Limitations of Sensory Systems (LOSS) Assessment

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Limitations of Sensory Systems (LOSS) Assessment

**Description**
This checklist is designed to assess the degree of loss in families with children who experience sensory system impairments and in specific issues with limitations to insight and awareness of self and others. **There are 100 items in the checklist and the lower the score the higher degree of loss experienced.** This is a pilot paper for this assessment of losses experienced within families who have children with sensory limitations, and it is designed to gather input on the following factors.

**Construct, Trait, Skills or Competency**

**Primary Factor**

- **Integrative Reason**
  Insight, awareness, clarity of thought

- **Eco-System Development**
  Individuation, environmental control, resilience

- **Family Vision**
  Attachment, bonding, promoting values

- **Mindfulness**
  Time consciousness, worry-free parenting, validation

- **Expressed Communication**
  Openness, social connection, emotional connection

- **Positive Mental State**
  Family Joy, hope, future perspective

**Positive Regard**
Pride in family, pride in self, empathy

**Keywords**
Special Needs, Disability, Diversity, Neurodiversity, Learning Disabilities, Sensory-Integration Disorders

**Disciplines**
Child Psychology | Cognition and Perception | Cognitive Behavioral Therapy | Cognitive Psychology | Communication Sciences and Disorders | Counseling Psychology | Counselor Education | Disability and Equity in Education | Disability Studies | Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Educational Psychology | Elementary Education | Elementary Education and Teaching | Family Practice Nursing | Health

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The types of losses experienced by families who have children with sensory limitations are multiple and ongoing across development and the life cycle. Some of these losses are not ever resolved and cause the families to experience complicated bereavement or a "partial death" syndrome that is traumatic. They experience the loss as they witness other individuals enjoy the accomplishment that comes over time as their child grows and develops. These can frequently serve as reminders of loss and continued grief and trauma can be experienced by the parents and other family members. After the child is beyond school age and educational support, they sometimes do not qualify for vocational rehabilitation services and may be stuck in service systems that do no offer future growth. When this occurs, the family may continue to experience shame and multiple losses that are emotional, social, and financial. It is critical that these losses be assessed to develop support systems and services that allow the family to maintain a sense of dignity and future perspective.
Limitations of Sensory Systems (LOSS)

This checklist is designed to assess the degree of loss in families with children who experience sensory system impairments and in specific issues with limitations to insight and awareness of self and others. **There are 100 items in the checklist and the lower the score the higher degree of loss experienced.**

Frequently children who struggle with limitations of insight and awareness present with sensory integration concerns. Integration is what occurs when we are presented with *new information* through sensory channels. This input triggers an emotional response that we interpret based upon our level of understanding and our own reality or world view. We evaluate and process this information to determine a course of action. If we cannot calculate the value of this new information or see the relationship it has to previous information or knowledge we experience a cognitive disconnect, confusion, and in some cases a system overload. The individual may become stuck in the process of responding at a primitive level of an emotional physiological response and lack the tools to make sense at a secondary or more complex feeling level. They are enslaved to physiologically responding to the basic emotions and be unable to process this information at a more complex or integrative level. Trapped by the primitive reactive brain versus the sophisticated responsive brain that is accessible through the application of reason and logic, they are unable to consolidate this new information and formulate an integrative whole. Without the process of integration we lack the ability to make connections and utilize new information in an intelligent manner. Integration allows us to think on a conceptual level and make critical judgments about how to act or behave, it allows us to make connections and see the bigger picture in a predictive manner. We rely on the integration of our thoughts and feelings about *new* sensory information in order to think clearly, and respond in a decisive way.

When the integration system is impaired, the thoughts we form related to the sensory and feeling input remain ineffective because they aren’t connected to the whole person in a unified fashion. At best, this ongoing occurrence results in fragmented development in which there are gaps within the knowledge base. The individual may appear to have some understanding in certain areas but will either inconsistently have access to this information, lack knowledge or skills of application, or the ability to create a clear plan on how to utilize this new knowledge. The information stays in a concrete format or is too simple to be useful. As this person in unable to make abstract connections to self and others, this new input creates a defensive response which jars the system and the person activates resistance as they struggle to adapt. They desperately hold on to previously formed and familiar concepts so as to know how to respond; however, this old way of thinking doesn’t adequately support the new input and will not suffice. The end result is increased chaos and confusion, and a sense of feeling over-whelmed. This cognitive disruption creates feelings of instability which
flood the senses and result in behavioral outbursts of inappropriate, undesirable, or immature behaviors.

