**Decoding Your Child's Sensory Personality S4|113**

Why do certain children develop in a certain way and other children not develop in a certain way? So why do you have little ones who walk at nine months and other ones who only walk at 18 months and they all are actually typically developing children, but they have this very wide range of normal. Are you born with the sensory personality? Is it nurture nature? Like where is it on that spectrum, I guess? In the late afternoon, having a slobbery toddler all over you is just not as pleasant as it is at eight o'clock in your threshold is lower. Nowhere was, did anyone tell me as a parent, I should do this, but is an understanding your own sensory personality as a parent.

So how, how does one identify my sensory personality as a parent and also the sensory personality of my child? And is there an age that that sensory personality is, you know, comes to fruition. Welcome to Sense by Meg Fora, the podcast that's brought to you by Parent Sense, the app that takes guesswork out of parenting. If you're a new parent, then you are in good company.

Your host Meg Fora is a well-known OT, infant specialist, and the author of eight parenting books. Each week, we're going to spend time with new moms and dads just like you to chat about the week's wins, the challenges and the questions of the moment. Subscribe to the podcast, download the Parent Sense app and catch Meg here every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life.

And now meet your host. Welcome back moms and dads. This is Sense by Meg Fora and I am Meg Fora.

I'm always delighted that you join me every week. This is a weekly podcast. We run it, comes out most Thursdays and some weeks we have a mom who joins us who talks about her journey and asks me questions and tells me about the challenges and the joys of early parenting.

And sometimes we have a fellow expert like Kath McGaw or Sammy Hammond, or we've had various different dieticians, nurses, doctors. And then sometimes we have Tove Gant come alongside me and actually host the event with me. And the reason we do that is that I also have some wisdom that I want to share that often I need somebody to actually ask me the questions and to act as your, you know, kind of stand in for you and ask me the questions that we think you would be wanting to ask.

And today is just such a day. And so welcome to you Tove. Hi Meg, thanks so much for having me.

It's wonderful to be here as always and to unpack all your wisdom for our moms and dads out there listening. So I thought this week would be a really good week to chat about sensory personalities and sensory processing. And I thought I would start by saying what exactly does a sensory personality mean and how does that impact early infant development? Yeah, so I mean it was this topic is very much along the lines of how is my child developing and why did certain children develop in a certain way and other children not develop in a certain way.

So why do you have little ones who walk at nine months and other ones who only walk at 18 months and they all are actually typically developing children but they have this very wide range of normal. And there are many reasons for that but one of the contributing factors is the sensory personalities. Now we've done a sensory personality episode a couple of times before.

Actually one was led by Bailey Georgiadis. It was a very early episode so you can run go all the way back moms if you want to and have a look at that. And there was a more recent one done with Tove where we looked at the sensory personalities.

The reality about sensory personalities or we could call them sensory temperaments is that they are kind of the way that our brain is wired to approach the world via a certain response to sensory information. So we all take in sensory information all day, every single day, every single moment. Moms you will be able to if you stop listening to my voice and focusing on that you'll be able to hear the traffic around you, a child crying, you'd be able to maybe feel the clothes on your back, you'd be able to smell a smell in the environment and so all of the sensory information is coming into our brains all the time at in every given moment.

It's non-stop and our brains are just absolutely incredible and quite miraculous at the way that they're able to actually almost triage the information and habituate stuff that just is not important like the feel of your clothes on your back which once you put them on doesn't matter so you don't want to feel those all the time. Our brains are amazing at helping us to alert to and focus on things that are urgent and important and habituate out things that are not urgent or important. Now what happens is that we all have different thresholds for sensory information.

So some of us take in sensory information and are much more sensitive to it so we actually do feel the clothes on our back all the time and others of us are really laid back and have a very high threshold for sensory information and often we don't perceive everything that's going on. So these are kind of two thresholds and obviously they don't happen in like a plus one and a minus one it happens in a continuum you know and just like everything in life it's a continuum so some of us are very sensitive and some of us are less sensitive but we both sit in the more sensitive camp but you know it's variable. So these are the two kind of sides of the threshold.

Now within those sides of threshold we then have two ways of responding to that sensory information. We can either respond in accordance with our threshold or we can resist our threshold and act against it and that is what creates the four sensory personalities. So let's break that down.

Let's say we have a very high threshold for sensory information which means that a lot can be going on without us noticing it and we act in accordance with that it means that actually we will generally be quite a laid-back person and so not a lot will we won't perceive a lot going on we'll be generally much more laid-back. Generally these are babies who sleep well, feed well and actually just generally just take the world in their stride and so these we call settled babies for the moms I call them and dads I call them serene parents and so they tend to be a lot more laid-back because they've got this very high threshold a lot is going on and they don't always perceive it. Then you've got also the high threshold child but who acts in opposition to that.

