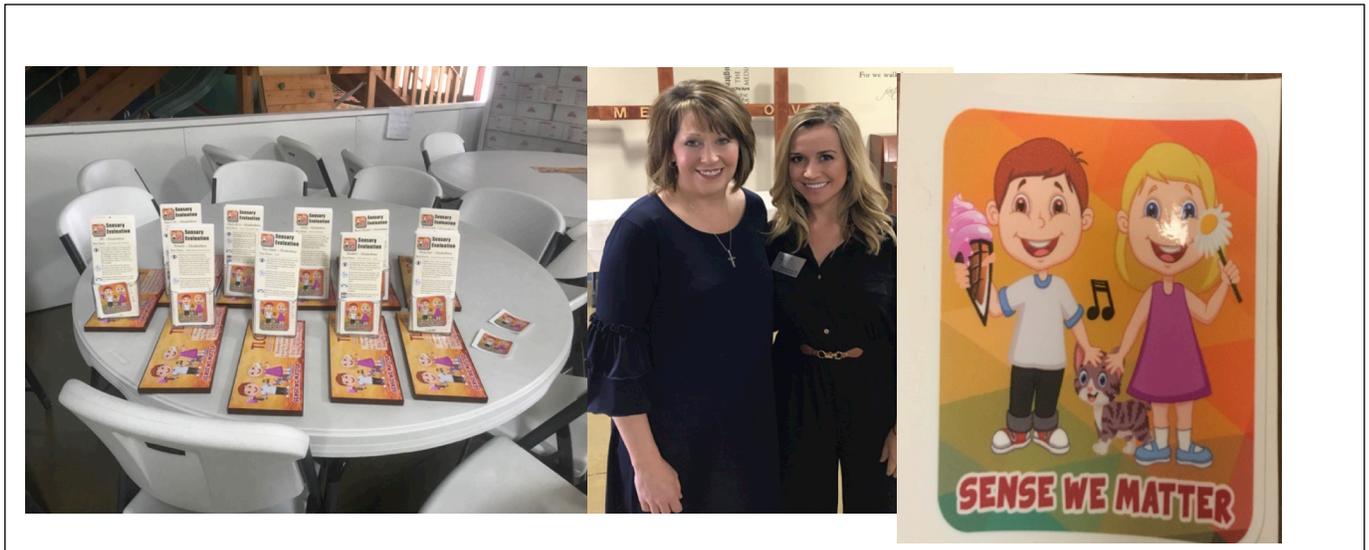


My O.T. Story
“Sense We Matter”
Vanessa Odom, OTS



The Initial Interest: *I originally was interested in the field of occupational therapy because I had a heart for children with special needs. I shadowed OT's in high school and undergrad that worked with children and thought that OT looked like it would be such a fun career to enter into. I not only have a heart for children with special needs, I have a heart for their families. Although having a child with special needs is one of the most incredible blessings one could experience, it does come with struggle. Thus I've always thought helping the family, as a whole, is part of helping the child. What can I do to make this child's life better? What can I do to make their families life easier? In the OT program at Milligan I learned more about including the family in the therapy process and how vital that for occupational therapist to think about when providing services. It takes problem solving, collaboration, and compassion to work with the families of these children. One of the most important things I've learned throughout the program is that parents are the experts on their child. They spend 24 hours a day with them. Thus, it's important to treat these parents as the experts that they are and work with them to come up with solutions for their daily life. In our pediatric class we learned a lot about sensory integration and sensory processing disorder. I found it so interesting that everyone has sensory sensitivities, including myself. What would it be like to not be able to process the sensory stimuli happening around me? What if I felt senses to the extreme? My heart for children with special needs, knowledge of sensory processing disorder, and desire to help the families have an easier time participating in daily activities would be what led me to want to take on this project.*

Dear God, Give me an EXPO idea: I had been praying that an idea for this project would come to me. I asked God what I could do that would impact the community and for something that I would have a personal connection to. Days after praying this prayer, Dr. Isbell connected me someone she knows, Angie Odom. She explained that Angie has a five-year-old daughter, Bella, who has sensory processing disorder and that she was looking for a student that could carry out a project for her. Once I contacted Angie and found out what her idea was, I knew I

wanted to take on this project. She explained that it's sometimes very difficult to go to public places, like a restaurant, with Bella because of all the sensory stimuli going on around them. Bella is very sensitive to smells and loud noises. If Angie's family deals with these struggles, other families do too. Thus, I began to create a program to implement into the community that would help these families do something normal, dining out. I wanted to create awareness to people in the community, specifically restaurant owners, about what sensory processing disorder is and what everyone can do to support these families. As an occupational therapist, it's my obligation to be an advocate for these families. With my area of expertise, I understand sensory processing disorder and what a vital role the environment plays. I am in a perfect position to make a difference as an OT student with this opportunity. An occupational therapist knows how to look at environments from a sensory perspective whereas, other professionals or adults may not think about it.

