

2025 Avanti Therapeutic Projects Symposium

Course B: Critical Analysis of Sensory Modulation Disorder Interventions

Julia Wilbarger, Ph.D., OTR

Friday February 28th, 2025; 8:30 a.m - 4:00 p.m. CST

Location: Live webinar via Zoom; on-demand via Thinkific for 45 days; recordings will be released within 1 week of the event.

6 Contact hours



Audience: OTs, SLPs, PTs, mental health professionals, and interested others

Course Description:

Clinical reasoning for interventions for Sensory Modulation Disorders (SMD) is challenging for practitioners at all levels of experience. In this course, models of clinical reasoning will be explored and applied to critically analyze SMD and develop targeted, individualized interventions. The Model for Understanding Sensory Modulation (Wilbarger, 1991 & 2023) will provide a framework for understanding the key constructs needed to analyze sensory modulation as a neurobehavioral phenomenon. The STEP2SI model (Stackhouse, Wilbarger, and Trunnel, 1996; Stackhouse, 2022) will be introduced to guide both clinic-based direct interventions and home-based sensory diets (Wilbarger, 2024). Learning activities will include discussions and breakout sessions designed to apply these concepts and develop intervention plans using multiple case studies. This course design aims to balance theoretical knowledge with practical application to ensure that participants gain both a deep understanding of sensory modulation and the skills to develop effective intervention strategies.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the key constructs of sensory modulation as a neurobehavioral phenomenon.
2. Apply models of clinical reasoning to analyze and address Sensory Modulation Disorders.
3. Use the Model for Understanding Sensory Modulation to analyze individual SMD profiles.
4. Use the STEP2SI framework to develop direct and home-based intervention plans.
5. Design individualized sensory diets based on case study analysis.

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	Course B: Agenda
8:30 AM - 8:45 AM CST	Welcome and Introduction Overview of the course objectives and agenda. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMD as a clinical challenge • Sharing participants' experiences with SMD cases and questions for today
8:45 AM - 9:30 AM CST	Understanding Sensory Modulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Sensory Modulation Disorders (SMD) • Key constructs of sensory modulation as a neurobehavioral phenomenon. • Special considerations for Sensory Defensiveness
9:30 AM - 10:30 AM CST	Introduction to the Model for Understanding Sensory Modulation (Wilbarger, 1991 & 2023). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep dive into the clinical reasoning process using the Model for Understanding Sensory Modulation
10:30 AM – 10:45 AM CST	Break
10:45 AM - 11:00 AM CST	Interactive Activity: Discussion on identifying and analyzing sensory modulation challenges. Use polls. Breakout Room: SMD Profile Analysis: Small group breakout sessions to analyze case studies using the model, with each group presenting their findings. Report Out
11:00 AM - 12:30 PM CST	Introduction to STEP2SI Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the STEP2SI framework (Stackhouse, Wilbarger, and Trunnel, 1996; Stackhouse, 2022). • STEPPSI clinical reasoning process
12:30 PM - 1:15 PM CST	Lunch Break
1:15 PM - 2:30 PM CST	Designing Interventions: Application of the frameworks to clinic-based interventions and sensory diets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SI Intervention Principles • Sensory Diet Principles • Applying Sensation to Intervention Quick Review
2:30 PM - 2:45 PM CST	Break
2:45 PM - 3:45 PM CST	Case Study Presentations and Group Discussion Breakout Rooms: Participants will work in small groups to develop a sensory modulation intervention plan for a given case study. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups present their intervention plans and receive feedback from peers and instructors.
3:45 PM - 4:00 PM CST	Wrap-Up and Q&A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap of key concepts and discussion on how to implement these strategies in practice. • Final Q&A session to address any remaining questions.
4:00 PM CST	Adjourn

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Speaker Biography:

Julia Wilbarger, PhD, OTR/L, received a BS in Physiological Psychology from UC Berkeley, a MS in OT from Boston University, and a PhD in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience from the University of Denver, Colorado. She has practiced as an OT in early intervention with high risk and developmentally delayed infants and toddlers, in the public schools and in private practice. At The Children's Hospital, Denver, she served as a clinical specialist in sensory integration. She joined the faculty at Dominican University of California in the Occupational Therapy Department as an Associate Professor in 2012. Dr. Wilbarger has done extensive research, published and presented on issues of sensory processing, sensory modulation disorders, and sensory integration in children. Her research is focused on the study of affective and sensory processing and intervention in a range of clinical populations.

