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Love Jean: Inspiration for Families Living with Dysfunction of Sensory Integration

A. Jean Ayres
Philip R. Erwin
Zoe Mailloux
Crestport Press (Jan 31, 2004)
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This book deals with the important subject of children who have dysfunction of sensory integration. Co-author Ayres, a sensory integration pioneer, is the “Jean” of the title, which refers to the way she signed her letters to her nephew, Philip Erwin, who had dysfunction of sensory integration. Ayres defines sensory integration as “a neurobiological process that refers to the detection, assimilation, organization, and use of sensory information to allow individuals to interact effectively with their environment in daily activities at home, school, and other settings.”

She goes on to explain that for people who have sensory integration dysfunction, “for some reason this centralized sensory integration function doesn’t work well, thus not allowing all of what we sense to reach their final, optimal destinations. In the absence of this information flowing freely, it is more difficult for our bodies to maneuver easily and for learning to occur.” Co-author Mailloux, a sensory integration therapist and researcher, provides insights from a therapist’s perspective.

Philip’s condition was diagnosed in 1975 when he was fourteen years old. Experts agree that it is better if the condition is diagnosed earlier. In their correspondence during the mid-1970s, Jean and Philip discussed the problems that the boy was encountering because of his condition. Jean encouraged him to not give up hope, and recommended that Philip engage in activities like riding a scooter board, jumping on a mattress, and swinging in a net. Over time, these exercises improved Philip’s condition.

The qualifications of all three authors are impressive. The late Ayres was an occupational therapist with a PhD; she pioneered the theory of sensory integration, creating many of the principles that still guide its diagnosis and treatment. She founded the Ayres Clinic, where she taught graduate students and cared for those with this disorder. Despite his dysfunction of sensory integration, Philip is a vocational educator and wooden boat restorer. Mailloux was one of Ayres’s first research assistants and the co-author of several of Ayres’s research papers. She is Director of Administration at the Pediatric Therapy Network in Torrance, California.

The book’s only weakness is that it does not give information about the costs of treating dysfunction of sensory integration. The reader is not told, for example, whether Ayres and others charged Philip for his treatment.

This book offers hope to children who suffer from sensory processing difficulties, as well as to their parents and the occupational therapists who treat them. Sensory integration dysfunction does not doom one to a life of failure. Children who possess characteristics such as intelligence, personality, drive, temperament, and persistence are able to overcome, or at least compensate for, sensory processing difficulties. It is important that their condition be recognized and treated early in life. This inspirational book is highly recommended.
RUTH WUCHERER (September / October 2004)

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