

# Meet Mizba

*A story about sensory  
discrimination, coping at school  
and mental health*

*Illustrated by Jacinta Read*



**Content Warning -self-harm / suicide.  
Mizba's story contains a serious mental health  
crisis and may be upsetting to read.**

Meet Mizba. Mizba is 11 years old. She likes soccer, 3 D printing and reading, especially the Aru Shah book series. Mizba is in the gifted and talented stream at school and always the first to be picked for the Brain Bowl competition. She has always enjoyed participating in tumbling class and wants to get into organized sports but finds them difficult.

Mizba doesn't have anyone to sit with at lunch and doesn't get invited for playdates after school.



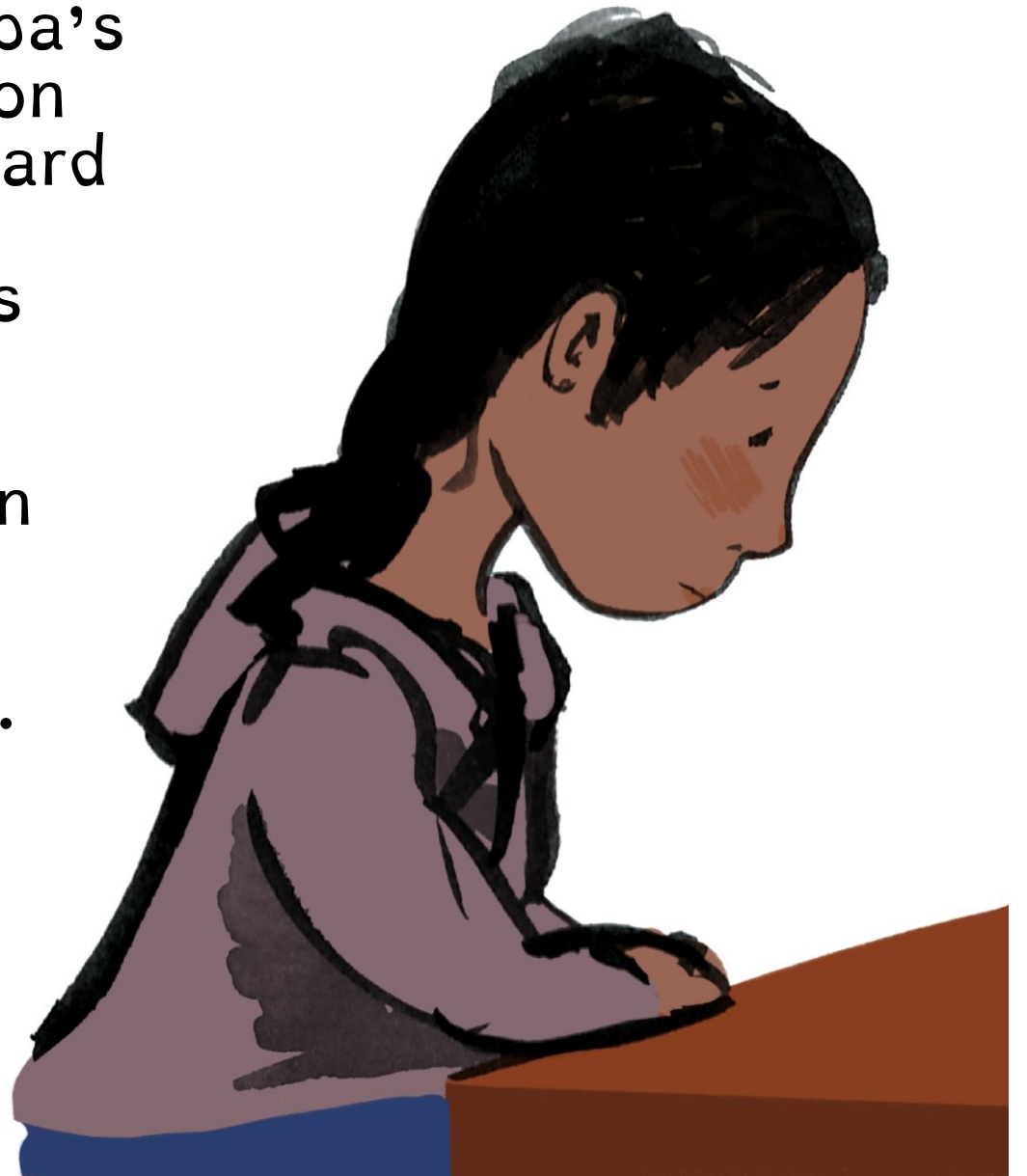
Mizba makes learning look easy, but this takes a lot of effort as she finds school incredibly stressful. Organizing her tools, finding items in her bag, zipping her pencil case, sitting still in her chair and gently closing the classroom door are all tasks that require a lot of effort for Mizba.

Now in middle school she finds it even more stressful to manage her materials, access and organize a locker, and keep to her class schedule. The only thing she feels successful at is following the rules and getting A+ grades.

On this day, Mizba gets a B on a geography paper. The teacher knows this is unusual and tells Mizba not to worry.



