

## Strategies:

**Accept Stimming - Stimming: reduces anxiety and often encourages feelings of well-being and happiness.** Stimming can include sounds and repetitive movements—unless unsafe or harmful, accept stimming behaviours. If an individual develops a harmful stim identify which sensory system the stim is supporting and re-direct to a more proactive stimming behaviour.

**Sensory Overload** - If a child is experiencing the fight, flight or freeze response, stand back, reduce all language and allow them time to calm if safe to do so. Remember “less is more”.

**Identify & Label Sensory States** - Observe and label pupils different sensory states; slow & tired, just right, fast & wiggly and fast & emotional (Brukner,2014). Label and share own sensory states throughout the day.

**Sensory Enabling Environment** - Complete a sensory audit for schools and classrooms. Be aware of seating, lighting and distractions around white board areas. Provide visual supports to reinforce learning objectives and personalised writing tools.

**Teach Self-Regulation Strategies** - Introduce self-regulation anywhere body breaks (Brukner, 2014) and identify which sensory movements the pupil finds most comfortable. The Zones of Regulation® (Kuypers,2011) and Social Stories™ (Gray, 2015) also support teaching of self-regulation strategies.

**Sensory Regulation/Thinking Tools** - Availability of sensory regulation tools during lessons to aid attention and concentration—Incorporate rules for appropriate use.

**Sensory Circuits** - Include sensory circuits into the school timetable at the start of the day and after lunch to support pupils attention and focus in readiness for learning.

**Break Times** - Provide structured activities at break times.

**If in doubt, heavy work!**- Heavy work regulates the power senses (vestibular and proprioception) and are activities that involve pushing, pulling or lifting heavy objects and have a calming effect. Encourage frequent heavy work breaks throughout the day and at the end of break times. Wear back pack during transitions.

Incorporate personalised sensory regulation strategies/sensory breaks into individual pupils positive behaviour support plans and EHCP's.

*Pupils who require glasses or hearing aids are not expected to learn and develop without them - please do not expect pupils who are unable to regulate their sensory systems to be able to learn without sensory regulation input and strategies.*

## The Whole School:

- ◆ A culture of celebrating individual differences
- ◆ Acceptance of stimming
- ◆ Sensory enabling environments incorporating quiet spaces, heavy work boxes, sensory circuits and thinking tools
- ◆ Clear concise communication supported with visuals
- ◆ Understanding and open culture about sensory processing differences
- ◆ Teach sensory self-regulation body breaks
- ◆ Adults to understand that an increase in sensory behaviours may indicate heightened anxiety and requires careful monitoring
- ◆ Incorporate opportunities to explore the senses throughout the school day and include in curriculum activities

*Pupils who are over or under aroused to different sensory stimuli are not in the optimal place for learning. Teaching pupils to be aware of their different sensory states and supporting them with identifying self regulation strategies and tools, whilst promoting sensory enabling environments, is key to ensuring that they are “just right” and ready learn, and a prerequisite for developing emotional regulation and building resilience.*

**In order to understand the effects of sensory processing difficulties on physical and emotional well-being, it is necessary to view it as a form of ongoing stress (Ostovar, 2009).**

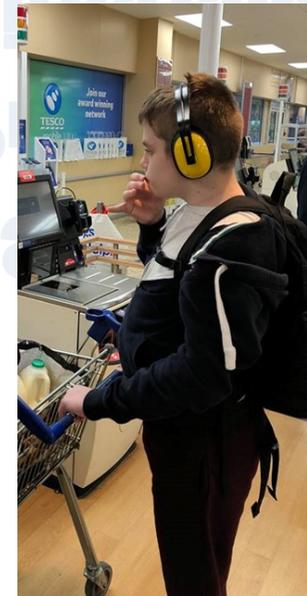
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# Sensory Processing Differences



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## Presentation of pupils with sensory differences.