Now the high threshold child who acts in opposition to that becomes what we call a social butterfly and a social butterfly is a child who's got a high threshold but starts to realize quite early on that actually the world is more interesting than they are seeing so they start to really start to respond to, invite in, flirt with and engage very strongly with sensory input and social engagement and so they tend to be very social and very sensory seeking because they know that sensory information's out there, their threshold's not letting it in and so they go and seek it. So those are our two high threshold personalities. Our two low threshold personalities are the sensitive baby and the slow to warm up baby and they both sit on the more sensitive side so everything that goes on in their world could disrupt them.

They're sensitive to noises, they're sensitive to sounds, they can over respond to the sensory information in their world and they tend to be either avoidant and it's that kind of classic flight, fright or fight. So with flight that's the avoidant and with fright it's the screaming and really difficult kiddies and we do see those in our practices and so these are the four sensory personalities. Settled, slow to warm up, social butterfly and sensitive.

Now the way that little ones take in sensory information does impact their early development. Meg, are you born with the sensory personality? Is it something that is, is it, is it nurture nature? Like where, where is it on that, on that spectrum I guess? Yeah, so like with everything it's, it is a spectrum like, you know, like you just said. Some of it comes from our nature, in other words the genes we've been dealt and an example of that would be that very often a social butterfly parent could give birth to a social butterfly child.

It happened in my household, social butterfly father, social butterfly son. They are, you know, they, there's definitely a genetic component. Then there is the congenital component which is kind of your genes as well and that's the stuff that happens in pregnancy and just after pregnancy.

So very high levels of toxic stress in pregnancy, cocaine in the, in the, in utero, you know, mom who ingests cocaine. These type of things, very high levels of alcohol in utero, baby being born very early or very small for dates. So prem babies, all of these little babies that need a lot of interventions, like let's say they get a, an infection in utero because your waters broke early and you didn't know and now they've got an infection in utero.

Now after they're born they have to have lots of tubes and pipes and wires and pricks and so on. They are more likely to be sensitive. So things that happen in and around pregnancy and birth can also wire us to be more sensitive.

And then you've got the nurture, which is what comes afterwards. And so laid on top of this nature comes the way that our homes are and our environment. So I'll give you an example.

And you know, there's a concept that's become known as the ACEs, which is the Adverse Childhood Events, A-C-E-S, ACEs. And adverse childhood events are events in a child's life that have a devastating and compounding impact negatively on development. And they, the biggest ACE is actually poverty.

So we know that children that are born into poverty often are then exposed to trauma as an example or neglect or hunger. And all of those things are ACEs, you know, adverse childhood events, and that can actually compound certain thresholds. So if I said to you, right, and this would be for absolutely everybody who's listening, I'm going to take you out of your cushy world that you live in, listening to podcasts and, you know, existing as you do, and I'm going to drop you into a slum with very high levels of violence.

And I'm going to put you into a marriage and a relationship in which you're under threat all the time. And you never really know that you're safe and maybe where there's no electricity and maybe there's not enough food. And so suddenly everything in your world is threatening.

And in that environment, what will happen is that your threshold will tend to become lower. And the reason is you need a low threshold because your life is under threat. So you need to be on full alert all the time.

And so we see this environment and there you can see, I mean, I've really painted an extreme picture of an environment that is very stressful and chaotic and violent and traumatic, and that can then decrease your threshold and make you much more sensitive. And being more sensitive will then mean that your likelihood of flight-frightened fight is higher, which means that you are more likely to then perpetrate violence. You're more likely to withdraw.

You're more likely to be reactive in the world. And so you can see how the environment actually does impact sensory thresholds as well. So that's super interesting because as a parent of multiple children under the age of like three, I found my sensory threshold has definitely dropped because, you know, everyone's screaming and shouting and wants you and pulls at you.

And so that's really interesting. Does that then also mean that your children are impacted by their siblings? You know, so if one of them is having a meltdown and the other one's having, like, then that's how they all kind of feed off each other. So that fight or flight is then also triggered by their siblings or that multiple space.

Because I find myself, my patience is a lot shorter. I'm a lot, you know, more prone to wanting to yell, to like needing time out from my children, where when I had one, even though she had additional needs and she was incredibly hard work, my patience seemed longer. Yeah, you know, and I love this question because I'm telling you now, Tove, 90% of mums listening to you right now can completely, you know, kind of understand this.

