

## verve feedback

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SMS 32546 (Each SMS costs R1)

### WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

**Annemarie Lombard**, occupational therapist and founder of Sensory Intelligence Consulting.

SPD occurs when the brain cannot properly process sensory information from the environment, says Lombard.

It often affects the ability of children to learn, and they don't develop on par with their peers. "They can't sit still, can't do sports, they don't concentrate, they become clumsy and cannot plan their movements," Lombard explains.

"So often these children are seen as naughty and not disciplined enough."

Lombard says the predisposition to SPD can be genetic, inherited from parents. It can also be caused by sensory deprivation, such as that experienced by a child who has seldom been spoken to or cuddled.

Other causes are prenatal and birth complications, as well as any brain trauma while growing up.

Lombard says SPD is most prominent in people who have autism spectrum disorder, and it's also quite common in those with Aspergers disorder. There is also a strong overlap in people with SPD and the ADD and ADHD population.

Not just anyone can address this condition, says Lombard. Treatment for it is specifically done with an occupational therapist specially trained in sensory integration therapy.

For more information, go to [www.sensoryintelligence.co.za](http://www.sensoryintelligence.co.za) or [www.babysense.co.za](http://www.babysense.co.za)

**Liz Senior**, occupational therapist and founder of the Clamber Club.

Tactile defensiveness is found more among children these days, says Senior, perhaps because there is greater awareness of the condition.

"I think it was always there, but it is now a recognised disorder of the nervous system."

These children are often oversensitive to stimuli other people would hardly feel. Touch can be irritating and even painful to these children, and cause major disruptions in their nervous system.

"It's not something the child can control, and telling them that it is okay to touch does not make the experience any different for them."

Children with tactile defensiveness need to be treated by an occupational therapist who specialises in sensory integration. The brushing technique is often used and is very effective.

Senior says you do get children who are not tactile defensive but who avoid touch, because it's unfamiliar to them, and they have not had the opportunity to experience important touch – as in messy play and playing outdoors.

These children should be urged to play games that touch, such as finger-painting, baking, running and rolling around outside, playing in the mud or the sandpit, moulding clay and making fabric and seed collages.

For more information, see [www.clamberclub.com](http://www.clamberclub.com)

## WHY I CRACKED MY HUSBAND'S RIBS



**SENSORY OVERLOAD:** Tertia Albertyn with her children, three-year-old twins Kate and Adam. Adam has SPD.

PICTURE BY MEGAN WILLIAMS COURTESY OF TERTIA ALBERTYN

Tertia Albertyn (39) admits that she is very odd. The Capetonian always cuts the labels out of her clothes. Sometimes she wears her panties inside out. She has banned whistling in her house.

It was only when her son Adam (3) was diagnosed that her oddity was given a name – sensory processing disorder (SPD), although she suffers from a milder version than her son.

SPD is a neurological disability of the brain to correctly process information coming in from the five senses as well as the vestibular system and the positional sense.

Last year, Tertia and her husband Marko attended a workshop run by Annemarie Lombard, an occupational therapist who heads Sensory Intelligence Consulting, to better understand herself and her son. She was surprised to discover that there are others like her.

Lombard told participants at the workshop she could always tell which women were sensory-defensive just by looking at them. They usually wore no make-up, had their hair very short or tied back and wore non-fussy clothes.

Tertia fitted the bill. A sensory profile that she filled in during the course revealed that she had two sensory issues which fall under the umbrella SPD term – tactile and auditory defensiveness.

Asked to explain what it is like to live with her sensory defensiveness, Tertia paints a picture. When you are in a mall one day, she suggests, stop what you are doing and just listen. Listen really hard and allow all the noises to register in your brain. Stop your brain from tuning out the noises.

Listen to the people talking, air conditioners humming, babies crying, the wheels of the shopping trolley, and the cell-phones ringing. It's noisy.

Now imagine hearing all those noises at the same time, clamouring for attention, and not being able to tune them out, says Tertia.