What is Sensory Processing Disorder? : If you're familiar with the term "sensory overload," you have an idea what sensory processing issues may look like. Sometimes called sensory processing disorder or SPD, these issues happen because the brain has trouble organizing information from the senses. Children or adults with sensory processing issues can be oversensitive to sights, sounds, textures, smells and other sensory input. This can make a trip to a toy store or visiting a new restaurant an overwhelming experience for them. We all have sensory sensitivities, but these children experience this on an extreme level. All kids can be finicky or difficult at times. But children with sensory processing issues can be so emotionally sensitive that doing simple daily tasks is a constant challenge. SPD is a diagnosis that can stand-alone or be paired with other diagnosis such as Autism and ADHD.

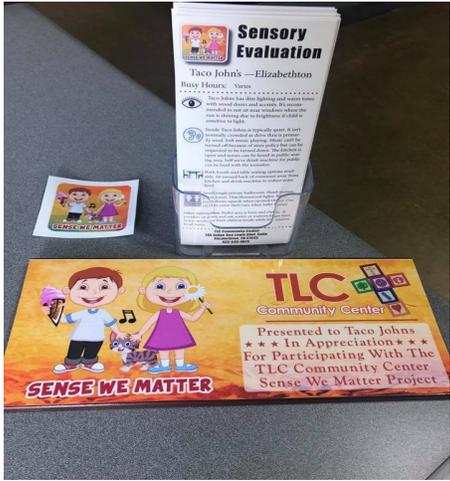
Families that have children with sensory issues often find it difficult to go anywhere or do anything because of their child's sensitivities to loud noises, bright lights, NEW social situations, crowds, or new environments. I assessed local restaurants to identify things that might be hard for a child with SPD to handle and develop simple accommodations to help these families have a more enjoyable eating experience.

The Game Plan: I met with Angie Odom the end of January to devise a game plan for Sense We Matter. We talked about what we wanted to accomplish out of this project and created some realistic goals. Initially, Angie envisioned doing something with grocery stores, restaurants, Dr. offices, and other small businesses in the area. This project is a project that

can grow into something much bigger really fast as it has much potential and a high demand for advocacy. I shared with her the criteria for my project and that I didn't want to go too many directions with the initial project so that we could lay a solid framework and foundation for this project to be built upon in the future. Thus, we decided to focus on restaurants in Carter County. This project can expand into Johnson City and surrounding areas and can include more than just restaurants in the future. To begin, we set a goal to work with 10 restaurants in Carter County that would be willing to participate in this community wide effort. Once we narrowed our focus to restaurants we made a list and tried to include a variety of choices that families could choose from. Angie agreed to help me contact some of the business owners and get pre - approval on the participation in the implementation of Sense We Matter. She would set up appointments with the business owners and I would meet them to propose the idea and seek permission to complete a sensory evaluation of their restaurant. We brainstormed some ways to provide incentive for business owners that participated. We planned a "kick-off" event that we would invite the restaurant managers/ owners to attend. There, they would be awarded with certificates, a window cling to identify their restaurant as "sensory friendly", and recognition from local media and press. We planned this date for April 6, so that it occurred before the EXPO presentation in order to give me time to implement a sensory card system and educate staff on how to use the sensory cards during that window of time after they've been recognized in participating in the Sense We Matter project. Sensory tip cards would be developed based off of the sensory evaluation that I would perform at each restaurant. The tip cards will be custom made to each restaurant and will be printed for families that see the Sense We Matter window cling displayed. Families will then request a "Sensory card" so that they know where may be best to request to be seated and will make them aware of things to avoid or aware of accommodations that can be made. I planned to meet with restaurants the following week made it our goal to do 3 per week until the evaluations are done. I planned to make an info sheet about the project to give to restaurant owners when I went in to educate them about sensory processing disorder (SPD) and the Sense We Matter project objective.