And even a mum of one baby will understand this, that in the late afternoon, having a slobbery toddler all over you is just not as pleasant as it is at eight o'clock in the morning. Your threshold is lower. So the answer to your question is 100%.

Your environment, the siblings really do have an impact. And yes, a very busy environment, very noisy siblings can actually decrease the threshold of subsequent children. And I'll give you quite a good example of this in our household.

So my third baby was born and I knew she was a sensitive baby pretty much from the time she was born. She had quite, she had very severe reflux. She still is quite severely lactose intolerant, even as a teenager.

So she had, you know, lots of reflux and I knew her sensory threshold was low. But because I'm also slow to warm up, so I also have a low sensory threshold, I was deeply sensitized to this and obviously all the information that I've learned over the years. And so I created this incredible cocoon around her.

And I would, the kids were just not allowed near her at a certain time of day in the late afternoon. I was very fortunate in that I had a nanny who could look after the other two. And I created this bubble around her to ensure that her world felt as calm as possible so that her threshold wouldn't dip any lower.

And so, you never forget, I mean, we all have these terrible parenting moments and I've certainly got a lot that I look back on and I go, oh, geez, I wish I could just take that one moment back. And one of them was when my middle child, who was a settled baby, very well-regulated, self-regulator, came into the nursery and I had this kind of four-week-old baby who I was nursing and breastfeeding. And by the way, breastfeeding was also very painful for me also because my threshold is low.

So, you know, there's a whole piece there as well. And I was, end of the day, my threshold's low. I may be projecting it onto the baby, but I think her threshold's low as well.

And in comes her gorgeous older sister who's five years old and bounds into the nursery to say, I just want to give her one last kiss before she goes to bed and all bubbly and runs over. And I lost the plot. And I said, I growled like a banshee.

And I said, get out, you know, like this deep scream. And she froze and she looked in huge eyes and then she burst into tears and she ran out. And I thought, like, what was I doing? She was so happy for her little sibling and just wanted one last kiss before her sibling went to bed.

And I behaved like this terrible growling banshee. But what it was, was deep inside of me, I needed to create and contain this cocoon. And obviously I was on the edge.

My newborn was on the edge. And I just, this bounding, happy, gorgeous five-year-old was all too much. So, you know, yes, environments do make a difference.

They do impact. And of course, in that situation, you could argue that I was correct in protecting and creating this bubble around my newborn. But you could equally say that I was actually just reacting from my own low threshold.

And I was going into my red brain, which was already in overload. And just this one more extra thing was my, you know, kind of, scream response at her. So, yes, I mean, households certainly do have an impact on little ones and on their mothers.

I mean, Meg, there's often a philosophy that you hear go around. And I guess it would be interesting to understand in relation to this, how much of it is true, where they kind of say, like, you know, if you're a chilled parent, your baby will be chilled. If you are a neurotic mom, your baby will be neurotic.

Like, where does that, I mean, is that a sensory thing? Is that a, cause I always thought I was quite laid back. I don't think I'm laid back now. I mean, I knew I was organized and structured, but now like after, I feel like I'm like, yeah, I just, I often wonder that.

Like I've got a, my half sister's just had a baby and she's incredibly anxious, like incredibly emotional. She cries about everything. She's like a lot, she's a lot of energy like that.

Like that's very much her vibe. And she's got the most chilled out baby. And I was like, how, how have you got such a chilled baby? Like he sleeps beautifully.

And I'm like, where is this? Are you actually a chilled person deep down? And you weren't like, where does that come from? So is that just a myth? How old is her baby? First of all? Well, he's, he's coming out of the fourth trimester. So I, I recognize that it's early days, but I still like, he's still sleeping well, he's eating well, he's taking well. And for someone who's so anxious and doesn't want anyone to touch him and doesn't want like.

So yes, you're alluding to something called goodness of fit. And it's a very interesting thing because goodness of fit doesn't just pertain to parent and child relationships, but also to environment and human, human engagement. So the environment that you put into either fits or doesn't fit with your personality.

So you can have a very anxious and, you know, anxiety often goes with the slow to warm up personality, a sensory personality. So you'll probably find that she is a little bit more sensitive and, you know, kind of takes time to warm up. And so it might, that might be one of the drivers for anxiety.

So let's, so let's say that she fits in and I don't know her and I might be talking completely out of, you know, out of turn here, but possibilities are that she is more sensitive and she needs control. And that's where anxiety comes from. But she gets given a child with a very high threshold.

So maybe that comes from her husband's side of the family, or maybe somewhere in her genes. And so she gets this child that's very, very high threshold. She's clearly actually really laid back, a settled baby.

