they are just being negative or difficult and the parents and teachers not really understanding and that is why your book is so important because you bring to light what Sensory Processing Disorder is and if you can tell us what SPD is, who it affects and how?

Dr. Ostovar- Sure, Sensory Processing Disorder quite simply put is a disorder where the brain for some reason and we don't know why right now has trouble accurately analyzing processing, taking in the information and transforming sensory information that sent to us by our sense organs. And of course our sense organs include sight, taste, hearing, touch etc. so when this information from the environment is collected by our sense organs it is sent to our brain and it is sent to our brain and then the next step is that the brain takes this information and processes it and transforms it into the sensations and reactions that we feel. So when individuals have problems with this process, this condition occurs and it really is one that affects the interior trip of information something happens in the brain and that is why we get the reactions that we do. I do want to point out Lisa that this is really a universal condition, but in kids with SPD this is an exaggeration of this universal condition. We have all been in a place where we felt that the noise was too much and we just couldn't take it anymore. Listeners who have

issues such as headaches they might find themselves in a room that is quieter and darker and you find yourself shutting out all of the sensory information that is being thrown at you by the environment.

Lisa Davis- You know that my mother had what we now know would be SPD, pretty severe, she was very sensory defensive and unfortunately she passed away about 15 years ago so it was before people were talking about it. All the doctors said oh you're just hysterical, you have anxiety, you need to relax, and she would spend a couple hours a day a dark room and she would meditate and everything was too loud, and too bright, even the curtains moving, or the breeze. Everyone asked what was going on with my mother. It just breaks my heart that she never got any validation and then I see these things in my child and now at least we know what's going on.

Dr. Ostovar- Lisa I am so glad you shared that story, I really appreciate it because this is a condition that affects children, adolescents, adults, it is pretty pervasive. 1 in 20 kids is diagnosed with this disorder, and like many other newer disorders, we do find that the previous generations were clearly suffering from stories and anecdotes that we hear. You have these memories of your mother suffering from this disorder and trying to help herself. I think the worst part is exactly what you said Lisa, and that is exactly heartbreaking. If there is no name for this, if it is not recognized by the medical community, then there is no validation for the person who is suffering from it and I think this is why it is so important and I do appreciate this opportunity to talk about the book and to talk about this disorder particularly now because there is no recognition of this disorder of this point in an official way so that insurance companies would cover assessment, diagnosis and treatment of the disorder. Over the next couple of years this is being considered to be put in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The next edition that is coming up in 2012 and so all of the attention we can give to this disorder and the support is so important.

Lisa Davis- It really is and I have had the wonderful opportunity to interview Dr. Lucy Miller and she has been doing a ton of work to get it into

the DSM IV. Why do you think hasn't it been in there, I don't understand? I don't even know how to ask the question, it boggles my mind, honestly, I don't understand why it's not validated

Dr. Ostovar- Well your question comes from a very logical place and unfortunately we don't always approach people from a logical place. It should be and certainly for those of us who work with kids and individuals with this disorder parents, educators, clinicians, and as you said Dr. Miller, we see this in a way that affects the individual's function and it takes away from their quality of life. I think it is very unfortunate that some people in the medical community are hesitant to at least consider newer disorders and to think outside of the box and to think about things from a different perspective. I think change is very difficult, it is scary and I think it takes people being open minded and listening to our patients carefully and respectfully and really believing what they're reporting as a first step. Then secondly the cost I'm sure has something to do with us because certainly if this recognized as a disorder that has it's own coding and is required to be covered, I am sure that expense is something that being taken into consideration as well.

Lisa Davis- Yeah. There is something that I have always wondered about. This month is devoted to Autism Awareness; April is National Autism Awareness Month. If my child has autism are the therapies that help with SPD going to help with their autism, it's sensory, is it from the same place?

Dr. Ostovar- This is a great question. The sensory issues are an important feature and component of autism. Most individuals, as far as I know, more than half of the children with autism have clinically significant symptoms of SPD

Lisa Davis- Okay

Dr. Ostovar- We do see this reported by families. And all though it's not a diagnostic criteria for autism, it is recognized as an area of impairment. If you are looking at the DSM IV right now, they are listed under associated features and disorders and listed to as all the responses to sensory stimuli, so I certainly in my book with kids on the spectrum of autism have seen them present with sensory issues and one of the things we always recommend in the treatment of children with autism is sensory integration therapy which can really relieve the child of a lot of the discomforts that they may feel in regards to sensory stimuli that feels at an exaggerated level or a level that feel uncomfortable to them

Lisa Davis -And that would entail going to Occupational Therapist that specializes in SPD?

Dr. Ostovar- Absolutely. That is exactly the way to go to really seek an assessment with an OT who has a specialty sensory integration therapy. Have them assess the child and have them come up with what we call a sensory diet for the child. Think of this, the OT as your nutritional consultant creating a very individualized sensory diet for you that includes activities that are comfortable for the child in a safe environment helping them get their senses comfortable with the different sensory information that comes in.

Lisa Davis - I see, okay. It's so interesting you talk about everything in the book, great tips for parents who are having their children evaluated, differences between SPD and look alike disorders, tips for parents and teachers on making the classroom more friendly. We don't have time to go into all of those things but I wanted to mention them. You have so many great things. One of the things that I did want to ask about I really connected to the section on stress - how all information comes into our bodies as stress - and for our kids that input is just more stress on an already over-stressed system. Will you tell us briefly about how stress affects the overall functioning of our children that would be great

Dr. Ostovar- Sure, as far as I know this is a new idea in this field. It really came to me just from working with the kids I was working with day to day and seeing just how stressed out they were psychologically, physically about anything they that were going to do; simple activities that typically growing children don't even think about. All of the energy and thinking and planning that was going into this. Think about stress as our body's response to any demand so when you think about SPD and what the senses are going through everyday all day long 24 hours a day it takes a toll on the child's system. It's absolutely exhausting. It interferes with all of the areas of functioning and it really is for the child staying in the fight or flight mode all the time they have to be alert, they have to be hyper vigilant, they have to be aware all of the time and it increases their arousal level. It really interferes with fully calming down and to being able to just relax and enjoy yourself and this is something we need to recognize and that is why it is so key to pay attention to this disorder and it is really taking a toll on these kids everyday

Lisa Davis- It really is. Roya, this is so incredible, I wish we had more time. I definitely want to have you come back in the near future. In the meantime, how can people learn more about you, your wonderful work and your book?

Dr. Ostovar- Thank you so much. I would love to come back and talk about this some more. They can visit my website which is www.royaostovar.com

There is a ton of information there and they can connect with me and I am happy to answer questions of parents or educators and connect with the community some more

Lisa Davis- This has been so wonderful and if people want to reach me they can go to itsyourhealthradio.org

I want to thank Future Horizons for teaming up with me during National Autism Awareness Month it has been such a fantastic month with incredible authors like you and I am very grateful. I hope everyone has a great week, keep being healthy and thanks again for an excellent month.