

# Staff Training to Support Sensory Needs for Neurodivergent Youth in Mental Health Treatment Settings

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## Background

- Ryther is a pediatric community mental health facility with a partial hospitalization program (PHP) and an intensive outpatient program (IOP).
- "Neurodivergent" (ND) refers to individuals whose neurological differences affect how their brain works.
- ND youth experience differences in sensory processing that can impact regulation and participation in daily activities.<sup>1</sup> Sensory-based interventions may improve functioning in these areas.<sup>2</sup>
- High co-occurrence of neurodivergence with mental health conditions necessitates a trauma-informed lens when addressing sensory needs.<sup>1,3</sup>
- Staff working with ND youth require knowledge of sensory systems to guide appropriate implementation of sensory tools to support regulation.<sup>4</sup>

## Purpose

- Assess current sensory supports within Ryther programming and identify gaps in supporting diverse sensory needs.
- Create a trauma-informed training module to enhance staff understanding of sensory processing and approaches to supporting sensory needs in ND youth.
- Provide Ryther with sustainable materials that can be integrated into daily programming and staff onboarding.

## Needs Assessment

<b>Community Mentor Meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify population served, program structure, staff roles and responsibilities, current approaches to sensory-related staff training.</li> </ul>
<b>Onsite Observations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observe day-to-day function of the PHP/IOP.</li> <li>Find gaps in sensory support practices.</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Interviews and Questionnaire</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess effectiveness of existing sensory-related training.</li> <li>Identify program-specific needs including common challenges and barriers to implementation.</li> </ul>
<b>Literature Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research peer-reviewed journal articles on sensory approaches to support ND youth, sensory regulation, and participation in mental health settings.</li> <li>Review implementation of sensory-based interventions and staff training approaches.</li> </ul>

## Topics of Interest for Training

"...staff and clients would benefit from more sensory support guidance..."

"...how to identify sensory needs."

## Development & Implementation

- Facilitated a one-hour in-person training session for staff of Ryther PHP/IOP.
- Training recorded for future onboarding and ongoing staff development.

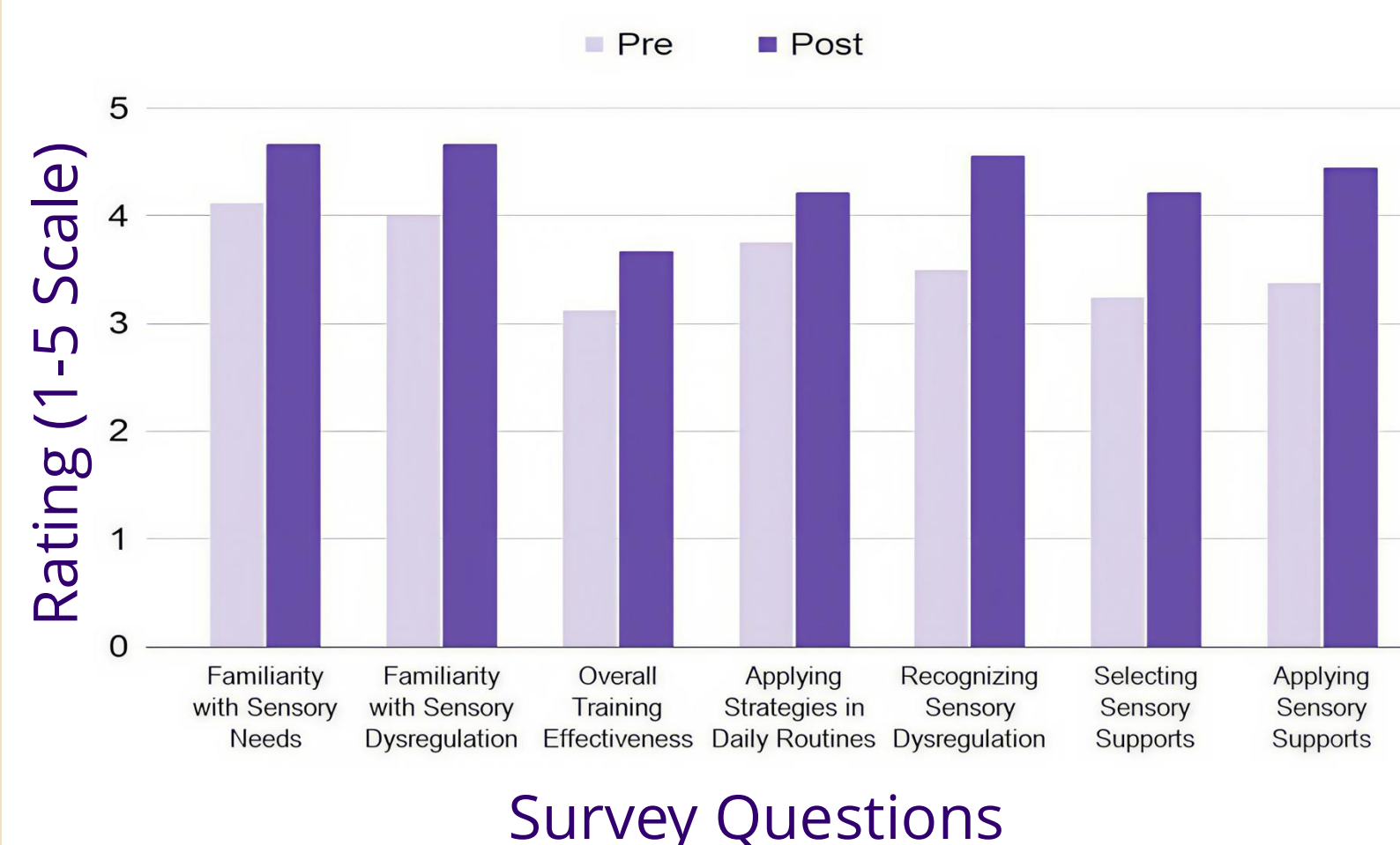
### Training Module

- Enhanced understanding of sensory processing and its impact on regulation with a trauma-informed lens.
- Provided education on sensory systems, sensory processing, and sensory regulation.
- Introduced tools and strategies to support sensory regulation in ND youth.

### Sensory Resource Bank

- Provided guidance on supporting proactive regulation by compiling research-based resources for staff to support sensory needs.
- Included education, tools for each sensory system, and strategies to identify and address sensory needs.

## Staff Training Effectiveness



## Staff Takeaways

"...function of fidgets as a sensory tool and not a toy."

"...skills to identify sensory needs our clients may be experiencing, then pairing with a tool."

## Training Results

- Staff training improved understanding of sensory processing and supports for ND youth.
- Sensory resource bank provided practical strategies that are easy to implement within the PHP/IOP to promote consistency across staff and programs.

## Conclusion

- Staff training is an effective way to increase understanding and confidence in supporting sensory needs.
- Trauma-informed sensory approaches are necessary for regulation and participation.
- Future research should evaluate the impact of long-term implementation of staff training and assess observable changes in sensory-related behaviors.

## References

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