### Some behaviours to look out for:

- Oversensitive to loud sounds or specific noises (fluorescent lights, vacuums, hand dryers etc.)
- Shields eyes from bright lights and sun light
- Doesn't want to get hands messy
- Jumps, spins or rocks incessantly
- Walks on tiptoes
- Tears off clothes with labels or prefers to wear clothes inside out to avoid seams
- Removes shoes and socks at every opportunity
- Does not appear to feel pain
- Often touches others too hard or soft
- Has a limited diet - resists new foods and textures
- Unable to ascertain when full from eating or distinguish between hunger and thirst
- Difficulties with dressing
- Chews on everything
- Consistently smells objects, food and people
- Dislikes haircuts, teeth brushing and nail cutting

### How to identify in class:

#### Observation

- Unable to sit still, frequently gets out of seat
- Difficulties with focus and concentration
- Appears to have selective hearing or difficulty listening
- Poor fine motor skills for handwriting or cutting—tires easy with fine motor activities
- Finds certain school environments/activities difficult, in particular the dining hall, play ground, assemblies and PE
- Struggles at times of transition between activities and different environments



#### Sensory Checklist

If sensory behaviours occur frequently or have an adverse effect on learning and well-being it is recommended that a sensory checklist is completed to identify which sensory systems require targeted support.

If sensory behaviours have a severe impact on every day activities please consult a GP.

## Sensory Processing Differences

Sensory processing allows us to receive and process information from each of our eight senses so that we can make effective use of the information to respond appropriately to the demands of the environment .

**The 8 Senses** - Sound (Auditory), Sight (Visual), Touch (Tactile), Taste (Gustatory), Smell (Olfactory), Vestibular (Balance and Orientation in Space), Proprioception (Sense of muscle and/or joint movements) & Interoception (Sensations related to psychological/physical condition of the body).

### What happens when sensory processing does not work effectively?

- Sensory Information is not processed smoothly in the brain
- Some children receive too much information
- Some children receive too little information
- Most children have a combinations of both!

### Three Main Types of Sensory Processing Difficulties:

1. Over arousal (Hyper reactive)
2. Under/low arousal (Hypo reactive)
3. Sensory seeking (Sensory Craving)

Characterised by difficulties with attention, focus, registration, arousal and emotional and behavioural responses.

**Sensory Overload**– Occurs when the brain receives too much input from the senses than it can process. It may feel like extreme irritability, discomfort and restlessness and can cause the physiological fight, flight, freeze or flock response.

**Learning** - School environments can be extremely busy and present with many sensory processing challenges which may trigger distressing behaviours.

**Home Life** - Children may be adept at “holding it together” in school when presented with sensory processing difficulties and meltdown at home or in a safe space.

## Implications for Teaching and Learning

**Environment** - Busy classrooms with lots of displays can cause sensory overload. Break times and lunch times can cause over stimulation or shut down due to noise levels, heightened smell, and close proximity of other students.

**Work** - Sensory processing difficulties may prevent pupils planning and carrying out learning activities effectively. Resources used to support learning also need consideration to fit with the learners sensory profile. Handwriting may be difficult or tire pupils easily.

**Friendships** - Pupils may distance themselves from others at break times for fear of bumping into others or equipment. Alternatively, they may be eager to touch everyone and every object. It may also be difficult for some pupils to understand and keep up with the rules of different group games and therefore opt to play alone.

**Emotional Resilience** - In order to develop emotional resilience pupils must first be able to regulate their sensory system. Pupils cannot be expected to understand the concept of different feelings especially how to be calm if they are unaware of how to calm and regulate their sensory system.

**Growing Up and Puberty** - Pupils with sensory processing differences may need additional support when they reach puberty due to being under or over aroused to bodily changes. Some pupils require support with social learning in regards to personal hygiene and personal care needs. Additionally, sensory differences may appeared heightened at this time due to change in hormones.

**Transitions** - Due to the different sensory inputs that occur with each transition it can be challenging for pupils with sensory processing difficulties to move between one activity to the next and to different environments. Big transitions such as changing year groups and moving from primary school to secondary school can be stressful for pupils with sensory processing difficulties as it may take time to desensitize to new sensory stimuli in different environments.

Observe pupils that experience sensory processing differences as they may already be using their own strategies to self-regulate that can be adapted for learning. Also look for any sensory processing strengths and incorporate these into learning opportunities.