The Process: Over the course of February and March I went to 10 restaurants to talk with a manager from each restaurant, educate them about SPD and the project I was completing, and gained permission to include their restaurant in my project. I proceeded to evaluate each of their environments with the same evaluation form that I created. On the evaluation form I was looking specifically at lighting, appearance of the environment, noise level, TV's, and bathrooms. The managers were great to work with and were very open to allowing me to

evaluate their environment once they understood that I wasn't there to change anything or make their job harder. Once I conducted all the evaluations I typed up "Tips" that would be important for a parent of a child with SPD to know when walking into a restaurant. Angie had window clings made using the sensory logo that she created for the sensory park at the TLC Community Center in Elizabethton. She also had plaques made to present to the owners and managers at the Kick Off event happening on April 6th. I sent the tips I typed up to Elizabethton Star journalist, Abby Morris-Frye. She was so kind and formatted the tips I provided to her into a beautiful 5 x 10 brochure to provide to the restaurants to hand out to families that request a "sensory card." She told me to do the occupational therapy stuff and she'd do the formatting stuff, since that's her area of expertise. I was so thankful she was willing to help me with that and she far exceeded my expectations. When I saw the final product I was so pleased and excited! Now it was time to invite the restaurant owners to the kick off event to implement the final program.



Kick Off Time! : The kick-off event was held at the TLC Community Center April 6, 2018. The goal of this event was recognize everyone that participated in this project. I also wanted to educate the managers about how to implement this program, why there's a need for it, how it will help their business, and answer any questions they still had. I wanted to make sure they knew what their role is before they left the event. WJHL, WCYB, Elizabethton Star, and the Johnson City Press were all in attendance to cover the "Sense We Matter" story debut.





Angie shared Bella’s story with the group of restaurant managers, why there’s a need for a program like this, and then I followed by educating them on how to implement the program. Eight out of Ten restaurants were represented at the kick off event and the other two would’ve been

there but had conflicts.

Sensitive to sensitive children

Restaurants work to make meals better for kids with sensory processing disorders

By John Thompson

ELIZABETHTON BUREAU CHIEF jthompson@johnsoncitypress.com



JOHN THOMPSON/JOHNSON CITY PRESS

Owners and managers of 10 Elizabethton restaurants received special plaques and customized patron information cards as part of TLC Community Center’s “Sense We Matter” program to assist families with children who have sensory processing disorders.

ELIZABETHTON — A busy lunch hour in a popular restaurant can be a fun place, with wait staff scurrying to get orders completed and lots of customers greeting friends while the aromas of delicious food fills the room and the clatter of the kitchen adds to the sounds.

That experience may be frightening for some small children who have sensory-processing disorders, though. The sights, sounds and smells of a busy restaurant can overwhelm a small child who is already extra sensitive to these stimulations.

Sociologists believe the number of sensitive children could be growing from several causes. These include children born with neonatal abstinence syndrome and children with autism.

Two women with the last name of Odom (not related) have joined together to start a pilot program that can help the families of children with sensory processing disorders enjoy a good meal at a popular restaurant.

What Now: Now that restaurants have implemented this, I we have been following up with them to see how it’s going, receiving feedback, and continuing to work with them to make this an effective program. I am also delivering a 4 x 6 “logo information” card for pediatric therapy clinics in the area so that families that have children with SPD will know to be looking for the “sensory logo” window clings in restaurants. I plan on continuing to promote this in the community to ensure that families know it’s a service restaurants are now advertising. The promotion of this program will hopefully continue to raise awareness and support for families that have children with SPD.

The Story Continues: I have created a binder sharing everything that I created to implement this project. I've made this a duplicable project so that this can continue to grow. Occupational therapists at the TLC Community Center with TalkBack therapy services have agreed to evaluate and create more sensory cards for other restaurants and businesses in the area. I hope to see this expand to Johnson City and other areas of Tennessee. FATZ and Chick-Fil-A have both expressed desire to make this a pilot-program for their entire corporation. They want to implement this into their entire franchise. Hopefully many more businesses and restaurants show desire to be apart of this. The impact it will continue to make is limitless.

Appendix A – Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge Angie Odom for helping me make this happen and for being supportive and available throughout the whole process. I'd also like to thank Bella Odom for inspiring us all to see things from a different perspective in a sensory world, the first 10 restaurants in Elizabethton that participated in this pilot- program: Taco John's, Chick-Fil-A, Dinos, Primos, Beef O'Brady's, Pizza Inn, McDonalds, Kimbos, JB's, and FATZ, the board members of the TLC Center for their support, my professors at Milligan College for all they've taught me, Abby Morris-Frye with the Elizabethton Star for formatting the brochures made in this project, John Thompson with the Johnson City Press, WCYB, and WJHL.

INITIAL EDUCATION GIVEN TO RESTAURANT OWNERS:

“SENSE WE MATTER”

MAKING THE COMMUNITY SENSORY FRIENDLY

WHAT IS SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER (SPD)?

