A Teacher's Manual for Sensory Processing

By Ashleigh Kendall




This Sensory Manual was created in April 2009 by Ashleigh Kendall, an Occupational Therapy student at the University of Sydney. While on her third year placement at DADHC Fairfield, Ashleigh created this manual for Les Powell School Mount Pritchard. To complete the project, Ashleigh received assistance and support from Rene Fraser, her placement supervisor.

Contents

Your new Sensory Manual

This manual is designed for teachers to use in the classroom.

Sensory processing difficulties are common amongst students with intellectual disabilities. The behaviours of these students can be very hard to manage.

Use this manual as a guide to assist you in teaching and supporting your students. The strategies provided in this manual will assist you in creating a comfortable and safe environment that promotes learning and social interaction.

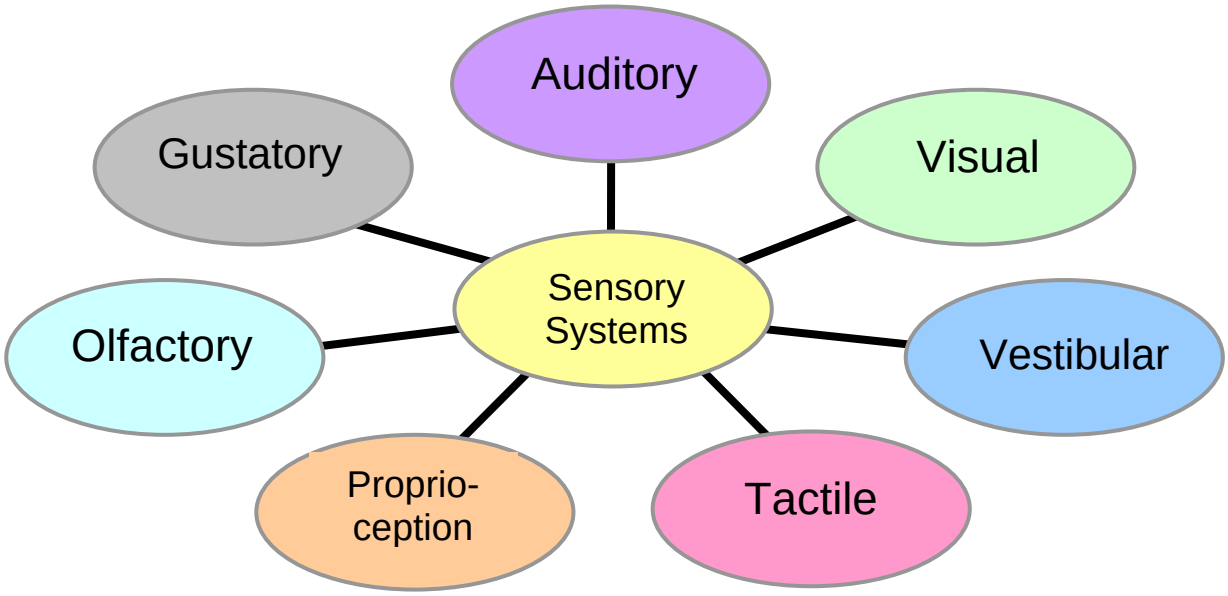
Remember that each student is wired differently and has individual needs. A strategy may work very well for one child and be ineffective for another. This manual will help you decide which strategies to try. Then it is your job to collaborate with your colleagues and decide which strategies work best for each student.

These strategies are by no means a “quick fix” for tricky behaviours. Finding effective strategies for individuals may take some trial and error. Strategies should be regular additions in a child’s daily program and be incorporated into their home program if possible.

Sensory Processing

SENSORY PROCESSING is the ability to organise and interpret information we receive through our senses. We use our central nervous system (CNS) to process sensory information. Our CNS consists of our brain and spinal cord. Sensory processing difficulties can occur when the CNS does not typically process sensory information.

There are seven systems that create our sensory experiences.