Mizba panics. She worries this may mean she won't make the honor roll; her perfect streak has been completely broken. Mizba's "battery" always runs on low, as working super hard to be organized in the school environment uses up so much energy. Her challenges with social confidence and initiation drain her, so when she gets home from school she is fatigued and sad. She doesn't have the ability to bounce back from this small knock. It feels like the world is closing in.



Mizbatold her parents that she feels ill, and now she is falling apart alone in her room. She feels desperate, exhausted and empty. Her heart physically hurts. As the tears fall freely, she bites her lip to keep from wailing in pain at the sense of panic and hopelessness.



Mizba starts to think about some drastic ways to end these terrible feelings.

Sometimes differences in sensory integration mean that we register or notice sensation, but we are unable to discriminate what it means. When this happens we can easily be confused in busy dynamic situations where we are asked to multi task and organize ourselves on tight deadlines. We may need to go slower than our peers in order to respond appropriately to task demands.



Every year students in middle and high school who have “held it together” despite differences in sensory processing suddenly hit a crisis point as school demands and sensory motor demands converge and become too much, too heavy and unbearable.

By this point mental health support and Occupational Therapy usually need to work together to provide effective support for building psychological well-being.



Struggling to overcome unidentified differences in sensory integration and processing can result in delays developing social competence, confidence and problem solving skills.

Our resilience – our ability to recover from stress – can be compromised, and we become at risk for dramatic declines in mental health.

# *Sensory Health Saves Lives*

Mizba's Dad decides to check on her after she ignores the calls to dinner. He finds her distraught, looking up some very upsetting videos on the Internet and trying to hide what she is doing. Mizba's parents take her to see a counselor who happens to be well trained in the importance of understanding sensory integration.

Mizba and her counselor work briefly with an Occupational Therapist, and Mizba gets a full sensory integration evaluation. Together they discover that Mizba has significant differences discriminating and identifying the meaning behind sensation. She finds it difficult to locate items by touch or by vision alone, to do up fasteners and to complete fine motor tasks successfully.

Following the recommendations of the occupational therapist, Mizba and her family, with her counselor, build a sensory lifestyle that includes fun, joy and successful relationship building with peers. Mizba starts to heal learns that she is good at more than just academics!



Does Mizba's story sound familiar to you?

For support finding a sensory integration and processing assessment reach out to your school, local sensory certified occupational therapy practice or contact us at **STAR** Institute and we'd be happy to guide you.

If a family member, friend or colleague expresses thoughts of self harm or suicide please call your national suicide prevention lifeline immediately. In the **USA** this number is 800-273-8255.

# *Sensory Health Transforms Lives*



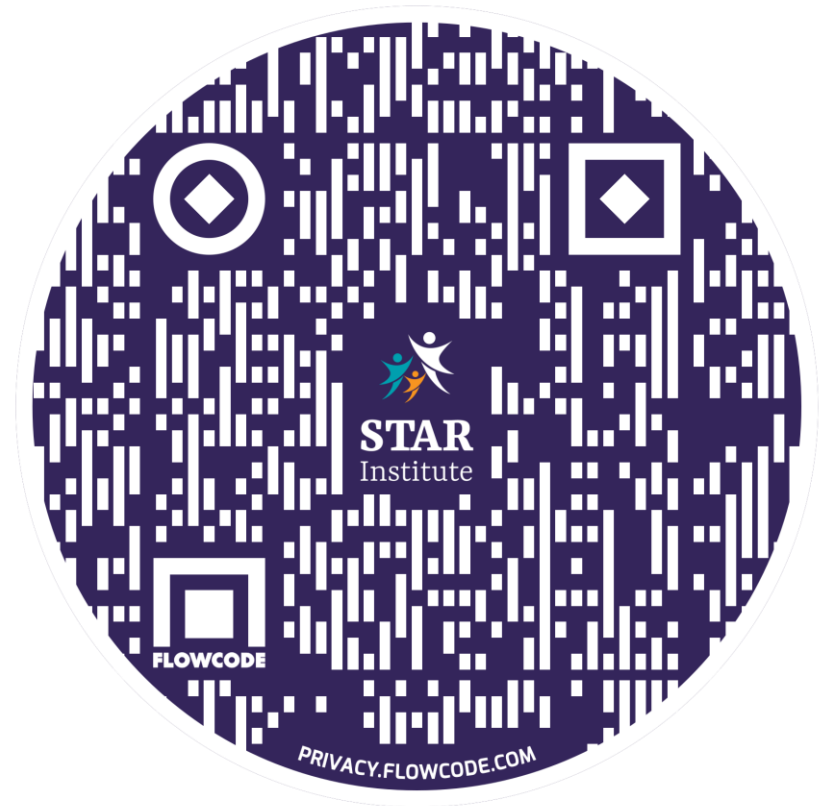
We have eight open sensory systems that work together to help us make meaning of the world around us: sight, taste, smell, touch, sound, body position, internal well-being and sense of motion/equilibrium. The way our bodies integrate and process sensation from all these systems is truly wonderful and highly complex. An Occupational Therapist who is certified in sensory integration understands and can explain this process best. And every teacher, mental health professional, parent, and person-who-works-with-humans also needs a better understanding of how sensory processing impacts health and wellness.

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.**



Scan to donate \$5 today!





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*Transforming health and wellness through the sensory domain*