If you're familiar with the term "sensory overload," you have an idea what [sensory processing issues](#) may look like. Sometimes called sensory processing disorder or SPD, these issues happen because the brain has trouble organizing information from the senses.

Children or adults with sensory processing issues can be oversensitive to sights, sounds, textures, flavors, smells and other sensory input. This can make a trip to a toy store or visiting a new restaurant an overwhelming experience for them. We all have sensory sensitivities, but these persons experience this on an extreme level.

All kids can be finicky or difficult at times. But children with sensory processing issues can be so emotionally sensitive that doing simple daily tasks is a constant challenge. SPD is a diagnosis that can stand-alone or be paired with other diagnoses such as Autism and ADHD.

WHO ARE WE?

My name is Vanessa Odom and I'm a Milligan College Occupational Therapy student. I'm partnering with a parent who has a child with SPD, Angie Odom, to implement a community wide program to give support to families of children with sensory processing difficulties.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Families that have children with sensory issues often find it difficult to go anywhere or do anything because of their child's sensitivities to loud noises, bright lights, NEW social situations, crowds, or new environments. We are going to be assessing local restaurants to identify things that might be hard for a child with SPD to handle and develop simple accommodations to help these families have a more enjoyable eating experience.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

By allowing us to assess your environment, we can provide you with simple tips, and implement the "tip card system" for families that notify the hostess that they have a child with sensory issues. This will help your business and will also show these families that you are aware of what they are dealing with and that you support them!

INVITATION TO RESTAURANT MANAGERS FOR KICK OFF EVENT:



**YOU'RE INVITED TO THE
"SENSE WE MATTER" KICK OFF EVENT
FRIDAY, APRIL 6TH AT 10 A.M.!**

Dear restaurant manager,

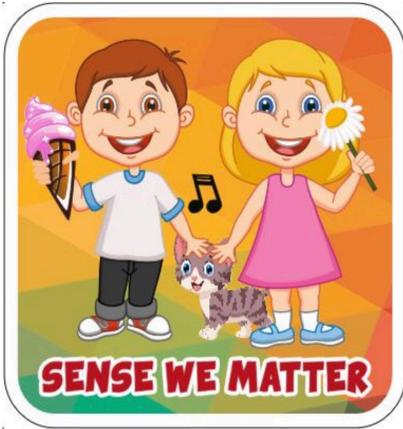
Thank you for participating in the Sense We Matter project! The BIG day is finally here! WJHL, WCYB, Elizabethton star, and Johnson City Press will be joining us to recognize and cover the presentation of awards for all the restaurants that participated in this community wide project to raise awareness and support families that have children with Sensory Processing Disorder. If you are unable to attend, please send a representative from your restaurant to attend. We are asking that each representative wear a shirt identifying their business for group picture and media coverage purposes!

Thank you for allowing us to evaluate your environment, we can now provide you with simple tips, and educate you on how to implement the "tip card system" for families that notify the hostess that they have a child with sensory issues. This will help your business and will also show these families that you are aware of what they are dealing with and that you support them!

Please RSVP that you or a representative will be present Friday, April 6 at 10 am. Contact Project Sponsor, Angie Odom (423) 895-8601 or Project Coordinator, Vanessa Odom (423) 258 -1189

Sincerely,
Vanessa Odom
Milligan Occupational Therapy Student

LOGO:



“SENSE WE MATTER”

MAKING THE COMMUNITY MORE SENSORY FRIENDLY

A community wide program implemented to make businesses aware of Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). Children or adults with SPD can be sensitive to light, sounds, textures, and other sensory input. If you see this logo displayed in a business, it means this location has been evaluated to identify things that might be hard for someone with SPD to experience. These locations should have a “Sensory Card” which you can request. The “Sensory Card” has simple accommodations that the business is willing to make for your family to ensure a better experience.

EVALUATION FORM USED:

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location:

Date:

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing?	
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?		
TV	Are there TV's? How many?	
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet?	
TVs	Can the volume be turned down? Or TV turned off	
Music		
Machines that make noise		
Seating Options	Booths? Tables?	
Bathrooms:		

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: FATZ

General Manager: Jerry Stinnett

Date: 2/14/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing? Very Dim Lighting	Lights can be turned up if too dark, otherwise the dim lighting is ideal for children that are light sensitive
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	White walls, wood accents, stone, carpet floors, maroon booths	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? 2 TVS in the bar area	TVs can be turned down or off, however if the bar area is busy this wouldn't be the ideal place to be seated anyways
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? Quiet environment	Busy Hours 11-2pm 5-7pm on weekdays Weekends 4-8pm Sunday 11-3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quieter during slow hours
Music	Soft playing music	Can be turned down