Auditory – sense of hearing

Vestibular – sense of balance

Gustatory – sense of taste

Proprioception – sense of body position

Visual – sense of sight

Tactile – sense of touch

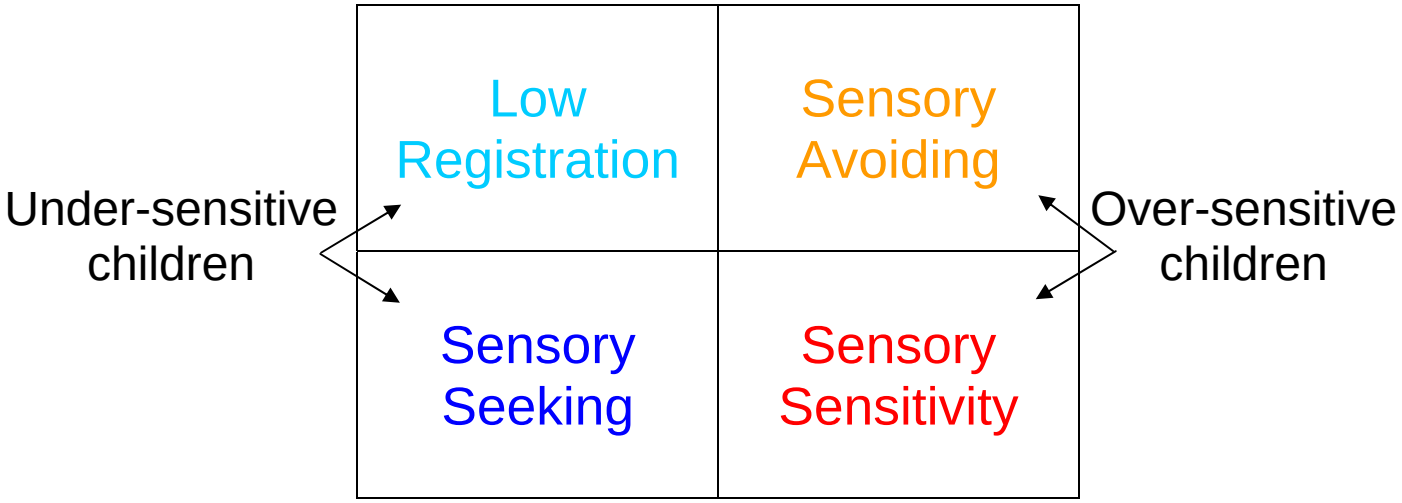
Olfactory – sense of smell

Sensory Processing Difficulties

Children with sensory processing difficulties are typically either:

- **over-sensitive / over-responsive** or
- **under-sensitive / under-responsive**.

These areas are divided into four categories which help describe how children cope with either too much or too little sensory information.



As you teach more children with sensory processing difficulties, you will find some children are easily classified and others are not. For example, Timmy may show all the obvious signs of a sensory seeker but Jane may show a combination of sensory sensitivity and low registration behaviours. This is not unusual. In fact, children can overlap across different categories. Additionally, a child's mood, the time of day and recent experiences can affect how a child processes that day.

Don't worry if you cannot pinpoint which category a child fits into. Use these categories to guide which strategies you investigate to use. Remember that each student is wired differently and has individual needs. A strategy may work very well for one child and be ineffective for another. Discover which strategy works best for each student using your judgement and trial and error.

Over-sensitive Children

Over-sensitive Children

OVER-SENSITIVE CHILDREN process too much sensory information. It only takes a little sensory input to rev up an over-sensitive children, and only a little more to overload them. For example, Emily may become aroused by jumping, but may start crying when playing on the swing. The CNS of an over-sensitive child fails to filter out unimportant information which means the child registers excessive amounts of sensory information. Over-sensitive children are generally classified as:

- Sensory avoiding or
- Sensory sensitivity.

Sensory Avoiding

Children who are sensation avoiders literally avoid sensory stimulation. What they sense is more frequent and intense than normal. Too much sensory input can be uncomfortable and frightening for these children. Their behaviour can be disruptive as they:

- Are rule bound and ritual driven
- May seem controlling or stubborn
- Throw tantrums to avoid activities
- Strongly resist change
- Withdraw from activities
- Are uncooperative

Sensory Sensitivity

Children who have sensory sensitivity notice everything in their environment. These children are constantly reacting to sensory experiences. These children may interpret some sensations as dangerous and therefore respond with fear and fright. It is common for children with sensory sensitivity to become upset with their own difficulties with tasks, or with others who interrupt them. They often are:

- Easily distracted
- Hyperactive

AUDITORY PROCESSING

Auditory processing is our brain making sense of what we hear. You may observe an over-sensitive child with auditory processing difficulties to:

- Hold their hands over their ears to protect from sounds.
- Complain about the noise level in the classroom.
- Be easily distracted by irrelevant noises in the environment. For example, air conditioner noise.
- Be easily frustrated during listening activities.
- Need instructions or directions to be repeated. The child may not be able to block out background noise.
- Never seem like they are paying attention.

VISUAL PROCESSING

Visual processing is our brain making sense of what we see. You may observe an over-sensitive child with visual processing difficulties to:

- Avoid bright lights. For example, cover their eyes or squint.
- Prefer to be in the dark.
- Look away from a task to notice all actions in the room.
- Become frustrated when trying to find objects in competing backgrounds.
- Avoid eye contact.