Well, what an awesome goodness of fit, because she got led in really lightly, which is exactly what she needed. Because obviously first time parents are anyway more anxious and layer that on top of slow to warm up. It's even more so, that was me.

And so she's able now to actually parent a baby and feel super, super successful, which of course feeds into you feel good, your anxiety goes down, baby's a little bit more relaxed. And so you get this lovely, beautiful dance happening and you end up with a great situation. The other side of that goodness of fit could have gone very badly.

So now let's say that you've got a really settled baby, very laid back, not a lot gets through to them because they're very, very settled. And you couple that with a super serene mother. So now you've got a mom who is very, very laid back.

And she just doesn't really think to really feed her baby, because it's just not on her radar, because time isn't really on her radar. And she's never been somebody who clock watches, so she's super laid back. And so the baby might not gain weight very well, or the baby might actually over gain weight, because the mom just keeps feeding the baby and the baby doesn't have its off signals.

And maybe the mom doesn't stimulate the baby enough, because the mom doesn't stimulate herself a lot either. She's also super laid back, doesn't seek out sensory stimulation or social engagement. And so then you can actually end up with a situation of a delayed child.

And actually, in the context of this particular topic, I'd like to just chat about a situation that I had in my practice a few years ago, where I had exactly that scenario. I had this little girl who came in and she was a year old and wasn't sitting yet. And she was definitely not crawling.

So she wasn't even sitting and you're supposed to sit around six months. She's a year old. She's not sitting.

She's not crawling, not even thinking about it. She's not rolling. She's really developmentally delayed.

And in walks this incredible father with her, who he turns out to be one of my favorite patients that I've ever, clients that I've ever worked with. And he's this great big guy with his beard and he's like a big bear. And he walks in and he sits down on the floor with her.

And she lies against him like a little sloth, her arms out to the side on either side of his chest and her legs out to the side of him on either side of his hips. And she puts her head to the side and like her ear on his chest. And that's how she sits.

And she doesn't move for the entire hour. So, I mean, for a one year old, any of us who've got a one year old, you know, immediately like this is not normal. So I'm watching the situation and this fit was incredible.

First of all, he was the primary caregiver. Mum was a very high powered banker and dad was an at-home dad, but he had, he was in the creative industry, but he was at home with the little one. And this was their first child.

And this baby was as laid back as could come. And this father was actually, if possible, even more laid back. And so what happened was that he just let her lie on her back because she was quite happy doing that under a mobile.

He would feed her and then he would put her back there and she never did anything. And so she just never learned to, she never developed the muscle tone needed for movement. Now, in order to develop muscle tone, you've got to want to seek things out.

You've got to want to seek movement out. And you've got to have a parent, if you're not seeking it out, who's whizzing you through the air, showing you the outdoors, stimulating you all the time, because they also are interested in the world. So put together a parent with a very high threshold and a baby with a very high threshold.

And we ended up with developmental delay. And it was really a fascinating scenario because it was, you know, having to change his, the way that he engaged with the world in order to stimulate her. And it was a really quick therapy.

She went through some SI with me. She went through some NDT with a physio referred to. And very quickly, of course, she was rolling, crawling and then sitting and walking.

And so, you know, but it was a classic example of how this sensory personality, plus the goodness of fit with the environment, creates or doesn't create this perfect storm for either wonderful development or the perfect storm for developmental delay. So that's really interesting because you flagged something that I think at least in no way was, did anyone tell me as a parent, I should do this, but is an understanding your own sensory personality as a parent. So how, how does one identify my sensory personality as a parent and also the sensory personality of my child? And is there an age because they're a bit blobby for a while, right? Like, is there an age that that sensory personality is, you know, comes to fruition? This episode is brought to us by ParentSense, the all-in-one baby and parenting app that help you make the most of your baby's first year.

Don't you wish someone would just tell you everything you need to know about caring for your baby? When to feed them, how to wean them, and why they won't sleep? ParentSense app is like having a baby expert on your phone guiding you to parent with confidence. Get a flexible routine, daily tips, and advice personalized for you and your little one. Download ParentSense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out of parenting.

Like, is there an age that that sensory personality is, you know, comes to fruition? Yeah, we tend not to try and label sensory personalities or even try and identify them under four months of age, just because there's a lot of variables that can lead to little ones looking like sensitive babies just because they've just come out the womb and, you know, they might look sensitive and be a little bit colicky, but actually that's not their sensory personality. So, we kind of let them move through that first trimester after they're born and we don't make too many assumptions. Having said that, you know, if you've got a baby who sleeps through its six weeks, is a really easy feeder, and you're super chilled, they probably are going to be a settled baby.

