



## What is Sensory Processing?

### Tips to help you and your Child

(Prepared by the Occupational Therapy Department)

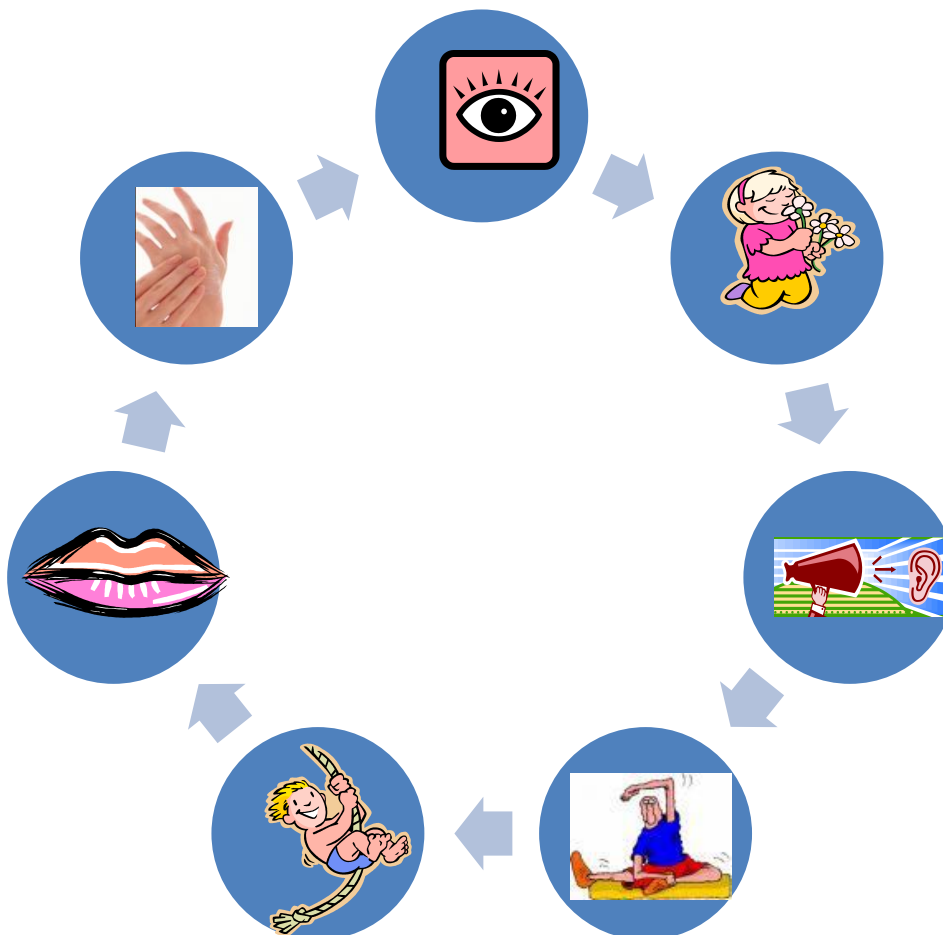
- This resource pack aims to provide parents with activity ideas that can be included in your child's routine at home to help them stay calm, alert and learning.
- This pack offers ideas for parents on regulation of the seven senses.