The following traits may be attributed to sensory processing difficulties or they may be related to a child's intellectual ability:

- Get lost easily whilst in familiar places, due to distractions.
- Have difficulty putting puzzles together when compared to age peers.
- Have difficulty copying from the board when the board is cluttered with

VESTIBULAR PROCESSING

Vestibular processing is our brain making sense of movement and balance sensations. You may observe an over-sensitive child with vestibular processing difficulties to:

- Become overly excited during movement activities.
- Seek or prefer play options that involve little movement.
- Dislike changes in head position.
- Hold head upright when bending over or leaning.
- Dislike playground equipment.
- Fear falling or heights.
- Avoid climbing, jumping, bumpy or uneven ground.
- Hold onto walls or banisters or furniture when moving around the room.
- Turns whole body to look at something.
- Have poor balance.
- Become anxious or distressed when their feet leave the ground. For example, trampoline or climbing equipment.
- Move robotically during activities.

Over-sensitive Children

TACTILE PROCESSING

Tactile processing is our brain making sense of what we touch. You may observe an over-sensitive child with tactile processing difficulties to:

- Prefer to touch than be touched.
- Avoid getting messy.
- Be sensitive to certain fabrics or clothes.
- React negatively and emotionally to light touch. For example, becomes angry and violent when being tickled.
- Become irritated by shoes or socks.
- Have difficulty standing in line or close to others.
- Rub or scratch at a place on the body that has been touched by another.
- Frequently walk on tiptoes to limit sensation on their feet.
- Have trouble tolerating touching, hugging, or cuddling.
- Strongly dislike having their hair washed, combed, brushed or cut.
- React emotionally or aggressively to touch, particularly when it is unexpected.

PROPRIOCEPTIVE PROCESSING

Through proprioceptive processing, we understand where our bodies are in space. You may observe an over-sensitive child with proprioceptive processing difficulties to:

- Avoid typical play experiences.
- Be afraid to try new things.
- Trip and fall often.
- Have difficulty performing gross motor activities.
- Resist tasks that provide resistance against their body.

These behaviours occur because the child is unsure of the position of their body in space so they don't know how to plan the movements of their body.

Over-sensitive Children

OLFACTORY PROCESSING

Olfactory processing is our brain making sense of what we smell. You may observe an over-sensitive child with olfactory processing difficulties to:

☐ React negatively to everyday smells.
☐ Dislike or complain about smells that normally go unnoticed.
☐ Routinely smell non-food objects.
☐ Be irritated by perfume.
☐ Smell people around them.
☐ Regularly talk about what other people smell like.
☐ Refuse certain foods.
☐ Feel sick or nauseated by bathroom or personal hygiene smells.
☐ Be bothered by household or cooking smells.
☐ Decide whether they will play with someone depending on that person's odour.
☐ Refuse to go somewhere because of the way it smells.

GUSTATORY PROCESSING

Gustatory processing is our brain making sense of what we taste. You may observe an over-sensitive child with gustatory processing difficulties to:

☐ Have a limited food repertoire.
☐ Strongly dislike flavoursome food.
☐ Reacts defensively to food in the mouth.
☐ Avoid certain food textures, especially mixed textures. For example, avoid crunchy food like crackers or smooth foods like custard.
☐ Take food off the fork or spoon using their teeth only, keeping their lips retracted.
☐ Gag easily while eating.
☐ Require fluid to get food down.

Under-sensitive Children

Under-sensitive Children

UNDER-SENSITIVE CHILDREN need intense and frequent sensory experiences to become engaged. Compared to their peers, over sensitive children need more sensory input to rev up and get going. The CNS of an under-sensitive child does not respond to stimuli easily because it takes a lot of input to cause a response. Under-sensitive children are generally classified as:

- Low Registration or
- Sensory Seeking.

Low Registration

Children with low registration notice sensory stimuli much less than others. They do not notice what is going on around them, and miss cues that might guide their behaviours. It is thought that most events in a child's everyday life do not contain enough intensity to arouse low registration children. These children often seem:

- Dull in affect
- Uninterested
- Withdrawn
- Self-absorbed

Sensory Seeking

Children with sensory seeking patterns notice and enjoy all activity in their environment. They like to generate extra sensory input for themselves so they will feel stimulated. These children are active, continuously engaging, fidgety and excitable. Sensation seeking can be difficult in the classroom as a child's seeking can easily distract them from participating in the task at hand. These children are:

- Fidgety
- Active
- Excitable
- Continuously engaging in new things

AUDITORY PROCESSING

Auditory processing is our brain making sense of what we hear. You may observe an under-sensitive child with auditory processing difficulties to:

- Seem like they are “in a different world” when called upon.
- Make noise only for noise sake.
- Have difficulty locating the source or location of a sound. For example, difficulty working out who said their name.