<p>Machines that make noise</p>	<p>Kitchen area is open in the middle/ back of the restaurant</p>	<p>Don't seat families that have children with SPD near the kitchen if possible</p>
<p>Seating Options</p>	<p>Booths? Tables? Has booths and tables</p>	<p>Try to seat family in quietest area. This varies depending on crowd and busy hours. The front left corner of FATZ was recommended by management. The bar area is quiet during the day or when not busy.</p>
<p>Bathroom</p>	<p>Brighter lighting with stone floors, music is a little louder in restroom, paper towels are available and push soap dispensers, 4 stalls with 1 big restroom</p>	<p>This bathroom had plenty of space and paper towels instead of loud hand dryers. This is ideal for a child that is an auditory avoider. Recommended for parents to use the family stall and cue child to cover ears when toilet flushes</p>

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: Chick-fil-A

Contact: Rachel Swartz

Date: 2/26/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing? Fluorescent lights in ceiling, dim hanging lights near windows	NA
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Neutrals and red, tasteful pictures hanging on walls	NA
TV	Are there TV's? How many? NO TVS	
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? LOUD when busy	Busy Hours: 7-8am 11:30-1pm 5-7pm **Plan To-Go or come during non busy hours if your child is sensitive to noise or crowds
Bathroom:	Automatic motion detected soap, sink, and toilets ;Paper towels are available; Two stalls; Music louder in bathrooms	Use bigger stall; Cue child to cover ears when toilet flushes; paper towels are ideal for children that are scared of the sound hand dryers make Carry hand sanitizer if your child doesn't like automatic machines

Music	Soft music/ instrumental christian music *not even heard when busy	Music is a little louder in bathroom
Machines that make noise	Kitchen noises , Milkshake machine	Try not to sit super close to kitchen, order for your child after they sit down if someone else is with you
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Both	Seat child in the inside of a booth so they can move around without escaping Recommended by staff to sit behind condiments in the middle area in between kitchen and play area
Space, Crowded?	When busy, VERY CROWDED	

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

Playground area: Accessories/ toys that are screwed into the wall make loud noises, the playground is very quiet if you are there during non busy hours or if there aren't many kids in the area. The playground is plastic and the room echos when kids are running and climbing on the plastic structure. Could use this area as a reward for your child, or avoid if they don't like crowds or loud noises. The room smells strongly of rubber, the floor material.

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: McDonald's
Date: 2/9/18

Contact: Margaret

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing? Hanging Fluorescents / Dim can lights	Don't look into can lights, very bright for someone that's light sensitive
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Brown , gold, maroon, wood color scheme instead. More neutral than older mcdonalds	NA
TV	Are there TV's? How many? The menus are TVs; there are 5 of them	NA
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? LOUD Beeping, staff yelling orders, frappe machine, mcflurry machine, kitchen noises	Don't sit near kitchen or icemaker if possible. Icemaker for the public is very loud.
Music	N/A	N/A

Machines that make noises:	Ice maker Frappe Machine McFlurry Machine Beeping sounds every 2 seconds	Explain to child what noises they're hearing and assure them they are not in danger
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Lots of seating options, booths and tables	Weekends are busy Early mornings → 11am best time for kids to play on playground before busy hours. It's quieter during the early morning hours
Space, Crowded?	Yes, crowded when busy	Avoid during busy hours if your child is sensitive to noise
Bathrooms	Hand dryers are loud Toilets are loud 3 stalls, 1 family Dark lighting Slick floors	This bathroom is not sensory friendly for children that are sensitive to noise. Bring napkins to dry hands and cover ears when flushing toilets
Playground:	Toddler playground area has spinning wheels on the wall that has loud beads when turned Hoop area: loud if basketballs are being dribbled High ceilings, echos Chain sounds in playground where kids can swing through hanging chains, small spaces, and slides	Playground is quieter during slow hours, use area as a reward for child or avoid if child doesn't like crowds or loud noises

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

- Water fountain in middle of restaurant trickling down from ceiling. If child is a visual seeker they may like sitting where they can see the fountain

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: Primos

Contact: Jewel

Date: 1/29/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Dim lighting, 1 fan in front left of the restaurant	
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Paintings/artwork on the wall, black ceilings	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? 3 TVs, don't have sound on just the picture	Can be asked to be turned off or sit where you can't see TV if child is distracted by TV or sit where they can see TV if they are calmed by watching it
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? Quiet when restaurant isn't busy. Open space	