The individual experiences the perceptual disconnection of thoughts and feelings, which drives the emotional response of fear which can result in the expression of anger or some other unwanted emotion. In confusion, the behavioral response becomes erratic, misdirected, and misguided and the attempt to connect to self and others is yet another missed opportunity for social support and affiliation. Over time, these missed attempts become more obvious and earmarks this individual’s inability to adapt, cope, and function which results in isolation and rejection. As a result, the individual experiences repeated disapproval, rejection, and despair. The more frequently this process occurs, the more likely this individual is to feel overwhelmed and ineffectual. In time, the individual may discontinue attempts at trying to make sense of new experiences and information and respond by shutting down or isolating. This regressed response creates feelings of helplessness and fuels the ineffective state of confusion they experience when new information or opportunities for experience present themselves. Trapped in this sensory loop, they reach to their parents or other parental figures to make sense of the world for them, and in effect become what Vygotsky deemed as an extra-cortical organizer (or brain outside their brain). Reliant on others to make sense of the world, the individual becomes more dependent and learns to believe they are helpless.

Despite the level of cognitive impairment, ideally we want each individual to function at their highest level possible. The inability to process information at an abstract level that allows for awareness and insight poses severe limitations and grossly impedes the skills of mental capacities. A strategic plan to develop competencies is needed, and this preliminary input from parents or others in the position of care-giving is instrumental in this process.

It is also critical to provide respite and emotional support to parents and care-givers. Without an accurate assessment of the needs; these attempts at support would be mere Band-Aids and just offer distraction. The problem of brain impairment isn’t going to magically disappear; however, we can find roadways into addressing areas that can show improvement for these individuals and their families and increase hope. Depleted hope results in anxiety and depression which can become a systemic problem for families. Addressing these concerns may assist in the alleviation of symptoms or exacerbation of an extremely difficult family situation. Recognizing and validating the loss is necessary to support families who may be experiencing invisible losses or complicated bereavement. Without these attempts to improve the situation, these families are left to cope through their own devices, and may likely experience feeling overwhelmed, social disconnection, isolation, and loneliness. This unrecognized loss can exponentially grow and further complicate the picture for this family, and negatively affect each of its members.
These losses are real, but often go unrecognized. Ignoring them doesn’t make them go away or improve the situation. At a minimum doing a better job at the identification of the loss can improve awareness, and with education, allow for improved treatment effort. The reality is that these children will continue to exhibit some degree of dependency on their parents or care-givers; however, if we can accurately address these issues of dependency, we can more precisely devise methods to address areas of limitation and supportively attempt to fill in the cognitive gaps for these individuals. It may be that their thinking will remain concretized, but we may be able to reduce some level of confusion and allow these families to experience less chaos and disorganization related to these losses.

Socially turning a blind’s eye to the needs of these individuals and their families represents a social lack of insight and awareness. When society turns its back on these individuals and their families it reinforces devaluation of them at a personal level and creates yet another layer of disconnection. This would seem to represent a paradox that states a reciprocal approval of the disconnection of insight and awareness, or in other words, the construct of leaving everyone in their perspective placement. The message being, “If you lack insight and awareness, we are not going to recognize you.” Advocacy for recognition of the losses experienced by families with children who have impairments of insight and awareness is necessary to change this social message. Acceptance of the state of loss for these individual and their families is a good place to start. Change may occur by slowing drawing lines to connect the dots in places in which these gaps exist.

This tool is offered as a place to start in recognizing family losses by identification of the areas of loss, the multi-dimensionality of such loss, and the complexity of the experience for the individual and their family members. Information gathered by assessing for loss can be used to identify issues, educate, devise a treatment plan, and offer support. This instrument can be used in assessment and evaluation to provide ongoing input to the treatment process. Family reports are considered a vital part of this change process as it is recognized that individual’s with impairment of insight and awareness may not provide accurate self-report. This statement is not saying that their input should be ignored or not gathered, but merely recognizing that this issue speaks to the core of the problem in that the individual’s abilities for insight and awareness must be gathered with an openness to this fact and thus evaluated with this issue in mind. Gathering data from the individual is a crucial part of the equation in that it assists in more accurately defining what the family experiences is in respect to the individual’s level of functioning related to insight and awareness. It is in gathering this holistic picture that we see the global messages that give meaning to this family constellation. Examining the constellation of traits, constructs, skills, and competencies mapped out by the LOSS can be used as a standalone instrument as a part of a larger battery used to assess family functioning. The information provided can be used to strategically design a map to support the family through their healing process.
Score: Place a check mark next to any construct, trait, skill, or competency that is displayed. Assign one point for each trait, construct, or ability that is expressed or demonstrated by the child, or when applicable by the parent, or family member. Tally the number of points displayed in each category and then transfer to the category scoring section.