The following traits may be attributed to auditory sensory processing difficulties or they may be related to a child’s intellectual ability:

- Have difficulty following simple verbal instructions because of confusion with words sounding similar.
- Take longer to respond to directions.
- Lose their place in discussions because they are still working on understanding something that was said moments earlier.
- Give inappropriate responses or respond slowly to routine directions and questions.
- Have difficulty relaying simple spoken messages because they can’t remember what they should say.

Under-sensitive Children

VISUAL PROCESSING

Visual processing is our brain making sense of what we see. You may observe an under-sensitive child with visual processing difficulties to:

☐ Stare at objects or people.
☐ Hesitate going up or down kerbs steps.
☐ Not notice when other people come into the room.
☐ Look carefully and intently at objects or people

The following traits may be attributed to visual sensory processing difficulties or they may be related to a child's intellectual ability:

☐ Have difficulty copying work from the board.
☐ Have trouble staying between the lines when colouring and writing.

TACTILE PROCESSING

Tactile processing is our brain making sense of what we touch. You may observe an under-sensitive child with touch processing difficulties to:

☐ Frequently bump and push other children on purpose.
☐ Seem unaware of cuts, bumps and bruises.
☐ Seem unaware of cold and hot temperatures or changes in temperature.
☐ Touch people or objects excessively.
☐ Fail to recognise simple objects by touch, when vision is obscured. For example, be unable to reach into their schoolbag and pull out their waterbottle.
☐ Prefer to manipulate hard objects.
☐ Bite themselves or pick nails frequently.

Under-sensitive Children

VESTIBULAR PROCESSING

Vestibular processing is our brain making sense of movement and balance sensations. You may observe an under-sensitive child with vestibular processing difficulties to:

- Rock in their chair.
- Rock unconsciously while sitting on the floor or standing.
- Regularly twirl or spin themselves around for fun.
- Excessively seek out all types of movement activities.
- Seek opportunity to fall without regard for personal safety.
- Take excessive risks during play that compromise personal safety.
- Seek out all types of movement activities, enough to interfere with daily routines.
- Appear to enjoy falling over.
- Stumble and fall over excessively.
- Have poor coordination of two sides of the body.
- Have difficulty performing motor sequences.
- Have difficulty maintaining a stable trunk position.
- Have poor coordination of head and eye movements.
- Have poor balance.
- Have a low alertness level. For example, not notice when someone enters the room.
- Lack sustained attention.
- Have decreased interest in interacting with the environment.

Under-sensitive Children

PROPRIOCEPTIVE PROCESSING

Through proprioceptive processing, we understand where our bodies are in space. You may observe an under-sensitive child with proprioceptive processing difficulties to:

☐	Crash into things.
☐	Appear clumsy or uncoordinated.
☐	Grasp tools very tightly. For example, a pencil or spoon.
☐	Have difficulty changing their body position in response to activity demands.
☐	Exert too much pressure when using tools. For example, has difficulty regulating pressure when writing or drawing.
☐	Misjudge an object's weight. For example, spill juice out of a cup when picking it up.
☐	Stomp or walk with heavy steps on a regular basis.
☐	Lean against the wall when walking.
☐	Play rough and regularly participate in tumble play.
☐	Show over-exaggerated movements.
☐	Hug and press against people or objects.
☐	Be self-injurious.
☐	Prefers clothes to be as tight as possible.
☐	Love to be wrapped in tight blankets, or wear weighted blankets or vests.
☐	Love jumping from high places.
☐	Spill and break things often.
☐	Seem to do everything with too much force.
☐	Misjudge how much to flex and extend muscles during activities.

OLFACTORY PROCESSING

Olfactory processing is our brain making sense of what we smell. You may observe an under-sensitive child with olfactory processing difficulties to:

- Have difficulty identifying smells.
- Have difficulty discriminating unpleasant odours.
- Fail to notice unpleasant odours.
- Attempt to drink or eat poisonous substances, without noticing the noxious smell.
- Actively smell objects, people or places excessively.
- Use smell to interact with objects.

GUSTATORY PROCESSING

Gustatory processing is our brain making sense of what we taste. You may observe an under-sensitive child with touch processing difficulties to:

- Put general objects in their mouth, constantly.
- Put their fingers and hands in their mouth, constantly.
- Love and crave intense flavours in food.
- Be very messy eaters and enjoy (not notice) leaving food on their face.
- Keep bits of food in their mouth at the end of the meal.
- Take extra large bites to stuff their mouth with food.
- Swallow food before chewing properly.
- Drool excessively.