Music	Low music, not loud	Seat families in areas that aren't directly under the speakers
Machines that make noise	Kitchen is open; Can hear the cooks, pans, and clanging sounds	Don't seat right beside the kitchen. Let cooks know that SPD family is present so they are aware of noise control
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Both	Ask for a booth instead of a table so that you can seat child on inside of booth and allow them to move more without escaping and running around. Back room/ area is usually quieter.
Bathroom:	Single private bathroom, paper towels available	

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: Beef O'Brady's

Date: 1/29/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Dim lighting, black ceilings	
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Green busy walls with lots of sports posters and hanging pictures on wall	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? TVS EVERYWHERE, 25 + tvs	Restaurant is willing to turn channels to kid friendly channels Can request to turn a TV off Can request for volume to be turned down or off in your seating area
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? Depends on time of day	Slow hours: Before noon Between 2:30-4:30
TVs	Can the volume be turned down? Or TV turned off YES	

Music	Yes	Can be turned down
Machines that make noise	Game Room	Can be used as a reward or avoided if child doesn't like loud noises
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Both	Don't sit in bar area, it is loud Recommended to sit in the event/party room on the right for quieter space and more privacy when event room isn't being used Sit away from doors or busy areas. Try to seat family in the quietest /most isolated area
Bathroom		

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: Kimbos

Date: 2/9/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing? Bright Florescent lighting	
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	White walls with Cow decorations and pictures	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? 1 TV in front room	
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? Moderately loud due to the small space	Side room seemed quieter The kitchen area is loud
TVs	Can the volume be turned down? Or TV turned off	TV can be turned off or down if requested

Music		No music playing in the side room
Machines that make noise	Kitchen, hood/grill	Sit in the side room away from the kitchen
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Both	Busy hours 9am 11:30- 1 pm Booth in left corner is ideal and free from cow breakables
Space, Crowded?	Small space, could be very crowded when busy	
Bathroom	White walls, Clean scent, Paper towels available , Dim lighting	

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

Smell is strong in this restaurant. If your child is sensitive to smells bring some peppermint oil or something they enjoy smelling (germ x, lotion, perfume etc) with you for them to smell and acknowledge that the smell is strong if your child notices.

Restaurant owner collects cows that are displayed in windows. Its requested that your child does not play with them. If it's a temptation please seat the child where they cant see or reach the cow figurines or sit in a booth that's not near them. Thank you!

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: JB's

Date: 1/31/18

Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing? Black ceiling , lots of hanging lights and lights in the ceiling	Some lights look like "spotlights" and may irritate children that are sensitive to light. Seat child where light isn't directly on them or face them away from spotlight
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Orange, bright diner decorations , decorated like a 50s gas station inside	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? NO ; security TV at cash register	
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? Very quiet when not busy, potential to be loud when teams or large groups come in	There's an outside picnic area that may be an option when warm. Take into consideration Hwy. noise and the sound of cars passing if your child is sensitive to noise
TVs	Can the volume be turned down? Or TV turned off N/A	N/A

<p>Music</p>	<p>Old timey music playing (50s) , There are speakers located in all corners of the restaurant seating area</p>	<p>Louder in the front room when not busy</p> <p>Shift manager will turn down the music if requested</p>
<p>Machines that make noise</p>	<p>Gumball machine open to the public</p> <p>Self serve coke machine is loud when public is getting drinks</p> <p>The kitchen is open and the grill is heard</p> <p>Ice cream machine can be loud</p> <p>Door dings when new people walk in (not loud)</p> <p>*Drive thru bell dings (not loud)</p> <p>Employees yell "order up" when they bring the meal to the register</p>	
<p>Seating Options</p>	<p>Booths? Tables?</p> <p>Both</p>	<p>Sit in the back room away from the open kitchen, self serve drink area, and ordering area</p> <p>The right and left corners of the back room do not have speakers above them</p> <p>Booster seats are available</p>

Space, Crowded?	Many seating options and a moderately large open space. When busy the place can be loud depending on group size and customers	Busy Hours: 12-1:30 pm 5-6:30 pm
Bathroom	Mens bathroom: neat "torch" light - bright Womens bathroom - bright lights Paper towels available	Bathrooms are each a single private restroom with bright lightening and paper towels available. Paper towel option is great for children that are sensitive to the loud sound hand dryers make.

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

There is an outdoor area with picnic table options and swings weather permitting that you and your family might enjoy if the indoor area is crowded or loud. Please be conscious of the noise from the highway and cars passing for your child if they are startled by unexpected noises.

The back room has floor heaters when temperature is cold outside. The heat blows warm air. If your child does not like the sensation of air blowing directly on them, please choose a booth or table accordingly.

There's a call in ahead option for take out or to order before you arrive to make things faster and more efficient.