Although, they can also end up a social butterfly because those are the ones often wake up and go, hold on, there's an exciting world out there. So, you know, there'll be a social butterfly. So, I tend to say to moms, don't try and overthink this before they're four to six months old.

Then I would suggest that you do our sensory personality course, which is inside the ParentSense app. And it is just, I mean, it's such an eye-opener for the way that your baby is wired for engagement. So, definitely do that.

But your first question was, what about us as parents? Like, do we have sensory personalities and can we know about that? And the answer is yes. And there's actually two therapists that I work with who actually help moms to identify their sensory personality. The one is in South Africa, her name is Anna-Marie Lombard.

And the other one actually is in Jersey and her name is Anne-Laura Jackson. And I'm actually in practice with her. So, if people do want to get hold of me in my practice, and you can just email info at meg4a.com, and then I can connect you with her as well.

And she helps you to look at what is your sensory personality. And then the other way to look at it, if you can get your hands on it, is I wrote a book on it, which is out of print, called Your Sensory Baby. It was also called The Baby Sense Secret.

And that book, we went quite deeply into the goodness of fit between mom and baby. That's amazing. Because I feel like that's something that would be super valuable in understanding your own parenting style, right? If you know that your threshold is super low and you've got a social butterfly, like you already are aware of some strategies that you probably need to dig deep and implore that you otherwise wouldn't, right? Exactly.

Yeah. So, now we've kind of unpacked some of the sensory personalities. In terms of the slow to warm up sensory personality, how does that affect baby's language development or their milestone development? Is there something particularly there that we should look out for? Yeah.

So, let's talk about the slow to warm up. Our slow to warm up babies are sensory sensitive. And so, they often are quite reticent to engage with the world.

They're avoidant. That's their default point is to avoid and then only to engage once everything's perceived as safe. But there's a couple of things that I think are important to recognize with them.

The first is that they can have slightly delayed milestones on the motor side because they actually don't like to touch the floor, engage with things. So, they often can be late crawlers, for instance, because they don't like crawling because then you've got to touch the floor. But one of the things that's really interesting with the slow to warm up is that they have a real reliance on the auditory system.

So, they tend to actually often be quite sensitive to auditory stimulation, but they really rely on language. And it was Vygotsky, who was a Russian psychologist, who spoke about language being the ultimate tool of the mind or the greatest tool of the mind. And this is absolutely true.

And what we find with our slow to warm up little ones is that if they have advanced language skills, or if you really work hard on their language skills, they tend to be a lot easier and it tends to have a lot of benefits for their development. And the reason for that is that language can actually make their world more predictable. So, your default sensory point when you are slow to warm up is that you're sensitive and that you will avoid.

If you understand what's coming next and you are verbally bright because you can understand what mom is articulating and even you verbally, you are non-verbally bright, you can predict what somebody's going to do because of watching their body language, you are much more likely to end up being more settled. And so we see that this, that language becomes this incredible tool to actually unlock these slow to blow up little ones. So, you know, I think, I mean, I've spoken about this on many podcasts and we recently had a podcast with a speech therapist where we spoke about language acquisition, but the truth is that really language acquisition is incredibly important, but with a slow to warm up child, it's more so because you can unlock their world.

And this is things like talking through, we're going in the car in 15 minutes. They don't know what 15 minutes is, but we're going in the car now, now we're getting the car in 15 minutes. We need to put our shoes on just now so that they start to learn that actually now there's going to be a sequence of events.

I've got to put my shoes on and then I'm going to go in the car. You might think to yourself, why am I going to tell my six month old this? But when you start to do that again and again, they start to learn that there's a sequence and a pattern and a prediction that they can actually start to piece together. So instead of when you lump them in the car, them throwing a temper tantrum because they have got a change of environment, which slow to warm ups absolutely hate, they've now had a sequence where they know that, okay, she warned me about my shoes and we did the shoes and then we now did the car.

That sequence starts to play out for them and they understand it. It's the same with if moms have got toddlers or preschoolers, talking them through starting at school. We know that we're going to school in the next couple of days.

You're going to meet your teacher. Tomorrow, you're going to have a play date with one of the children from that school. Now you've met that child.

Now we're going to school. That's your teacher. These are the clothes, clothes out the night before.

So you kind of almost build up slowly. When you do that for your slow to warm up, you use language to unlock them. And then what happens after that is that they are more likely to have positive social, emotional experiences.

And that's one of the areas of development that we do watch carefully with our slow to warm ups that they often might be so sensitive that they don't engage socially and emotionally because they withdraw. And so we need to make sure that that doesn't happen because that social, emotional developmental trajectory is so important. So it's kind of a progression of work on the language.