Empathy:
- Shared compassion __
- Shared understanding __
- A sense that others’ understand your parental experience __
- Inter-active or reciprocal empathy __
- The ability to compassionately comfort the child when he or she experiences intense emotions (i.e. fear, sadness, or sense of feeling overwhelmed) __

Total ___/5

Family Joy:
- The joy of seeing your child launch into adulthood __
- Shared humor __
- Enjoyment of previous pleasures __
- The ability to experience your own rhythm in life __
- Seeing confidence develop in your child __
- Gentle touch without an aggressive response __
- The ability to handle hugs __
- Your child exhibits spontaneity __
- The joy of experiencing your child’s friendships __
- Seeing your child experience the maturation of friendships __

Total ___/10

Resilience Within the Family:
- The ability to relax and shut down __
- The ability to keep your senses in balance __
- The integration of mind, body, and spirit __
- Family balance __
- Uninterrupted sleep __
- A healthy perspective of life __

Total ___/6

Clarity of Thought Exhibited by Your Child or Adolescent:
-Ability to not pull others into the middle of obsessions __
• The ability to think rationally __
• You child exhibits a worry free mind __
• Reflective thought that is shared or reciprocal __
• Ability to find descriptive words __
• Ability to converse at an age appropriate level __
• Ability to connect thoughts to feelings __
• Ability to clearly rely a message __
• Ability to repeat what was said in an accurate manner __
• Ability to communicate in an efficient manner __

Total ___/10

Pride:

• A sense of pride in your child’s accomplishments __
• A shame-free identity of self __
• Pride in your family __
• A sense of dignity __

Total ___/4

Future Perspective:

• Your child has the ability to anticipate consequences __
• Hope for tomorrow __
• A sense of confidence that your child is becoming an adult __
• A realistic expectation that you will have healthy grand-children __

Total ___/4

Validation:

• An internalized view of who you are is understood by your child __
• Your child has a clear sense of self __
• A shared understanding of independent identities of each family member __
• A sense that our family is “normal” __
• The integrity of being able to remain your authentic self __

Total ___/5

Communication:

• The ability to manage the intricacies of everyday conversation __
• Conversation without interruption __
• Your child has the ability to comprehend abstract thought __
• Sensual expression is present in the marriage or with your partner __
• You have maintained the ability to utilize creative expression __
• Assurance that your child will know how to ask for help when needed __
• The ability to effectively tell others about the losses and experience understanding __

Total___/7

Openness:

• Ability to ask for help __
• Ability to function without shame __
• Ability to tell and share with others what is happening in the home __
• Ability to experience family without a sense of failure __

Total___/4

Individuation:

• Independent thought is exhibited by each family member __
• A sense of freedom is experienced in the family __
• The ability to travel unrestricted or unencumbered __
• Confidence that he/she will survive on their own __
• Your child exhibits an awareness of others __
• The ability to say “No” without extreme behavioral or emotional consequences from your child __
• The ability to focus on the needs of others and not just your child’s needs __
• Your child has developed an independent interpretation of experiences __
• Your child has developed an independent perspective or worldview __

Total___/9

Time Consciousness:

• Time with friends __
• Alone time and privacy __
• Spatial freedom __
• A healthy connection to your past __
• Ability to exist in the present __
• The ability to give your child the time he or she requires __

Total___/6
Environmental Control:

- You have access to a quiet non-stimulating environment when needed __
- A chaos free and organized environment __
- Movement without your child requiring an explanation __
- A sense of security __
- Safety from harm __
- The ability of the child to negotiate a new or unfamiliar environment __
- The ability of the family to integrate your home environment into other environments __

Total ___/7

Worry Free Parenting:

- No fear of being unable to care for your child because of illness __
- An ability to adjust and adapt to sudden change __
- To feel acceptance __
- A sense of control over the losses __
- A hope that there will be sufficient energy to protect, cope and continue to provide the necessary support for your child __

Total ___/5

Family Connection (Vision) In Your Child or Adolescent:

- Healthy attachment to parents __
- Warm bonding to siblings __
- Secure connection to the extended family __
- Sensitivity to relationship stress between family members or with a significant other __

Total ___/4

Promoting Values in Your Child or Adolescent:

- Your child exhibits the ability to conceptualize values __
- Your child has the ability to understanding the significance of family values __
- Your child has the ability to recognize family values __
- Your child has the ability to assess values in others __

Total ___/4
Social Connection:
- You feel your child is safe when alone in social situations __
- Your child displays the ability to connect with other children or teens __
- Your child has a secure connection to the community __

Total ___/3

Emotional Connection Exhibited by Your Child or Adolescent:
- Ability to relate to others __
- Ability to effectively communicate their needs __
- Ability to accurately report what occurred in a social situation or incident __
- Ability to display appropriate social behavior __
- Ability to respond in an age-appropriate manner __
- Ability to make and maintain friends __
- Ability to assess values in others __

Total ___/7

Category Score:
Transfer the total score from each category to the scoring section below and compute the total score.

Empathy ___
Family Joy ___
Resilience ___
Clarity of Thought ___
Pride ___
Future Perspective ___
Validation ___
Communication ___
Openness ___
Individuation ___
Time Consciousness ___
Environmental Control ___
Worry Free Parenting ___
Family Connection (Vision) ___
Promote Values ___
Social Connection ___
Emotional Connection ___

Total Score ___/100

The lower the score the more symptomatic or potential issues within the areas identified, and the higher the degree of global functional impairment in the child or adolescent and potential loss expressed by the family.