

Preschool Field Officer Service

Integrated Child, Family and Youth Services



Sensory Processing

Do you know someone who....

- Dislikes loud noises
- Taps their pen as they are talking to you
- Appears overly energetic
- Appears to lack energy
- Always sucking or chewing on something
- Is sensitive to touch – sometimes is irritated by clothing, tags on clothes, shoes or someone sitting next to them
- Dislikes getting their hands dirty
- Who prefers to be firmly held

What is Sensory Processing?

Sensory processing (sometimes called "sensory integration" or SI) is a term that refers to the way a child responds to messages received from each of their senses. Whether drinking a drink, washing hands or climbing the stairs, it requires processing information from our senses (sensory processing).

What is Sensory Processing Disorder?

Sensory Processing Disorder is a condition that exists when a child reacts in a way that you would not expect for a child typically of that age. It means that the signals received from the senses are not organised into the appropriate responses. Sensory issues are usually defined as either **hypersensitivity** (when a child is over-responsive to particular stimuli – they are sensory avoiding) or **hyposensitivity** (when a child is under-responsive to particular stimuli – they are sensory seeking) E.g. a child who blocks his ears all the time when there are loud noises would be considered **hypersensitive** to sounds, where a child who has a constant need to touch people or textures, even when it's inappropriate to do so would be considered **hyposensitive** to touch.

What does Sensory Processing Disorder look like?

A child may be:

- Overly sensitive to stimulation (e.g. overreacts to or does not like touch, noise, smells, etc.)

- Unaware of being touched/bumped - unless done with extreme force/intensity
- Having difficulty learning and/or avoids performing fine motor tasks such as using crayons and fasteners on clothing
- Unsure how to move his/her body in space, is clumsy and awkward
- Having difficulty learning new motor tasks
- In constant motion
- Getting in everyone else's space and/or touches everything around him
- Having difficulty making friends (overly aggressive or passive/ withdrawn)
- Intense, demanding, hard to calm and may have difficulty coping with transitions.
- Experiencing sudden mood changes and temper tantrums that are unexpected
- Appearing weak, slump when sitting/standing; or prefer sedentary activities

What are some of the **Red Flags**?

- Over-sensitive to touch, noises, smells, other people
- Difficulty making friends
- Difficulty dressing, eating, sleeping, and/or toilet training
- Clumsy; poor motor skills; weak
- In constant motion; or in everyone's personal space
- Frequent or long temper tantrums

Where to go for help

The first step would be to visit your GP or Maternal and Child Health Nurse to discuss your concerns. They may refer your child to a paediatrician or a paediatric occupational therapist *who specialises in Sensory Processing Disorder*.

What will an occupational therapist do to help my child?

An Occupational Therapist will help your child to be able to better cope with their sensory needs. Therapy usually takes place in a room fitted out with specialised equipment called a sensory gym or a naturalistic environment for the child such as at home or kinder. Interestingly, similar therapy is used for different types of issues. For example, "A child who is over-reactive (hyper-sensitive) to vestibular input needs to swing and spin to retrain his brain, just as a child who is under reactive to vestibular input does. The difference is that if he's hyper-sensitive to movement, he's more likely to resist it, whereas if he's hypo-sensitive, or under-sensitive, he's more likely to seek it out." The therapy uses repetitive exercises to help a child experience sensations more accurately; aiming to teach the brain to react more efficiently to sensory input.

Why is Sensory Processing so important for my child?

- Assists with their daily functioning
- Required for intellectual, social and emotional development
- Required for a positive self-esteem
- Prepares the mind and body for learning
- Required to experience positive interactions with others and the world around them
- To achieve normal developmental milestones

Where can I find more information about Sensory Processing?

<http://spdfoundation.net/index.php/about-sensory-processing-disorder/#emotional>

<http://shopau.sensorytools.net/>

<http://www.spdaustralia.com.au/about-sensory-processing-disorder/>

[http:// www.childdevelopment.com.au/sound-awareness/182](http://www.childdevelopment.com.au/sound-awareness/182)