It will help your slow to warm up to make the world predictable, which means that they will then be more gregarious socially and emotionally or more settled socially and emotionally, which means that they will engage, make friends, and then you can just see your trajectories a whole lot more positive. So when toddlers have meltdowns, like one year olds, two year olds, because you want them to change or you want them to do something normal, like come to the bath or eat their food or not throw something over the balcony or whatever it is that you're telling them to do. Is that the way in which they react to that? Is that a sensory personality thing? Is that just like, I'm a toddler and so this irregularity of emotion is just coming anyway? Do we handle our toddlers slightly differently? Because I know we've spoken quite a lot about babies, but I'm definitely seeing in my toddlers, these sensory personality behaviors becoming more and more prevalent almost in these kind of emotional regulation, because when they're little, their emotional regulation is not quite as intense or it doesn't feel as intense maybe because they can't talk back and they can't, the reaction is not as visceral.

Like now it's like a physical fall down and scream on the floor, right? It's like a whole thing where as a baby, they have a cry and babies cry like you're used to that. So does that follow through as toddlers? Like how do we? Yeah. So, I mean, your original question was, you know, does a sensory personality have this massive impact on these temper tantrums? And I think it's important to recognize that there's three things and a lot more, but three main pockets that are happening.

The first thing is for any baby and toddler, there's the underlying physiological stuff, which will impact their mood. So for instance, putting a toddler in a bath just before bedtime is going to be stressful because their threshold is low, they're overstimulated and so therefore they're going to dig their heels in. So, you know, tiredness and, you know, it's the H-A-L-T, you know, hunger, anger, tiredness, and I've forgotten the L. So, you know, these things, you know, certainly and illness as well, those physiological things are going to exacerbate temper tantrum.

So that's the first thing. Before you think about a temper tantrum, you've got to think time of day and you've got to think when last did they eat? Like those are the two principal things. And if this is abnormal, are they getting sick? Like that's really what you need to be thinking about first of all, because they are more likely to throw temper tantrums and become more stuck in their ways and, you know, obstreperous if they're hungry and tired and so on.

Second thing certainly is the sensory personality. You know, you definitely see way less temper tantrums with sexual babies and even with social butterflies and way more with your sensitive and your slow to warm up. Absolutely no doubt.

You know, your social butterfly will throw a tantrum when you remove them from a social situation or from a sensory situation because they want that sensory input. But, you know, certainly they're not, they don't do as many temper tantrums as your slow to warm up and your sensitive babies who are hyper reactive to everything. So your sensory personality, yes, has a bearing.

So now you've got your physiological, you've got your sensory. And then, of course, the third one, which you also mentioned is, is it just because they can because they're toddlers? And that is definitely part of because they are asserting themselves. And so therefore, you know, it's the age and stage for autonomy versus doubt.

So yes, your sensory personality does have an input. And so what you are going to see is you're going to see this baseline of temper tantrums for all toddlers, which will be based on the physiological and the developmental stage. And then you put a layer on top of that of the sensory and it's going to be exacerbated for certain sensory personalities.

Okay, that's super interesting. And the social emotional skills that little ones with high thresholds, how the social butterflies and settled sensory personalities, how does that impact? Because we kind of did the slow to warm. How does that impact a child's social, emotional milestones? And what can parents do to support those kiddos? Yeah, so that's a great question because, you know, as I mentioned, we can see how the children with a low threshold who are more sensory sensitive are going to have this avoidance, this kind of flight, fright and fight.

And we know that flight, fright and fight is not conducive to making friendships because nobody wants to be friends with somebody who hits them or runs away from them. It's difficult to love, you know? So, I mean, that's fairly obvious. But what about those high threshold kiddies? Because those high threshold kiddies are settled and social butterflies.

And so when you think about that, you know, surely they should be the ones who have, you know, these incredible friendships. So, the reality is that these high thresholds also do have an impact that is worth noting. So, first of all, your social butterfly loves other children.

I mean, they love them. They want to be around them. They want to be there all the time.

There's two risk factors there. One is that they smother them. So, and particularly if they're in an environment, and this goes back to goodness of fit, if they're in an environment with a slow to warm up, your slow to warm up sees a social butterfly coming and they run the other way because that kid's unpredictable, noisy, going to bite them.

They're not too sure what's going to happen. So, you know, your social butterfly can be very overwhelming because they smother. And the other reason that they battle sometimes is that they often can't self-regulate, you know, how much they need.