"Imagine you couldn't press mute on the receptors that kept sending you continual messages like, 'There is a tag in your shirt'. Eventually you will want to rip your shirt off and tear that tag out," she adds.

Noise, like whistling, physically hurts "like a knife cutting through me," she explains.

Tertia also has extreme reactions to touch. Her family and friends know not to touch her accidentally as this can put her fight-flight-flight response into overdrive.

She feels as if she is in a constant state of heightened awareness, always alert and aware that "something might come and attack me". "It can be exhausting but I've learnt to live with it," says Tertia.

Only with Marko does she drop her guard. But even he learnt the hard way. Once he poked her in the side and she instinctively lashed out, accidentally fracturing his ribs.

"If you are coming towards me though and hold my hand, I can tell my body that there's nothing to be scared of, and that you are not a threat," adds Tertia. She's embraced both her sen-



*Noor-Jehan Yoro Badat speaks to a woman who suffers, along with her son, from an unusual and sometimes embarrassing sensory disorder*

sory defensiveness aspects, and has learnt to cope and work around them. "If I didn't I would go mad," she says.

It's also a relief to know that what she was attributing to anxiety was actually sensory overload, and there was a label for the "quirky" behaviour she had exhibited since childhood.

"As an adult you are more easily able to control your environment," she says.

"If something freaks you out, avoid the situation. Don't like labels, cut them out. Don't like loud noise, avoid it at all cost. Can't stand the feeling of food on hands, wash afterwards."

A good night's sleep always resets Tertia. But if she's had a day where she's been sensory-overloaded, sleep eludes her. Her body is on hyper-alert.

Every sound is too loud, and every movement by Marko sets her on edge. But because she understands what is happening to her body it doesn't freak her too

### Before long he ends up patting her too hard until he hurts her ...

much.

"I just get up and sleep somewhere else for the night. I don't try to fight it. I give myself permission to 'reset'."

Children, though, don't have the insights adults do, and find it harder to reset themselves. This is the case with Adam, says Tertia. From birth he was an intense baby. He would scream louder, get hungrier, more angry, more hot and more of everything, she adds.

It was his swimming teacher, more than a year ago, who recognised the symptoms of SPD. Not long after that he was officially diagnosed with the disorder.

Although Adam's other senses are ultra-sharp, his sensory issues are mostly with the vestibular system, which has to do with movement and balance, and proprioception, the sense of body position.

The latter system enables a person, for instance, to sit on a chair without falling off or walk up and down the stairs without looking at their feet.

With the vestibular system, Adam hates putting his head back. It's too much for him, says Tertia. Like her, he hates labels. He won't wear clothes with zips that touch his neck. He won't wear hooded tops, anything that is tight around his neck, and anything that is itchy or scratchy.

And if the seams in his pajamas bother him, Tertia turns them inside out for him to wear. "But by far the worst thing

that Adam does is that he uses too much force with things."

Adam loves his twin sister Kate and is protective of her, but when they roll around, playing and tickling, before long he ends up patting Kate too hard and hurting her.

"It's as if he can't help himself. The joy or excitement or love is just too much," says Tertia. "He can't switch it off. Afterwards he is immediately contrite."

Tertia understands Adam's behaviour for she sees so much of herself in him. "I know what it's like to be him. We are connected in a very deep way."

His occupational therapy sessions have helped him. Adam follows the Wilbarger brushing protocol, where a surgical brush is used against his skin on his arms, legs and back. "If he is having a huge, freak-out meltdown, the brushing calms him down amazingly," says Tertia.

He also sleeps under a weighted blanket providing deep pressure to help him calm down.

Two other tools Tertia uses to help Adam cope is having a routine and preparing him for what's to come. "Sensory kids crave routine. They need predictability in order to modulate the messages," she says.

His educational psychologist asked her once what Adam was like with Kate, and Tertia said he was fine. He was relaxed.

"She said it was because he knows his sister – she is predictable. Even though she beats him up, shouts and pushes, he knows what to expect from her. He doesn't need to be prepared for the unexpected sensory insult," says Tertia.

