



Meet Bess

*A story about parenting,
finding balance and sensory
under-responsivity.*

Illustrated by Jacinta Read

Meet Bess, she's 35 and is a clinical laboratory scientist. Bess likes fine foods and live folk music. Bess has been with her partner for 14 years and they have two children.

Bess found parenting her oldest child, who is seven years old, easy and natural. Her second child is three years old and the fit hasn't come quite as easily. Bess often feels that she is dealing with a baby who goes from 0-60, cries too quickly and for too long.

Bess *mostly* enjoys her weekly coffee morning with the other Moms, although she definitely feels that she often misses what is going on and is the last to laugh at the jokes.



Bess is enjoying her latte and talking to her friend. There's a lot of background noise, but it doesn't bother her at all. Bess's friend comments "I just admire you so much Bess, how do you do it?"

I JUST ADMIRE YOU SO MUCH BESS,
How DO YOU DO IT?

To her friends it looks like Bess has tuned out her son's fussiness.

Bess is horrified, she always seems to be the last one to notice that the crying child is her son. It's awful when this happens in public.



Another Mom that Bess doesn't know well comments, "You just seem to block out his fussiness, and it doesn't bother you at all." Bess can't tell if the woman thinks this is a genuine compliment or if it is an outright criticism.

Now her friendly coffee morning feels like a disaster. This often happens at her sister's house too. Comments about Bess ignoring, not paying enough attention, and being self absorbed.



Bess hates that her youngest child regularly gets so upset and she feels hurt by the suggestion that she is deliberately ignoring signs of distress.

She loves her kids.

She longs for a peaceful life and feels guilty that she misses the rhythm of “how things were” before her second child was born.

When it was just her partner and her oldest child things seemed to go so smoothly.

She has a good life, why is this part so hard?



Differences in sensory processing impact the formation of relationships throughout the lifespan. Children with sensory processing differences grow into adults with sensory processing differences.

At STAR Institute we have a thriving and much sought after adult and adolescent service. We started this because we kept hearing from parents that they needed this.



In 2011 a study explored the relation between sensory processing and anxiety in adults and found that both over-responsivity and under-responsivity correlated with higher rates of anxiety in adults.

A 2020 study in the Journal of Mental Health Counseling discussed the importance of understanding differences in sensory processing for successful mental health intervention.

Sensory Health Supports

Relational Health

Bess starts to reflect on comments people have made since she was in Grade 5 – that she comes across as low energy, misses what's happening the moment, sometimes even that she seems depressed. Bess decides to seek support from a counselor and after two sessions together the counselor suggests that she explore the possibility that the way she processes sensation is different and might impact how she responds to the world and her relationships.

Bess discovers that she is sensory-under-responsive – which means that she does not register sensory input until it is very intense. Bess is under responsive to sound, visual and touch sensations. She learns that the way she processes movement and position is a strength and has an “aha!” moment as she remembers how good she used to feel when she was dancing two or three times a week.

Bess takes dance up again and builds a sensory lifestyle that nourishes her nervous system. She finds she is more alert to the world around her and available for all her relationships. Even her work colleagues comment on the difference.

Bess and her youngest child bond and learn to play together and communicate with one another.



Does Bess' story sound familiar to you?

For support with an assessment of sensory integration and processing reach out to your local sensory certified occupational therapy practice or contact us at **STAR** and we'd be happy to guide you.

There are more and more practitioners out there who specialize in supporting adults with these differences.

Sensory Health Transforms Lives



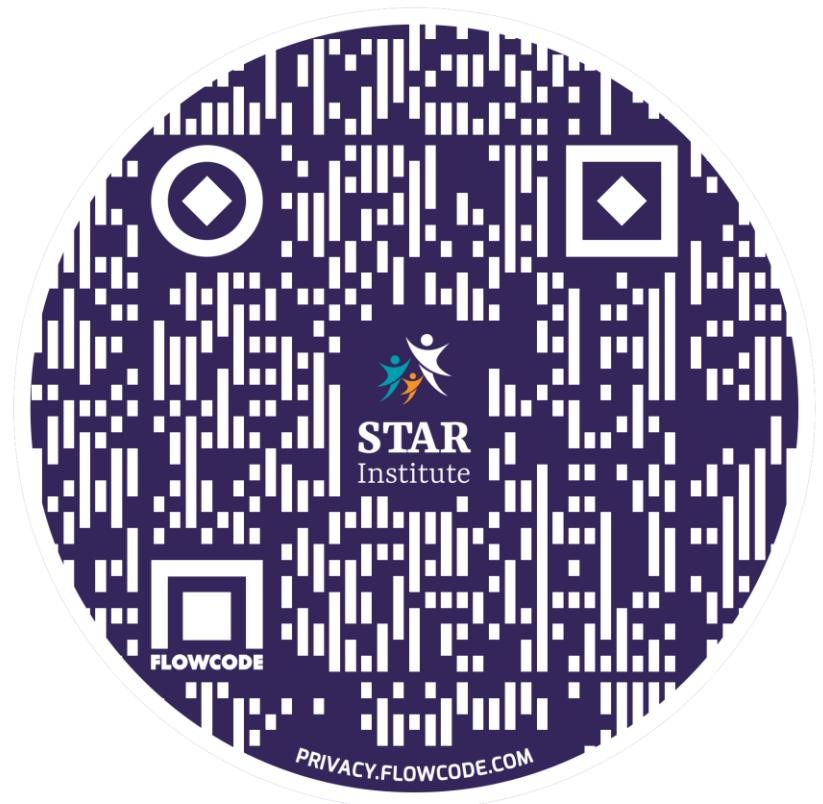
Unidentified differences in sensory integration and processing were impacting Bess' ability to enjoy life and bond with her youngest child. Had she known that her body's sensory preferences and capacities impact her ability to tune into the world around her she could have proactively cultivated a healthy sensory lifestyle. Sensory processing is more than the "five sense" taught in elementary school and we think it's time that the whole world understands the power of sensory health for psychological well-being.

Every month at STAR Institute is sensory awareness month but October is particularly special as we share our passion with the world.

This year we are sharing the stories of five characters who are very dear to our hearts – each character represents a different aspect of how differences in sensory integration and processing impact health and wellness. The characters are from different stages of life, contexts, and family backgrounds but they all have one thing in common – discovering the power of sensory processing transformed their lives for the better. These stories are based on real-life, real testimonies, real people.

Help us do more – this year we are raising funds for our education and advocacy work. So far in 2020, we have run free and pay-what-you-can parent workshops, trained school-based occupational therapists, educated educators, and more. With your support, we want to reach out to school districts, law enforcement agencies, more families and individuals, more clinicians, and educators. Your gift will be put to work immediately.

Give a little. Help a lot.



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Transforming health and wellness through the sensory domain