### Our Senses

1. Touch (tactile)
2. Sight (vision)
3. Sound (auditory)
4. Smell (olfactory)
5. Taste (gustatory)

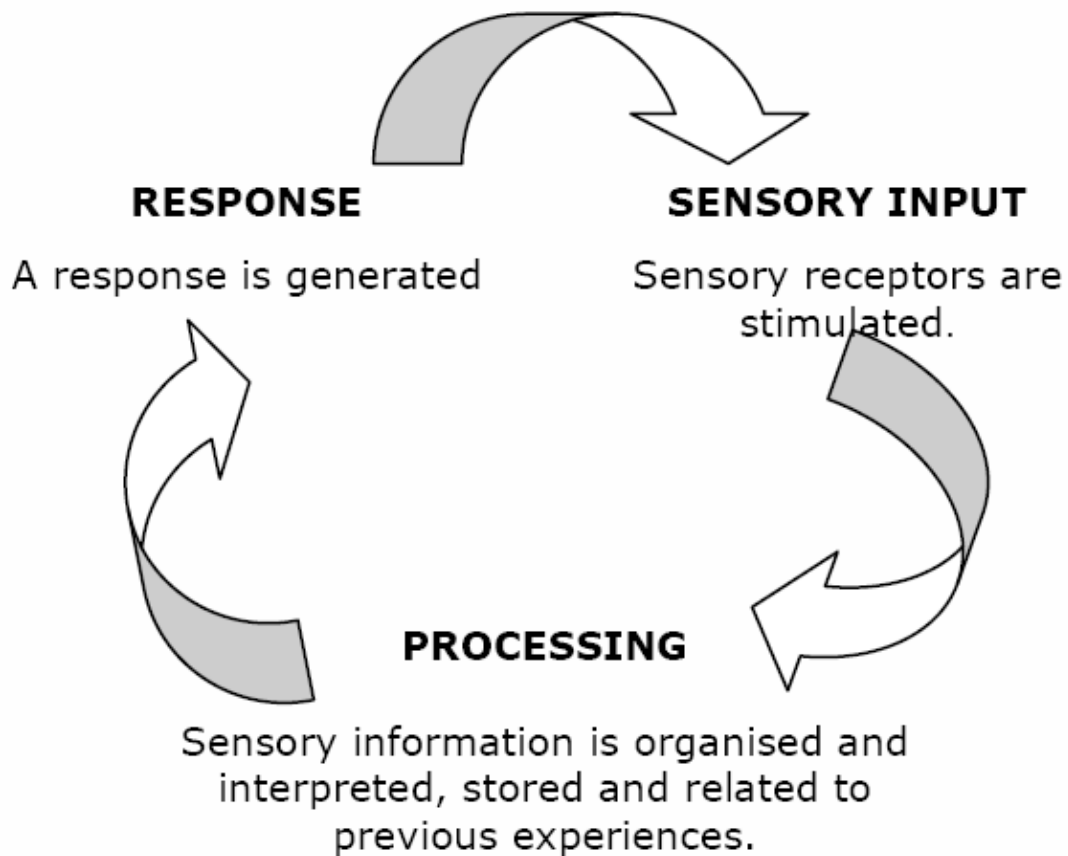
### Two additional internal senses:

6. Movement and Balance (vestibular)
7. Body awareness (proprioception)

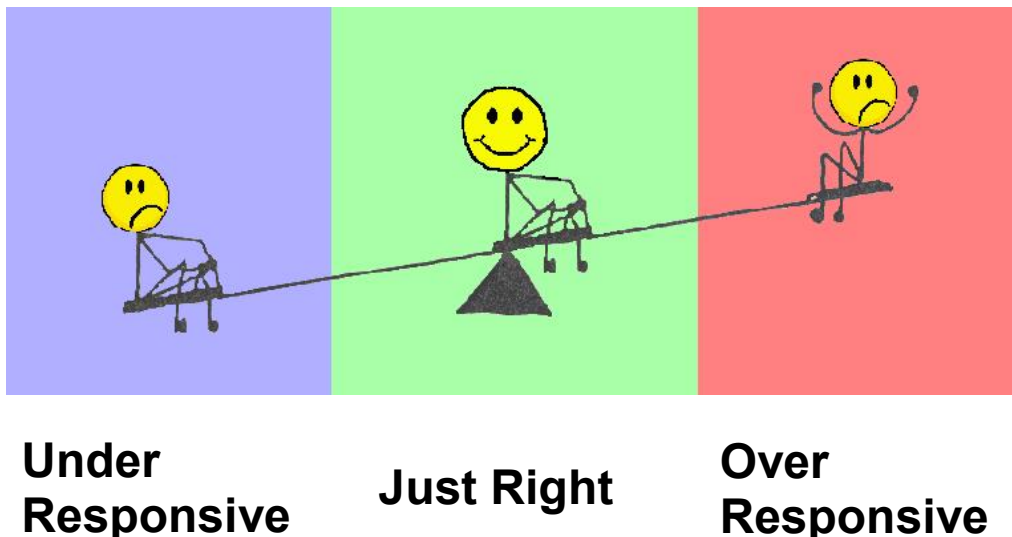


## What is Sensory Processing?

- The ability to take in (receive) information through our senses, sort it out (interpret), process it (organise) and make use of this information from the world.
- It affects our behaviours and actions and contributes to how we perform in different settings.



## How we respond to our senses or our Sensory Threshold?



## Difficulty with Sensory Processing?

Difficulty with sensory processing happens when the brain cannot sort out, filter, organise, analyse, and connect or integrate sensory messages. It is like a “traffic jam” in the brain, with some bits of sensory information getting “tied up in traffic”. Certain parts of the brain then do not get the sensory information they need to do their job.