Sensory kids don't well with transitions. Adam needs warning and time to prepare himself for the change.

Tertia explains that surprises and changes cause her a little stress, a fight-or-flight response. But then once her body sends out a message that she will be okay, it goes back to normal. "Sensory kids don't. They spike and they find it difficult to come back down to normal."

So she prepares Adam as much as possible. If she knows his grandparents are coming, she tells him. "He looks forward to it and is excited. But if he is busy playing and Ouma and Oupa suddenly appear, his initial reaction is not exactly welcoming," says Tertia.

As Adam gets older and better, Tertia says, his ability to modulate his sensory input improves.

But because Tertia knows what it's like to be him, she admits she is over-protective. "I've been told by his occupational therapist and by the psychologist that I have to let him fall a little. I have to allow him to learn about picking himself up on his own. It's hard," says Tertia.

Read more about Tertia's experiences with SPD on her blog, [www.tertia.org](http://www.tertia.org)



## Tax Season for EMPLOYERS

1 JULY - 29 AUGUST

Here's how to make it go smoothly

- Attend a SARS workshop - call 0860 12 12 18 or go to [www.sars.gov.za](http://www.sars.gov.za) for details
- Read the "Step by Step Guide to the New PAYE Process" - available at any SARS branch or [www.sars.gov.za](http://www.sars.gov.za)
- Collect a free training CD from your nearest branch
- Or call 0860 12 12 18 and we'll send you the material
- Consolidate all your monthly PAYE liabilities with the actual deductions and payments to SARS
- Collect the e@syFile software or copies of the new EMP501 and IRP5/IT3(a) manual forms from your nearest branch or call 0860 12 12 18 and we'll send it to you (download e@syFile from [www.sarsfiling.co.za](http://www.sarsfiling.co.za))
- Complete your reconciliation declaration and submit it with copies of your tax certificates to SARS electronically (eFiling) or on CD/DVD to a SARS branch
- Settle any outstanding amount if necessary
- Remember to only issue tax certificates to your employees once your reconciliation is completed



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2008 Tax Season TOGETHER, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### THE 5-MINUTE INTERVIEW

#### JEANNIE D

RADIO DJ, TV PRESENTER AND ACTRESS

Jeannie de Gouveia, who holds a communications degree from RAU, began her career as a DJ on Good Hope FM in Cape Town, and is one of the four presenters on TV's *Top Billing*. She won the 2006 Crystal Award for best-dressed presenter, was voted 2007's most popular female celebrity by *You* magazine, and took part in *Strictly Come Dancing* Season 2. Recently she was made brand ambassador for Garnier Nutrisse.

**If I weren't talking to you right now, I'd be ...** Packing to come to Joburg – I travel a lot and live out of a suitcase – or I'd be on set.

**A common misperception about me is ...** that because I am well known I have a high opinion of myself. I am very chilled. I love laughing and having fun.

**A phrase I use far too often is ...** "It rocks", "Oh my goodness"



**and "Schucks, I'm late!"**  
**I'm not a politician, but if I were, I would ...** Give more funding to education and health, as these are extremely important aspects in any country.  
**I'm good at ...** Packing light  
**I'm very bad at ...** Time management and saying no to

people, so my diary is always full of appointments.

**The ideal night out is ...** Dinner at Pigalle with my man, followed by some dancing.

**In a truer life I'd have been ...** Exactly who I am now. I am happy as I am, and have been working towards this from a very young age so it's worked out well.

**In moments of weakness I ...** Spend too much money on shoes and clothes I don't need!

**The most surprising thing to happen to me was ...** Being chosen to be the face of Garnier Nutrisse Hair Colour. I was thrilled.

**The best thing that's happened to me is ...** Becoming the Garnier spokesperson as well as all the things I have achieved in my life so far.

**The best age is to be ...** I think age is just a number. As long as you keep your mind young and feel young, it shouldn't matter.

**In a nutshell, my philosophy of life is ...** Work as hard as you can when you are young, so you can spend the rest of your life having fun.

– JABULILE NGWENYA