Calm Alert State

Calm Alert State

The Calm Alert State is the optimal level of arousal

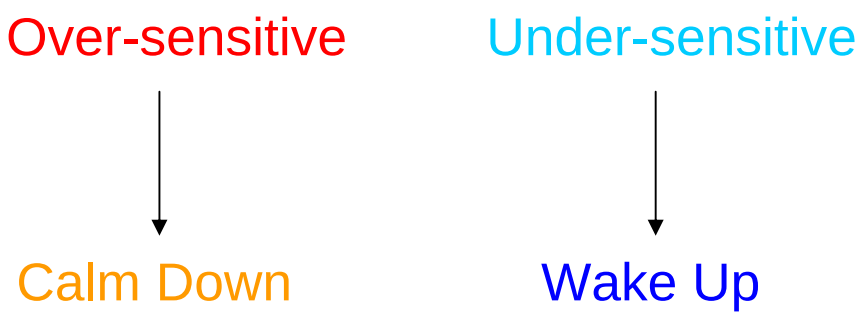
for learning or for an activity.

In the Calm Alert State, our nervous system has the just right level of arousal for the task at hand. In this state we can attend, concentrate and perform tasks in a suitable manner. We can attend to relevant information and block out the irrelevant information.

For a child with a sensory processing difficulty, finding and maintaining the Calm Alert State can be very difficult. Their nervous system needs special fine-tuning to find and keep an optimal arousal level. For learning and participation, it's important for the child to be in a Calm Alert State. Use the strategies in this manual to help your students find their Calm Alert State and regulate their arousal levels.

Over-sensitive children process too much sensory information. Generally, they will benefit from calming strategies that regulate their arousal level. Calming strategies usually reduce or channel out excess sensory information.

Under-sensitive children need large amounts of sensory information to maintain a Calm Alert State. Generally, they benefit from alerting strategies that "wake up" their nervous systems.



Low Registration

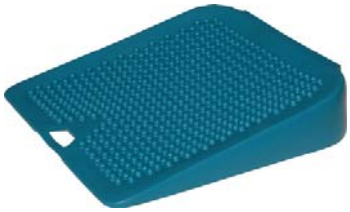
Strategies for Low Registration

Strategies aim to wake up the child. We want to enrich every experience with extra sensory stimuli. *NB Because we are adding sensory input, these strategies are very similar to the Sensory seeking strategies.*

- **Movement Breaks –** movement during or between activities that require concentration. Eg jumping, reaching up high then touching the ground.

- **Animal Walks –** movement during or between activities that require concentration. Great activity to precede table work. Eg monkey walks, gorilla walks, kangaroo jumps.

- **Move n Sit Cushion –** calms children down by allowing them to move while staying seated.



- **Pressure on Shoulders –** apply firm, maintained touch pressure on child's shoulders while they are seated (for 2-3 minutes).

- **Music –** play music that is upbeat, quick paced and has a lot of variation.

- **Food –** encourage parents to pack crunchy or chewy foods for their child.

- **Drink –** squirt lemon or lime into the child's water.

- **Theraputty –** warm up with theraputty.

Strategies for Low Registration

- **Mouth Fidgets –** keep a mouth fidget on the child so they can receive oral sensory input when they desire it.

Theratubing

Knobby Chewy Tube

Chewelery Bracelet

- **Position of Teacher –** always stand in close and in front of the child when giving instructions to or speaking to the child. Ensure you have eye contact.

- **Cueing –** gain the child's attention before giving them instructions. Eg clap your hands or ring a bell while standing in front of the child.

- **Constrast Work Materials –** use a coloured mat or a brightly coloured rectangle of paper under the child's work.

- **Hand Fidgets –** attach a fidget to a pencil or top or just keep loose on the child's desk.

Pencil Fidget

Squeeze Ball

Strategies for Low Registration

- **Slopeboard –** use a slopeboard for reading, writing and drawing activities.

- **Repeat Back to You –** have the child repeat information after it has been presented to ensure the child heard and understands your instruction. Eg ask the child “What do you have to do” rather than “What did I ask you to do”.

- **Desk Position –** avoid seating the child side on to the whiteboard. A position front on and front row allows the child to be close to the teacher’s instructions and any visual information.

- **Wikkistix –** reinforce lines of colouring in sheets with wikkistix.

- **Vibrating Pens**

- **Pushing and Pulling –** games such as tug of war, or carrying heavy objects.

- **Gym Balls –** during movement breaks or playtime allow the child to sit and bounce on a large gym ball. Some children could use a gym ball instead of a chair.

Sensory Seeking

Strategies for Sensory Seeking

Strategies aim to calm the child while keeping them alert. We want to provide lots of intense sensory experiences at appropriate times so the child is alert and focused when it is time to work. We want to provide the child with the sensory experience they need so they don't seek this input independently disrupting the class.

