

SENSORY PROCESSING

EDUCATIONAL HANDOUT

What is sensory processing?

Sensory processing describes how we receive and respond to sensory input from the environment, such as noises and smells.

Why is sensory processing important?

We receive information about the world through our sensory system. This includes sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, movement, and body position. Sensory processing is needed to engage in most child's activities, such as playing, eating, and dressing. Different sensation experiences help a child learn how to improve their skills with all activities. For example, a child can understand their surroundings by combining the information they receive from all their senses.

What does research say?

- Sensory processing skills support fine and gross motor, self-care, socialization, and emotional regulation skills.
- Children with sensory processing issues experience too much or little stimulation through their senses. They may feel uncomfortable and have trouble participating in activities.
- Adding sensory processing strategies into a child's daily life can lead to home and school success.

Sensory processing involves the following different senses:

Visual

See



The eyes collect and understand what is seen.

Auditory

Hear



The ears receive and understand what is heard.

Tactile

Touch



The skin notices and understands different types of touch.

Olfactory

Smell



The nose interprets different types of smells

Gustatory

Taste



The mouth and tongue perceive different types of tastes.

Proprioception

Body awareness



The muscles, joints, and skin interpret where the body parts are in relation to each other.

Vestibular

Balance



The inner ear's sensory receptors help detect movement.

A child with sensory processing problems may look like or experience:

- Overreaction to movement, sound, or touch
- Have low energy
- Clumsy
- Poor sleep
- Upset with self-care tasks, like washing hair, brushing teeth, and nail clipping
- Struggle with learning
- Seek a lot of movement
- Poor attention
- Picky eater
- Unsure how to play with other children
- Poor communication and social skills
- Avoid play equipment that involves movement, like slide or swings

The following are some examples of sensory processing activities for children:

Visual

- Play with sensory bottles
- Light up toys
- Puzzles



Auditory

- Listen to music
- Wear noise cancelling headphones
- Sing



Tactile

- Finger paint
- Walk barefoot on grass
- Play with sand



Olfactory

- Scented stickers
- Scented markers
- Scented dough



Gustatory

- Chew gum
- Blow party blowers
- Different types of foods



Proprioception

- Climb on playground equipment
- Sweeping
- Jump on trampoline



Vestibular

- Swing
- Slides
- Dance



For more information or concerns about your child's sensory processing skills, please consult your child's occupational therapist or contact your pediatrician. You may also refer to www.aota.org for additional information.

References

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