

What is Sensory Processing?

What are Sensory Processing Difficulties?

Sensory processing disorders occur when an individual has difficulty processing and integrating sensory information from their environment and producing an appropriate response

This can look like an individual missing or misinterpreting important sensory information in their environment **or** demonstrating inappropriate responses to environmental stimuli

We all have different thresholds for detecting sensory input within our environment. This determines how we respond to the sounds, sights, smells, and sensations in our environment.

High Threshold

An individual needs sensory input at a higher intensity level than most to detect and register it

- Examples: A child who doesn't seem to notice when they bump into something, doesn't seem to hear when you call their name, doesn't notice when they have food on their face, unaware of where their body is in space (may seem clumsy)

Low Threshold

An individual detects sensory input at a much lower intensity than most

- Examples: Doesn't like the feel of tags in their shirts, cries when hearing loud noises, gags with strong smells, dislikes their hands being messy, highly visually distracted

What does this usually look like?

High Threshold	Low Threshold
<p>Children who have high thresholds for processing input tend to present in one of two ways:</p> <p><u>Sensory Seeker</u>: Because they need more sensory input than most to activate their sensory system, they spend their days seeking out sensory input in their environment to help "wake up" their systems to self-regulate</p> <p><u>Sedentary or Low Arousal Level</u>: Because it takes so much input to regulate their sensory systems, they choose to remain in a hypo-responsive state due to the energy it takes to try and wake up their sensory systems</p>	<p>Children who have low thresholds for processing input tend to present in one of two ways:</p> <p><u>Sensory Sensitivity</u>- These children may exhibit strong emotional or behavioral reactions to sensory input in their environment, especially when it is unexpected or unanticipated</p> <p><u>Sensation Avoiding</u>- These children may flat out refuse to engage in activities or go to environments that have sensory input that they find distressing or aversive</p>

We also may have different thresholds for each sense. For example, a child could be sensitive to touch and smell but be constantly seeking out movement and deep pressure.

How can this impact behavior?

When we have problematic behaviors, especially around a specific time of day or activity, we have to really consider the environment and factors that may not be so obvious

- Is the child under responsive to auditory stimuli and often doesn't process verbal directions which may be why they seem like they aren't following verbal directions?
- Is a child sensitive to loud noises and too much unpredictable movement so they have a meltdown every time you try to bring them to a family birthday party?

If you think your child's difficulty in an activity or environment may be due to sensory processing difficulties, collaborating with an Occupational Therapist can help you figure out how to support your child in that setting to allow them to participate more and decrease negative responses

Strategies to Help Regulate the Sensory System

Strategies to Help Alert the Nervous System	Strategies to Help Calm the Nervous System
(Good for Under-Responsive Kids)	(Good for Sensitive Kids or kids who need to calm their bodies)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Movement, Movement, Movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jumping on a trampoline ○ Animal walks ○ Spinning (in office chair, sit and spin) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Anytime you do spinning activities where the adult is controlling the pace, start off slow and monitor the child's response ■ If your child has seizures, do not spin without guidance from a physician ○ Being upside down ○ Scooter board ○ Bouncing on therapy ball ○ Jumping and crashing in a soft area ● Glider or rocker chair ● Messy tactile play (shaving cream, sensory doughs, finger painting) ● Crunchy snacks ● Water bottle with a sport top or chewy spout ● Upbeat music ● Fidgets ● Playground activities (swinging, hanging, climbing, sliding) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Linear movement (Rocking chair, swing) ● Headphones or calming music ● Playdoh, kinetic sand, sensory bins, popping bubble wrap ● Animal Walks or Wheelbarrow Walks ● Jumping or crashing into pillow/blanket pit ● Yoga cards ● "Heavy work" helping around the house that use their muscles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Push/pull heavy laundry basket ○ Push/pull/carry heavy (unbreakable) groceries ○ Placing wet laundry into the dryer ○ Carry stack or bag of books ● Tug-of-war games ● Obstacle courses (over, under, through, around obstacles) ● Pulling a heavy wagon ● Roll up tightly in a blanket (like a burrito or hot dog) or using a body sock ● Drinking liquids through a straw (or other thicker liquids such as milkshake, pudding, jello, applesauce, yogurt) ● Blowing games such as bubbles, blow cotton ball or ping pong ball across the floor (can use a straw to blow) ● Use spray bottle in bathtub, to water flowers, for a water fight ● Lie on floor on his stomach propped up on elbows (this gives sensory input and helps strengthen upper back and arms) while reading books or doing puzzles ● Give deep pressure massages on arms, legs, back

If you have specific questions about how to help your child with sensory processing difficulties, please contact your child's Occupational Therapist and they can give you more specific information on how to support your child.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to reach out to Kerry Fallon (Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy Coordinator) at fallonk@cccsd15.net at District 15