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: Dinos

Contact: John "Red"

Date: 1/31/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Florescent lights in main room Dimlighting in side room to the right with Ceiling fans	
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Lots of wall space covered with sports pictures	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? NO	N/A
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? Quiet Kitchen is semi open in the back of the restaurant	Kitchen staff rings a bell when orders come out. It's located in the side room Busy hours: Sunday lunch and weekends
TVs	Can the volume be turned down? Or TV turned off	

Music	Soft music playing	
Machines that make noise	Bell when orders are done Kitchen noise	
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Both; tables only in side room	Request the left side room. It's normally an event room, they will seat you in that room and you will have the room to yourself! If there's an event going on request to be seated in the middle or front of the right side room.
Space, Crowded?	Kitchen is open in back of restaurant Party room on the left	
Bathroom	Very tiny private restroom	*air fresheners needed in restroom for kids that are sensitive to smells

Other Comments/ Recommendations:
Highchairs and booster seats are available.

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location: Pizza Inn

Contact: Melanie

Date: 1/31/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing? Dim in main seating area. Bright in the sunroom	
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Red color scheme, checkerboard floors	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? 4-5 in the main area, no volume audible	
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? LOUD , phone ringer goes off often and the restaurant is loud when crowded	Come during hours that aren't busy

TVs	Can the volume be turned down? Or TV turned off	
Music	Music is playing, not heard due to noise level of the restaurant	
Machines that make noise	Kitchen	
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Booth	Sit in booth on right back side against the wall
Space, Crowded?	Crowded	

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

Restaurant Sensory Evaluation

Location:Taco Johns

Contact: Traci

Date:2/9/18

	Observations	Recommendations
Vision		
Lights	Bright? Dim? Flashing? Dim lighting	
Walls Decorations? Is the décor busy? Colorful?	Warm tones , yellow red and orange, wood doors and accents	
TV	Are there TV's? How many? N/A	
Hearing		
Noise Level	Loud? Quiet? Quiet	Store manager reported it doesn't normally get loud or crowded inside

Music	Soft music playing - not disruptive	Music can't be turned off because of store policy but can be turned down
Machines that make noise	Kitchen noises Self serve drink machine out front	
Seating Options	Booths? Tables? Both	Sit toward back of restaurant away from kitchen and drink machine
Space, Crowded?	Tables and booths are close together, can be crowded	
Bathroom:	Single private bathrooms, hand motion paper towel, dim/fluorescent lights, small	Bathroom doors squeak when open/closed. Perhaps some WD40 would help?

Other Comments/ Recommendations:

TLC, restaurants partner for ‘Sense We Matter’

elizabethton.com/2018/04/06/tlc-restaurants-partner-for-sense-we-matter By Abby Morris-Frye Email the author Published 5:52 pm Friday, April 6, 2018

Several local restaurants recently teamed up with the TLC Community Center to take part in a pilot program designed to help families with children who have sensory issues.

Helping families who are learning how to handle sensory issues has become a personal cause for TLC Community Center Director Angie Odom since she and her husband Earl adopted their daughter Bella. At her birth, Bella was diagnosed with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) due to the fact she was born addicted to prescription medication.

One of the health issues Bella has experienced as a result of NAS is Sensory Processing Disorder, which is a condition where the individual has difficulty processing and responding to all of the sights, sounds, smells, and touches they are experiencing. Their senses are heightened, and that adds to the difficulty of processing everything at one time. They can often become overwhelmed.

“Everything they experience is so over the top,” Odom explained. “They have so much input they don’t know how to decipher it.”

Going through sensory issues with her daughter opened Odom’s eyes to a world she said she never knew existed. Going out to eat at a restaurant is a simple experience for most families, Odom said, but for a family with a child who has sensory issues, it can be overwhelming.



As Odom and her family visited different local restaurants, they learned which things in the environment there would cause issues with Bella’s senses — such as a loud hand dryer in the bathroom or lighting that is too bright — and began to avoid those places or find different areas in the restaurant to sit.

Odom decided to see if something could be established to help other families facing similar issues by reviewing different restaurants and businesses and then creating a list of tips for

families visiting there containing information such as less-busy time to visit or the quietest place to sit.

She approached Dr. Christy Isbell, a professor of Occupational Therapy at Milligan College, to get her input. Isbell then spoke to students in the occupational therapy program and OT student Vanessa Odom, no relation to Angie, decided to take the idea on as her project for the program.

Vanessa Odom visited many local restaurants, and 10 signed up to have her conduct a sensory evaluation and create a tip card for families.