And, you know, I've seen this with my own social butterflies in my family where they kind of crave, absolutely crave social engagement and sensory stimulation. But eventually it actually becomes super irritating. And with my son, he used to do this high pitched wail, like a scream, like a screech.

He was just excited. He wasn't upset. He was just excited.

But he used to do this all the time. And nobody wants to be around somebody doing high pitched screeches, but he was doing it because he had to fill the world with sound, with movement. I mean, that's what the social butterfly does.

So, they can overwhelm other people and they actually can overwhelm themselves because they often don't recognize their own thresholds. And then before you know it, they've kind of gone and they flipped into the, onto the other side and they've had an awful down and a temper tantrum or whatever it is. So, it can, that high threshold of the social butterfly can impact.

And then the settled little one where you've got to watch with them is that they can, and there's another word that's often used for them, which is called a social bystander. They often just are watchers. So, they will, you know, they're so laid back and they'll just watch the world go by, like the little girl who was, you know, like the little sloth on her daddy's chest.

You know, she just watched that whole session go by with her head on, with her ear on her dad's heart, you know, and that was, that's what they can do. They'll go and stand at the side of the sandpit and watch everybody else play, or maybe they won't even do that. Maybe they'll just walk away and, you know, kind of going to sit in a corner and they're so easy and they can get lost, particularly in play groups, because the teacher in a play group has to deal with the social butterfly who's going to overstimulate the slow to warm up, who's going to completely trigger the sensitive baby.

And so, she's got her hands full. And so, when somebody comes in who's a social bystander, the teacher's like, oh, thank goodness, you know, one child that'll just take care of themselves. But the reality is that that social bystander actually really does need input and does need stimulation.

And it kind of goes back to that one baby that I saw that I mentioned in another podcast who had a mom who was very, very laid back and she just didn't socialize this child at all. And it wasn't because the child, I mean, the child was actually very sensory sensitive, but that didn't have anything to do with it. The mom didn't, for her own self, want to seek out social engagement.

And so, this child, it became more and more tricky and she ended up on the spectrum. And not just because of the way the mom handled her, there was also other sensory issues and so on. But the point is that she would have done really well if she had had a mom who could co-regulate with her and also push the boundaries into a little bit of social, you know, engagement.

So, I mean, you touched on that now in terms of that kind of understanding the sensory personalities and whether it becomes a disorder or becomes something more. So, are there therapeutic interventions or approaches that, you know, babies who are struggling to regulate themselves or toddlers who are struggling to regulate themselves or parents who are struggling to regulate themselves can implement and look at putting it around in their home? Yeah, this is a great place to start to wind up this podcast, is to actually look at what we can be doing. So, I think it's very important to recognize that these sensory thresholds, including parents and children, sit in two camps largely.

The one is the functional camp and the other one is the dysfunctional camp. So, let's start with the functional camp. The functional camp is that we all have sensory personalities.

We can all function in our world. We can hold on a marriage. We can, you know, nurture our children.

Our children can develop along an okay trajectory, maybe milestones a bit advanced or a bit delayed, maybe more social, less social. And that all fits within what we would call a neurotypical or typically developing person. And that as long as the environment for that person matches what their capacity is, you're actually going to have somebody who's very successful.

And so, if you're working within the typical environment or the typically developing person and child, the important thing is to recognize what's going on in their sensory world and to make sure that the environment caters well to what they need. And, you know, I mentioned that my youngest was a slow to warm up. I spent my life, 14 years of her life, making sure that the world, I mean, I didn't spend my life doing this, but the world did revolve around her needs to a large degree because we had a nanny at home.

She went to school down the road with the same children that she was in a play group at two years old with. So, everything was very predictable and settled. Her world got upended when we moved continent and that immediately spun in an anxiety situation for her because she was slow to warm up.

And so, it's a very clear example of how the environment can have a very big impact on function. She's functional and typically developing, but it was a big challenge. And I think as a parent, having that insight into our child's sensory personality, into their needs and into the environment and into our responses, that's the magic.

That's what we can do. And actually, Anne-Laura Jackson, who I mentioned earlier, is the OT I work with here in Jersey. She actually has a program she takes people through that includes this goodness of fit piece.

So, typically developing, you're looking for goodness of fit because you want the environment and the tasks in the environment to match the capacities and the sensory profile. And how do you control that, Meg, in a home? I mean, you've just flagged it in your own home, right? You had two social butterflies and you had a slow to warm. If I look at my home, I've got, I even, like, every time I think I know what they are, I feel like they're me.

They're all different sensory personalities. How do you manage, how do you control that as a parent? So, your biggest role, and I honestly think that this is probably our most important role, you know, people think your most important role as a parent is to either feed your child, you know, or to make them happy. And actually, it's neither of those things.