NB Because we are adding sensory input, these strategies are very similar to the Low registration strategies.

- **Classroom Helper –** ask the sensory seeking child to help with errands around the classroom. Eg tidy the books or hand out paper to classmates.

- **Cueing –** gain the child's attention before giving them instructions. Eg clap your hands in a beat, ring a bell or blow a whistle while standing in front of the child.

- **Position of Teacher –** always stand in close and in front of the child when giving instructions to or speaking to the child. Ensure you have eye contact.

- **Visual Stimulation –** allow the child to receive visual stimulation when it is not disruptive to the class or student's work. Visual stimulation may assist the child to concentrate and focus on an activity. Eg stare at a light up toy during story time. →

- **Pace the Stimulation –** help the child pace themselves during movement activities – spread out the stimulation over time, rather than experiencing it all at once. Too much spinning or swinging can result in overactivity, lethargy or nausea.

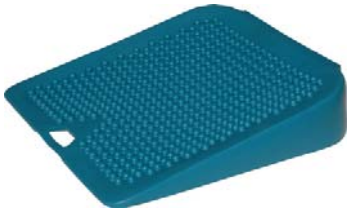
- **Movement in Class –** negotiate a set of rules with the child which allows the child to move around during class activities. The child may concentrate better when moving.

Strategies for Sensory Seeking

- **Self Squeeze –** teach the child to cross their arms and squeeze their biceps when they are seeking.

- **Change in Position –** within reason, allow the child to change their position during activities. Eg completing a puzzle allow the child to alternate between sitting and lying on the tummy.

- **Move n Sit Cushion –** calms children down by allowing them to move while staying seated.



- **Gym Balls –** use a gym ball instead of a chair.

- **Movement Breaks –** movement during or between activities that require concentration. Eg jumping, reaching up high then touching the ground. Desk, chair or wall push-ups are another effective alternative.

- **Mouth Fidgets –** keep a mouth fidget on the child so they can receive oral sensory input when they desire it.

Theratubing

Knobby Chewy Tube

Chewelery Bracelet

- **Animal Walks –** movement during or between activities that require concentration. Great activity to precede table work. Eg monkey walks, gorilla walks, kangaroo jumps.

- **Swimming and Bikeriding** – before or during school.

Strategies for Sensory Seeking

- **Slopeboard –** use a slopeboard for reading, writing and drawing activities.

- **Music –** play music that is upbeat, quick paced and has a lot of variation.

- **Hand Fidgets –** attach a fidget to a pencil or top or just keep loose on the child's desk.

Pencil Fidget

Squeeze Ball

- **Food –** encourage parents to pack crunchy or chewy foods for their child.

- **Drink –** squirt lemon or lime into the child's water.

- **Pushing and Pulling –** games such as tug of war, or carrying heavy objects in their schoolbags.

  - **Wikkistix –** reinforce lines of colouring in sheets with wikkistix.
  - **Vibrating Pens**

- **Weighted objects –** encourage the child to carry their bag on their bag when moving to classes or place weighted toys on the child's lap during classtime.

- **Textures Under Paper –** place sandpaper or corrugated cardboard under paper when drawing.

- **Theraputty –** warm up with theraputty. →

Sensory Avoiding

Strategies for Sensory Avoiders

Strategies aim to calm the child and reduce frightening or uncomfortable sensations. The aim here is to alter the child's environment to minimise distress whilst also trying to introduce acceptable sensory experiences. It is important for the child to be in control of the activity and that they're not forced to participate.

- **Noise Level –** consider the noise level of the classroom and try to reduce competing noises.
- **Soft Music –** play soft music or set a metronome to a slow rhythm to calm the child.
- **Ear Plugs –** trial ear plugs or unplugged headphones with the child who fears or is distracted by excess noises.
- **Quiet Corner –** if the child appears to be over overwhelmed provide a quiet corner in the classroom (separate from the naughty corner) where the child can sit to calm down, reorganise and refocus.
- **Soft, Slow Voice –** use a soft voice and slow down your movements and speech when speaking to the child.
- **Reduce Visual Distractions –** eliminate decorations near the child's desk and between the child and the whiteboard. Eg wall and ceiling hangings.
- **Worksheets –** prepare worksheets free of visual clutter.
- **Don't Force Movement –** acknowledge the child's unpleasant reaction to movement and do not force the child to engage in activities.
- **Child Controls Their Movement –** encourage activities where the child has an active role and self-directs their own movement.

Strategies for Sensory Avoiders

- **Touch Pressure -** provide firm touch pressure while the child is engaging in movement activity. Sometimes adding pressure makes the child feel more secure.

- **Games During Movement –** engage the child in play and imagination games during challenging movement activities, to distract the child and enable them to tolerate the movement. Eg games involving their favourite toy or music and singing.

