

# Sensory Processing Skills

## What is Sensory Processing?

- Sensory processing is the way we take in all of the sensations from our environments and within ourselves, organize them, and create an adaptive response.
- How we organize our senses for use and function
- Those with sensory processing challenges usually experience these senses more or less intensely than others which can cause stress and disruption in participation in everyday life.



### Auditory

- How we hear the world around us



### Olfactory

- Our sense of smell



### Interoception

- Senses we feel from within us.
- Hunger, thirst, sick



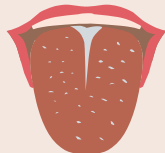
### Proprioception

- The senses we feel from our muscles and joints



### Visual

- How we view the world around us



### Gustatory

- Our sense of taste



### Vestibular

- Our balance
- Our orientation to ourselves and the world.



### Tactile

- Our sense of touch

## Challenges of Sensory Processing:

Everyone takes part in sensory processing skills everyday in order to accomplish their occupations. When sensory processing challenges inhibit a child from functioning in their world, then we may need to address these further. Below are examples of how these challenges present:

- Atypical responses to sensory input. Maybe we notice adverse behaviors when our child touches sand, eats a certain texture, or hears a loud noise.
- Poor ability to conceptualize, plan, and organize motor movements. Maybe they struggle with sequencing in order to accomplish a task or have trouble controlling their body movements to play appropriately with others
- Poor visual perception and visual motor integration. Maybe they have trouble coordinating their eyes and movements to navigate their world.

## Neurological Thresholds:

The concept of neurological thresholds can seem intimidating. However, it is a really helpful concept when we are trying to understand the amount of stimuli in the environment and how much of it we need in order to respond. The word **stimulus** means any detectable change in the environment. So, we can have **high thresholds** or **low thresholds**.

- High thresholds: Kiddos with a high threshold need a lot of environmental stimuli to notice something and respond to it. They can often miss cues
- Low thresholds: Kiddos with low thresholds do not need a lot of input to notice stimuli.

## Patterns of Self-Regulation:

People are either **passive** or **active** in their reaction to sensory input and how they regulate themselves in response.

- Passive sensory individuals tend to let things happen around them and then react.
- Active sensory individuals tend to take control over the sensory input

The 4 patterns of self regulation:

**Sensory Seeking:** Actively try to gain sensory input to meet their needs. They may be hyperactive, touch others often, or engage in unsafe activities. (active, high threshold)

**Sensory Avoiding:** Actively avoid sensory input. They may run away from loud, busy environments, cover their ears when overstimulated by noise, or wear gloves to avoid touching certain textures. (active, low threshold)

**Sensory Sensitive:** Feels overwhelmed by sensory information, but they do not actively try to avoid it. They may just display frustration. They may be easily distracted, irritable, cautious, and uncomfortable in loud or bright environments. (passive, low threshold)

**Low Registration/Bystander:** Does not recognize all of the incoming sensory information, They do not compensate by trying to gain more sensory input to meet their needs. They may seem uninterested, and inattentive to their surroundings. (passive, high threshold)

## How can we support these skills?

Each individual and their sensory needs are different! It is the job of the therapy team to work together to figure out what works best for the child across their environments. Below are a few ways to support kiddos with differing sensory processing challenges:

- Always be ready to adjust your response and the environment to best meet the needs of the child at any given point.
- Create an environment with multiple different sensory experiences for the child to explore (different textures, sights, smells, etc.)
- Encourage physical activity and facilitate movement games for children who crave sensation or children who need more of it to become alert.
- Work collaboratively with the therapy team to create a sensory diet
- Offer calming toys or a sensory room for a child to go when they are feeling stressed and unsafe

**Remember!** Sensory processing challenges are not a diagnosis. These are just characteristics to be aware of so we can better support our children. Our goal with addressing this is not to change our child but to create an environment that supports their needs and adjust our response to their needs appropriately.

# References:

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