I think your biggest role as a parent is to be a co-regulator, which means that you have to have a very high level of attention to them and what they need in that moment and what's going on in the environment. And that might mean that you have to tell everybody else to be quiet. And in my situation, like my child who walks into the room, my five-year-old who walks in and wants to give her newborn sister, when her threshold is super low at the end of the day, a slobbery kiss and a cuddle, my reaction might have felt be not very out of kilter, and I didn't really behave very well.

But I was super protective, and I was doing what is called co-regulating for my child. And when we become co-regulators, we are very deeply watching people's mood, their emotions. We are helping them when they're toddlers to identify their mood and their emotions.

We are using lots of words. One of the ways we can do it, and this is for moms who feel at the end of their tether, is to go low and slow. So when things feel like, sheesh, I'm going to murder somebody, it's like going, slow your voice down, lower it, because it's self-regulating for us.

It helps us to go into a calmer brain and then respond. So to be a co-regulator is important. There is another side to that, that sometimes we just actually can't do it, because we're already not in that space.

We're in our red brain. And you mentioned something earlier on that you said that you always thought that you were a more settled person, and actually you're finding yourself at your end of your tether more and more with your kids. But sensory and social breaks for us as moms are critically important, and they're not nice to haves.

They are like have to haves. And so maybe it is for you, and I don't know, obviously everybody's situation financially might be different, but something like, I know it might sound crazy, but a massage once a week, a half an hour deep pressure massage can just be what you need. That deep pressure proprioception can actually just reset you.

Or a daily walk. I mean, walking is the most, the single most regulating thing on a sensory level, because it's reciprocal actions. Our left and right are going in opposite directions.

Our eyes are getting visual information going backward into them, so the visual system gets regulated, and we get a lot of proprioception, and we're breathing as well. And so walking, like a half an hour walk when you're to end of the tether, is important. And that means that maybe that when you get an au pair to look after the kids, instead of sitting down to quickly do some emails, it's saying, I'm going for a walk.

Like, I know it doesn't really make sense because I've got a lot of work to do, but if I go for a walk, I'll be a better mom later. And so I think it's helping ourselves to stay in a regulated state. It's helping our children then by recognizing, and then actually the third aspect that I haven't mentioned there is our partner, where we have to have a goodness of fit with our partners.

And a good father, and we're going to start going through some fatherhood podcasts coming up in the next couple of weeks as we go into June. But a good father is what I call him a vessel for his partner, because he needs to create a buffer and a container around her so that she can actually then go into the child. And vice versa, that's what a good team does.

So a little bit of teamwork goes a long way there as well. It's amazing. That was so helpful.

Thank you so much. Pleasure. Yeah.

And I just want to finish off by saying what we haven't mentioned is the other camp of children. So we've got our camp of neurotypical developing children, and we've spoken about what you can do for them, but you have got your camp of neurodivergent children who are maybe on the spectrum or maybe ADHD or really, really compulsive. And that is a whole different story.

And so these four sensory personalities that I've spoken about today occur within the typically developing framework, but actually on the fringe of that, you get your extremes. So when your sensitive baby is so sensitive that they can't have their nappy change, they can't feed. And I've known children who cannot feed.

They have to be tube fed because they can't tolerate the feel of a nipple in their mouth. That's dysfunctional. Or when you are so sensitive visually that you can't make eye contact.

And so you don't have to make social emotional engagement, and then you might end up on the spectrum. So that's a whole nother story. And for those children, there's no question in my mind that it's not sufficient to expect a parent to look at goodness or fit.

Obviously there's a bit of that, but there you need external assistance. And there you've got a therapist who does one of two things and hopefully both. She does hands-on therapy in a SI gym, and she does a home program for assisting with goodness of fit.

But it'll be a more intense home program. And that's what an SI therapist, a sensory integration therapist, would be doing. And myself, I work with babies.

And then obviously I have already mentioned Anne-Laura Jackson, who I work with here. There's some incredible therapists in Cape Town. Karina, many, many of them who have put you in touch with other people in touch with.

So if moms do want to know, it's just reach out to us on Instagram, ask the question, and I can put you in touch with the right people. Thank you so much, Meg. Thanks everyone for listening.

It was incredibly helpful. I know it is for me. Definitely need to work out my sensory personality here.

And yeah, so like the podcast, follow us, subscribe, and we'll see you next week. Lovely. Thanks everybody.

Thanks for joining us. And thank you, Terve. Thanks to everyone who joined us.

We will see you the same time next week. Until then, download ParentSense app and take the guesswork out of parenting.