On Friday, representatives of Fatz Cafe, Beef O'Brady's, Pizza Inn, Primo's, McDonald's, Kimbo's, Dino's, Chick-fil-A, JB's, and Taco Johns attended a special event at the TLC Community Center to kick off the "Sense We Matter" program. Sense We Matter designates participating restaurants and other businesses as "sensory friendly environments." The restaurants all received a "Sense We Matter" decal to place on their doors to let the public know they are sensory friendly, a plaque to hang inside the restaurant, and a tips card featuring information about sensory issues at that location.

"This is a big day for a lot of families, especially my own," Angie Odom said to those in attendance. "I want to thank you all for going the extra mile and for all of your support." Vanessa Odom also thanked the restaurants for their participation and allowing her to evaluate their facilities.

"You are playing a vital role for these families," Vanessa Odom said. "These kids do matter. We want people to be aware of Sensory Processing Disorder because it is a real issue and it affects real families."

"We don't want you to change anything, we just want families to be aware of things they may encounter," she added. "They will have a better idea of what they are walking into and be better prepared."

Sensitive to sensitive children

Restaurants work to make meals better for kids with sensory processing disorders

By John Thompson

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JOHN THOMPSON/JOHNSON CITY PRESS

Owners and managers of 10 Elizabethton restaurants received special plaques and customized patron information cards as part of TLC Community Center's "Sense We Matter" program to assist families with children who have sensory processing disorders.

ELIZABETHTON — A busy lunch hour in a popular restaurant can be a fun place, with wait staff scurrying to get orders completed and lots of customers greeting friends while the aromas of delicious food fills the room and the clatter of the kitchen adds to the sounds. That experience may be frightening for some small children who have sensory-processing disorders, though. The sights, sounds and smells of a busy restaurant can overwhelm a small child who is already extra sensitive to these stimulations.

Sociologists believe the number of sensitive children could be growing from several causes. These include children born with neonatal abstinence syndrome and children with autism.

Two women with the last name of Odom (not related) have joined together to start a pilot program that can help the families of children with sensory precessing disorders enjoy a good meal at a popular restaurant.

Angie Odom is the executive director of the TLC Community Center, an organization that provides assistance to young mothers and children on many different matters. She and her husband, Earl, have also adopted a child who was born with neonatal abstinence syndrome and has sensory processing disorders. She said her child's sensitivity to the slightest sounds and images made it difficult to enjoy a meal at a restaurant.

She said many things that an adult would not even notice, such as a noisy ice dispenser, or a hand dryer in the restroom, or even a knife cutting food in the kitchen, could cause discomfort in a sensitive child. She realized that many more families must also be facing the same difficulty in eating out in public.

That was where Vanessa Odom was able to help. She is a student at Milligan College, majoring in occupational therapy under professors Jil Smith and Christy Isbell. Angie Odom discussed her family's problem with Isbell. The professor's suggested allowing Vanessa Odom to take on the problem as her project for the annual Milligan College Occupational Therapy Expo.

Vanessa Odom conducted her work by approaching local restaurants and explaining the problem that most adults never notice. She offered to conduct sensory evaluations for those restaurants willing to participate.

She received approvals from 10 restaurants and set about conducting the sensory evaluations. Her findings were then placed on custom-made 10-inch by 5-inch cards for each of the restaurants. The brochures provide information on the busiest hours, the sound and light challenges, the best place to sit to avoid too much stimulation and other information.

The cards are designed to be available to families as they come in the restaurant. There are also window stickers for the families to know the restaurants are participating in the program, which the Odoms have called "Sense We Matter."

Vanessa Odom said the purpose of the program was not to change anything in the restaurants, but to help the parents have a better idea of what the restaurant is like and to be prepared for things that may affect their child.

In appreciation of the cooperation of the 10 restaurants who agreed to participate in the program, Angie Odom invited the owners and general managers to come to the TLC on Friday to receive the cards for their restaurant and colorful "Sense We Matter" plaques.

The participating restaurants are: Taco Johns; Kimbos; McDonald's of Elizabethton; Pizza Inn of Elizabethton; Chick-fil-A of Elizabethton; Dino's; Beef O'Brady's of Elizabethton; Primo's; JB's; and Fatz Cafe.

Angie Odom said "Sense We Matter" is a pilot program and is the only one like it that she and Vanessa know about. But she said that the number of children with sensory processing disorders is expected to grow over the next five years, so the program may be just the beginning of efforts to accommodate their needs.

TLC Community Center Executive Director Angie Odom says many things that an adult would not even notice, such as a noisy ice dispenser, or a hand dryer in the restroom, or even a knife cutting food in the kitchen, could cause discomfort in a sensitive child.