Behaviours we might see:

Sense	Under Responsive	Over Responsive
<b>TOUCH (Tactile)</b>	Does not notice when hands or mouth are dirty Seeks tactile play Touches people and objects	Does not like hands being dirty and messy Will not want to touch or gets irritated by certain textures e.g. tags on clothes
<b>VISUAL (Sight)</b>	Looks carefully or intensely at objects Has a hard time finding objects in a messy background	Dislikes bright lights Distracted by visual objects around the room
<b>SOUND (Auditory)</b>	Appears to not hear what you say Doesn't respond when name is called Enjoys noises or seeks to make noise	Distracted by background noise Covers ears at loud noise Difficulty listening in class/ following instructions/ focusing on homework
<b>SMELL (Olfactory)</b>	Seeks certain smells	Avoids certain smells
<b>TASTE (Gustatory)</b>	Seeks certain tastes Chews or licks non food objects	Restricted diet Will only eat certain foods Does not like certain textures
<b>MOVEMENT &amp; BALANCE (Proprioception)</b>	Fidgety and restless Seeks all kind of movement	Fearful of heights Avoids swings or other playground equipment

## How can we help?

It is important to remember that everyone responds differently to sensory information. What are **your** sensory preferences? Do you prefer light touch or deep touch?

Remember we only need to intervene if sensory difficulties are affecting a child's participation in daily activities!



## Become a Sensory Detective!

1. Think about your child and the behaviours they are displaying or finding challenging
2. What sensory areas do you think your child is having difficulties with?
3. Look for patterns

<b>Sensations my child enjoys or seeks:</b>	<b>Sensation my child avoids/ dislikes:</b>	<b>Sensations my child ignores/ is slow to respond to</b>

## General Sensory Strategies

<b>ALERTING</b>	<b>CALMING</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a more stimulating environment</li><li>• Make use of variety</li><li>• Use high contrast stimulus</li><li>• Increase the intensity of prompts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a more neutral environment</li><li>• Keep things consistent, simple and similar</li><li>• Decrease the intensity of prompts, contrast and variety</li></ul>

## Sensory Play

Sensory play helps an overresponsive/sensory sensitive child to explore new situations. Sensory play helps provide an under-responsive child/sensory seeker with the input they crave/seek.

- Messy play including finger painting, making shapes in shaving foam and flour
- Arts and crafts including gluing/pasting, and working with a variety of textures such as card, cotton wool, crepe, paper.
- Sand bins/boxes and Ball pits.
- Baking - making dough.
- Blowing bubbles, party blowers/whistle.

## Heavy Work Activities

Heavy work activities can be calming for a child that is over-responsive to sensory input, they can help refocus a child that is underresponsive/sensory seeking or can help increase body awareness for a child that is slow to register information from their senses.

- Heavy work activities involve pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying and weight bearing using their own body.
- Wall presses/pushes x10.
- Chair push ups/ lifts x10
- Tug of war-pulling
- Row row your boat game
- Animal Walks-Donkey kicks, bear walk, inchworm, seal, wheelbarrow walking
- Roll over therapy ball on tummy, walk forward, weight bearing on hands.

## TOUCH

### **TOUCH (Tactile)**

- Light, quick, unpredictable and varied touch is alerting.
  - Children may have difficulty taking in touch information whether clothing is twisted on the body or face is dirty)
  - Compensatory strategies e.g using a mirror after meal times
- Deep touch or pressure has a calming effect.
  - Use firm, steady touch for a longer duration in a predictable pattern
  - Wrapping them tightly in a blanket or allowing them to have a heavy pillow that can be hugged tightly.
  - Use of a weighted vest or blanket.
  - Chewing or sucking to be calming.

Strategy to consider:

A tactile bin can be created using small storage boxes with a lid. They can be filled with sand, rice, cotton balls, porridge flakes, flour, water.

Begin by encouraging them to place hands into a dry texture bin with either cotton balls, flour, rice, porridge flakes, or sand. Make it fun. Work on one texture at a time.

Hide objects in the bin for your child to find with eyes open and then eyes closed. If the child is reluctant to place hands into the texture allow them to drive a car through the rice or walk dolly over the sand.

When a child can immediately jump into the bin with both hands and can tolerate buried hands introduce semi wet and then wet textures such as water/ ice, bath foam, washing up liquid-making bubbles, shaving cream, flour mixed with water, porridge/oatmeal flakes mixed with water, playdough or homemade dough, paper mache.

Always have a bowl of water or hand towels nearby to allow the child to rinse off if required.

When a child is comfortable touching various dry and wet textures with their hands they can be more willing to put new foods in their mouth when eating.

Applying deep pressure or engaging in heavy work activities are also recommended when a child shows sensitivity to touch or being touched.