- **Make Time for Movement –** program movement the child enjoys and is not frightened by into the child's routine. Although these children avoid sensation, it's important that they still experience movement activities. Eg swinging, sliding, running, jumping into the child's program.

- **Talk to Parents –** find out if there are any fabrics, types of clothing, textures or play substances that bring out negative reactions from the child.

- **Reduce Touchiness –** before touchy activities desensitise the child's hands and fingers. Eg while child places palms up on the desk, place your palms over the child's palms and press firmly. Eg clapping and body or hand slapping songs like pat-a-cake.

- **Eating Utensils –** use plastic utensils if metal ones can't be tolerate.

- **Choose Food –** allow the child to choose which foods they will eat first.

- **Reduce Sensitivity Around the Mouth –** wipe the child's cheek and mouth with a damp washcloth before mealtimes.

- **Avoid Tilting Backwards –** avoid movements that involve the child tilting backwards.

Sensory Sensitivity

Strategies for Sensory Sensitivity

Strategies aim to calm the child and reduce frightening or uncomfortable sensations. We want to decrease sensory experiences while keeping the child alert and aroused.

- **Noise Level –** consider the noise level of the classroom and try to reduce competing noises.

- **Instruction –** ensure that when giving instructions there are no unexpected or unwanted noises. Start an instruction from the beginning again if interrupted.

- **Reduce Visual Distractions –** eliminate decorations near the child's desk and between the child and the whiteboard. Eg wall and ceiling hangings.

- **Desk Position –** avoid seating the child side on to the whiteboard. A position front on and front row eliminates visual distraction of the other children.

- **Rocking Chair –** if possible, provide a rocking chair in a quiet corner for the child. Slow rocking has a calming effect on the nervous system. A hammock is also appropriate.

- **Clear Desktop –** store all items that are not needed out of sight.

Strategies for Sensory Sensitivity

- **Pace the Stimulation –** help the child pace themselves during movement activities spread out the stimulation over time, rather than experiencing it all at once. Too much spinning or swinging can result in overactivity, lethargy or nausea.

- **Touch Pressure –** provide the overly excited child with firm, sustained touch pressure on the child's body to calm the child. Eg pressure on the shoulders for 2-3 minutes.

- **Squeeze –** provide an object the child can squeeze, to calm them down.

Cuddly Toy

Squeeze Ball

- **Approach –** avoid approaching from behind and touching the child.

- **Avoid Light Touch -** always use firm, sustained pressure contact whenever you need to touch the child.

- **Child Directs Touch -** let the child control how they touch things. Eg allow the child to dictate how much paint they put on their finger during finger painting.

- **Choice –** allow the child to choose the activity within the given task. Eg let them choose between finger painting or painting with brushes.

- **Avoid Strong Smells –** Eg use non-scented textas.

Strategies for Sensory Sensitivity

- **Choose Food –** allow the child to choose which foods they will eat first.

- **Gym Ball -** roll a large gym ball over the child's tummy while they're laying down. Alternatively, squash the child with the gym ball while they lay on the tummy.

- **Self Squeeze –** teach the child to cross their arms and squeeze their biceps when they need to calm down.

- **Weighted objects –** encourage the child to carry their bag on their bag when moving to classes or place weighted toys on the child's lap during class time.

- **Quiet Corner –** if the child appears to be over stimulated provide a low lit, quiet corner in the classroom (separate from the naughty corner) where the child can sit to calm down, reorganise and refocus.

- **Movement at the Right Time –** avoid fast, arousing movements before the child is required to concentrate. Movement activities will arouse the child and it will take time to settle down into the calm alert state needed to concentrate.

- **Cueing –** gain the child's attention before giving them instructions. Eg clap your hands, ring a gentle sounding bell or stand in front of the child. Be gentle and calm in your approach as you don't want to startle the child.

- **Position of Teacher –** always stand in close and in front of the child when giving instructions to or speaking to the child. Ensure you have eye contact.

Common Problems

Over Sensitive Ears

Common signs of over sensitive ears:

- Child holds their hands over their ears to protect from sounds.
- Child is easily distracted by irrelevant noises in the environment (eg air conditioner noise).

Strategies

- **One at a time -** introduce loud sounds one at a time. Allow the child to adjust and tolerate the new sound before introducing a new one.

- **Silence -** decrease language during activities, and allow for silence.

- **Noise Level –** consider the noise level of the classroom and try to reduce competing noises.

- **Soft, Slow Voice –** use a soft voice and slow down your movements and speech when speaking to the child.

- **Ear Plugs –** trial ear plugs or unplugged headphones with the child who fears or is distracted by excess noises.

