

A Parents Guide to Sensory Processing

The sensory system is responsible for processing the information we receive through our senses, including touch, taste, smell, sight, sound, proprioception, vestibular and interoception. Sensory processing refers to how our brains interpret and respond to this sensory information. Some children may have unique sensory needs and sensitivities which can affect their behaviour and daily activities. Some children can find it overwhelming to manage the sensory input they are receiving. This is often referred to as being over or under responsive. The table below shows examples of behaviours you may recognise in your child when they are having difficulty managing the sensory information they are receiving.

Over-responsive to sensory input:

Children who are over-responsive to sensory input may be easily overwhelmed by sensory stimuli, which can lead to avoidance. They may show the following behaviours:

Under-responsive to sensory input:

Children who are under-responsive to sensory input may have a high threshold for sensory stimuli, which can lead to seeking out sensory experiences. They may show the following behaviours:

- Becoming distressed or upset by loud or unexpected noises.
- Disliking being touched or hugged, especially by people they don't know well.
- Avoiding certain textures or materials, such as clothing tags, scratchy fabrics, or messy play.
- Being picky or restrictive about food textures, flavours, or temperatures.
- Being easily distracted or bothered by visual stimuli, such as bright lights, busy patterns, or flickering screens.
- Avoiding physical activities, such as climbing, jumping, or swinging, due to fear or discomfort.
- Has a difficult time dealing with noisy or chaotic environments, like the supermarket or travelling on public transport.

- Seeking out rough play, such as crashing, banging, or jumping.
- Chewing on non-food items, such as pencils, toys, or clothing.
- Appearing oblivious to pain or discomfort.
- Seeking out sensory experiences, such as spinning, swinging, or rocking.
- Appearing disorganised or forgetful, especially when multitasking or transitioning between activities.
- Displaying a high tolerance for cold or hot temperatures.

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It's important to note that sensory processing difficulties can vary from child to child and may present differently in different situations or environments.

Here are some strategies that may help your child regulate their sensory needs.

Create a sensory-friendly environment:

Adjust the environment to reduce sensory input that may be overwhelming or distracting. This may include using noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs, dimming lights, or using a weighted blanket or vest to provide deep pressure input.

Offer sensory breaks:

Provide opportunities for your child to take breaks from sensory input when they need it. This may include taking a quiet break in a designated space, engaging in calming activities such as deep breathing or yoga, or providing sensory toys or tools to help them regulate their input.

Encourage sensory exploration:

Offer a variety of sensory experiences, this may include messy play, water play, or tactile play with different textures, materials, and temperatures.

Use visuals:

Provide visual cues or schedules to help your child understand and prepare for transitions or changes in routine. This may include images/ photographs to show their daily routine or a visual representation of time e.g. a sand timer.

Provide opportunities for movement:

Engage your child in physical activities that provide vestibular input, such as swinging, climbing, or bouncing on a therapy ball. These activities can help your child regulate their sensory input and improve their overall coordination and balance.

By understanding your child's sensory processing difficulties and providing support and accommodations as needed, you can help them thrive and participate in daily activities more comfortably.



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