Heavy work/deep pressure is calming and makes your child less aware of the feeling of touch and in particular, light touch. This could be in the form of a head massage prior to washing. You can brush their finger nails with a nailbrush before nail clipping which is a form of deep pressure and will make them less sensitive to the light touch/feel of the nail clippers approaching.

## SIGHT

<p><b>SIGHT (Vision)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make visual cues more obvious and relevant</li><li>• Label drawers/cabinets</li><li>• Use a high colour contrast timetable/visual schedule to assist with organisation.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use low intensity and high familiarity e.g. soft lighting, plain, neutral colours.</li></ul>
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Strategies to consider:

- Reduce clutter
- Dim light
- Consider coloured light bulbs
- Introduce new colours through clothing and toys
- Keep sunglasses in the car.
- Move the child's desk away from direct sunlight or move seats in class

## SOUND

<p><b>SOUND (Auditory)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a specific cue when you want the child's attention e.g.: clapping, touching on the shoulder.</li><li>• Ask the child to explain or repeat information back to make sure he processed what was said.</li><li>• Use a timer for reminders.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Noise which is rhythmic, predictable, consistent (~ 60-80 beats per minute) has a calming effect. Try and keep noises subdued or get his to listen to quiet or "environmental sound" music.</li></ul>
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Strategies to consider:

Can you prepare your child for loud noises and sounds that are approaching such as the Hoover/vacuum cleaner?

For example: I am going to be using the Hoover here, it might get a bit noisy, let's bring your toy into another room while I Hoover. We are going to be going into the public toilets and the hand dryers might be a little noisy, but we can put our hands over our ears if they sound too loud.

Are there headphones, ear muffs, ear defenders available to use during times of loud noise? These could be used in times of public gatherings where the noise is too much for your child to process all at once.

Listen to sounds of the wind, rain, birds, waves through headphones to get familiar with new sounds.



## SMELL & TASTE

<b>SMELL &amp; TASTE (Olfactory &amp; Gustatory)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To calm, use low intensity (e.g. mild flavours, predictable, consistent).</li></ul>
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- To make meals more interesting, incorporate unfamiliar foods, unusual combinations.



Strategies to consider:

Your child may be reluctant to try foods, dislikes certain textures or avoid trying new foods.

If your child is not yet comfortable touching dry or wet textures with their hands then they are less likely to be comfortable placing these textures in their mouth.

Set up the tactile bins to help your child to become comfortable with how textures feel in their hands. Start with dry textures, move to semi wet and then wet.

Make tasting new foods fun. Move tasting sessions away from meal time.

Create a food chart of what I tried, what I liked about it, what I did not like, I'd like it more if it had a sauce, was baked or fried, had more salt.

Try to slowly integrate the new foods tried at mealtimes.

At mealtimes consider using a platter that is passed around the table and food is taken from this. This helps your child to become comfortable with the sight and smell of food as it is passed around the table.

If processing the taste of toothpaste is difficult, Is there flavour free/mint free toothpaste available at home to trial? Options can be discussed with your child's dentist.

Engage in smelling games. What could it be? Eyes could be closed. Find a smell/essential oil that is liked by your child. Your child could have this nearby when they experience an unpleasant smell. Colour with scented markers.

## MOVEMENT & BALANCE

### **MOVEMENT & BALANCE (Vestibular)**

- Movement which is fast, alternating and rotary (e.g. spinning) tends to be arousing.
- Use movement breaks and/or movin'sit cushions to maintain concentration and attention.

- Movement which is linear (not spinning in a circle), regular, repetitive, predictable is calming.
- Activities that provide slow rhythmic movement such as rocking helps to calm our nervous system.

Strategies to consider:

Create more opportunities for alerting and heavy work activities throughout the day to reduce the amount of time the child attempts to seek this movement on their own.

An alerting activity could be followed with a heavy work activity to help your child to become calm and re-focused for table top work or before returning to class after yard time.

A wind-down routine may be needed at bedtime that includes heavy work activities.

Screen time should be reduced when bedtime is approaching.

Your child may benefit from a heavier blanket being placed on their bed to help them to relax and calm when settling.

Your child might enjoy touching everything and this might distract them from focusing on school work or tasks that need to be completed.

Provide them with more opportunities to touch in their day using tactile bins, sand bins/boxes, baking, messy play and arts and crafts.

If your child enjoy biting and chewing try including more opportunities for blowing, sucking, chewing, crunching in their day.

Blowing bubbles, blowing cotton balls with a straw. Placing a straw in their glass routinely at mealtimes or using a water bottle with straw throughout the day

Encourage use of a vibratory toothbrush.

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