- **Quiet Corner –** if the child appears to be over overwhelmed provide a quiet corner in the classroom (separate from the naughty corner) where the child can sit to calm down, reorganise and refocus.

- **Squeeze or Self Squeeze –** provide an object the child can squeeze, to calm them down or encourage the child to cross their arms and squeeze their biceps.

- **Touch Pressure –** provide the overly excited child with firm, sustained touch pressure on the child's body to calm the child. Eg pressure on the shoulders for 2-3 minutes.

Mouthing

Most teachers will have seen this behaviour in the classroom or playground; that is, the behaviour of constantly putting non-food to objects in the mouth. This is an oral sensation seeking behaviour and it is very common amongst children with sensory processing difficulties.

Children with sensory processing difficulties put objects in their mouth to help them organise their sensory environment. The child can understand their environment better when they are receiving sensory information, and they get this information from feeling things with their mouth.

Strategies

- **Mouth Fidgets –** provide the child with a quick and effective way to obtain oral sensory stimulation. The tube can be attached to the child's shirt or hang around their neck. Chewy tubes are available in a variety of shapes and sizes and also in the form of a bracelet.

Theratubing

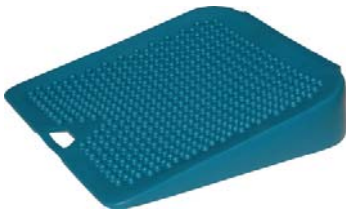
Knobby Chewy Tube

Chewelery Bracelet

Strategies

- **Movement Breaks –** allow movement breaks every few minutes during meals, or allow the child to kneel or stand while eating.

- **Move n Sit Cushion –** allow the child to sit on cushion during mealtimes. The cushion calms children down by allowing them to move while staying seated.



- **Gym Balls –** use a gym ball instead of a chair during mealtimes.

- **Weighted Utensils –** use weighted utensils to increase sensory awareness of the hands.

- **Animal Walks –** prior to eating, participate in movement or animal walks.

- **Sensory story –** about eating new and different foods.

- **Choose Food –** allow the child to choose which foods they will eat first.

- **Child in Control –** encourage the child to control their eating as much as possible. For eg, if they are able to spoon feed themselves, let them do it independently.

- **Quiet Place –** consider eating in a quiet place rather than a noisy one.

Icky Yucky Touchy!

Some children are sensitive to touch. They may dislike doing messy activities or being touched or hugged. Children with over-sensitivity often misinterpret many types of touch as negative or even painful. Touch from behind, fast touch, and especially light touch can elicit what are known as 'fear, fight or flight' responses.

Strategies

- **Rocking Chair –** use slow rhythmical rocking prior to challenging touch activities.
- **Work Up To It –** begin with touch activities that the child can tolerate, then gradually introduce others.
- **Vibrating Pens –** play with vibrating pens to help desensitise the child.

- **Avoid Light Touch -** always use firm, sustained pressure contact whenever you need to touch the child.
- **Child Directs Touch -** let the child control how they touch things. Eg allow the child to dictate how much paint they put on their finger during finger painting.
- **Textures –** use different textures during play. Eg rice, beans, dough, sand.
- **Sensory Story –** about touching new and exciting things.
- **Noise Level –** consider the noise level of the classroom and try to reduce competing noises when participating in tactile activities.
- **Hide and Seek Games –** play games that involve reaching into a box or bag with a hole in it and pulling out something.

Appendix

Glossary

Arousal

- A state of the nervous system, describing how alert one feels.

Auditory

- Relating to the sense of hearing.

Central Nervous System

- The brain and the spinal cord.

Fight or Flight Reaction

- The body's automatic, protective response to a situation that is perceived as dangerous.

Gustatory

- Relating to the sense of taste.

Olfactory

- Relating to smell.

Over-sensitive

- An increase in sensitivity to stimulation. An over-sensitive person will have a low threshold to stimulation.

Poor Registration

- A term used to describe the system of a child who does not respond to general stimulation from the environment.

Proprioception

- The perception of posture, weight and body position in space.

Glossary

Sensory Avoiding

- A term used to describe the system of a child who avoids or limits sensory stimulation. This child will create familiar and predictable situations so that these events can be interpreted.

Sensory Seeking

- A term used to describe the system of a child who is constantly engaging with his environment to gain stronger stimulation.

Sensory Sensitivity

- A term used to describe the system of a child who is unable to filter out extraneous or irrelevant sensory input. The child is unable to stay on task and is distracted by the most recent stimuli.

Tactile

- Relating to the sense of touch.

Under-sensitivity

- A reduced sensitivity to stimulation.

Vestibular

- System relating to balance, muscle, tone and movement.

Visual

- Relating to sight.

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