

## SENSORY PROCESSING

### What is sensory processing and what can I do to help?

#### What is Sensory Processing?

Sensory processing is when a child's sensory system picks up information from their environment and that information is then sent to the nervous system, which processes the information and generates a response or reaction to what is happening around them. Guided exposure to playful sensory experiences is the best way to promote healthy development of the sensory systems. This ensures that children learn to process, integrate, and generate appropriate responses to the sensory information in their environment.

Sensory experiences are so powerful that they can "rewire" the brain. These experiences can help children understand their environment more clearly, making them feel safe. Or the experiences can be overwhelming, causing children to become defensive and withdrawn.

It is important to understand that no two children will react to the same sensory experience the same. Children's' sensory behaviour can also be unpredictable due to children receiving sensory input all day, every day. Think of a child's body like a 'sensory bank'. Some days a child may get a lot of beneficial sensory input (money in the bank) and be able to regulate well when an uncomfortable sensory situation comes up. On other days, a child's day may be full of disturbing and annoying sensory input. On these days, the negative input takes 'money' from the bank and when the bank is 'bankrupt' is when a child has a meltdown.

#### The Eight Senses



**Tactile (touch)** is found in the skin. It's function is to provide information about the environment and object qualities (touch, pressure, texture, hard, soft, sharp, dull, heat, cold, pain)

**Visual (sight)** is found in the retina of the eye. It's function is to provide information about objects and people. Helps us define boundaries as we move through time and space



**Auditory (hearing)** is found in the inner ear. It's function is to provide information about sounds in the environment (loud, soft, high, low, near, far).

**Vestibular (balance)** is found in the inner ear. It's function is to provide information on where our body is in space and whether or not our surroundings are moving



**Olfactory (smell)** is found in the receptors in the nose. It's function is to provide information on different types of smell (musty, acrid, putrid, flowery,

**Vestibular (balance)** is found in the inner ear. It's function is to provide information on where our body is in space and whether or not our surroundings are moving



**Proprioception** (body awareness) is found in the muscles and joints. It's function is to provide information about where a certain body part is and how it is moving

## How do you know what sensory activities to do?

Two things to keep in mind:

1. Proprioception is the ruler over all the other senses. Proprioceptive activities help the brain organise and regulate, making it so much easier to handle all the other sensory input coming its way.
2. Seekers AND avoiders will **both** benefit from sensory play in that particular sense.

### Proprioceptive Activities

#### No Equipment

- March
- Wrestle
- Arm wrestle
- Bear hugs
- Joint compression
- Push against a wall
- Hand presses
- Push-Ups
- Jump
- Crawl
- Animal walks
- Sit on your child (yes, I'm serious)

#### Common Household Items

- Pillow fight
- Pull something heavy around in a blanket
- Climb
- Swing
- Play-dough

#### Special Equipment

- Swim
- Trampoline
- Crash pad
- Climbing dome
- Theraputty
- Scooter board
- Weighted compression vest
- Weighted stuffed animal

### Oral Sensory Activities

#### No Equipment

- Make silly faces
- Whistle
- Roll your tongue
- Any type of heavy work

#### Common Household Items

- Blow bubbles
- Chew gum or chewy foods
- Chomp on crunchy foods like carrots
- Suck a smoothie through a straw
- Slurp noodles
- Use a straw to blow items around (e.g. ping pong balls, cotton balls, paint etc).
- Musical instruments

#### Special Equipment

- Chewable jewellery
- Chewable keychain
- Vibrating toothbrush
- Airbrush markers
- Water bottles with a biteable straw

### Calming Activities

#### No Equipment

- Be upside down
- Bear hugs
- Get outside
- Look up
- Sing
- Animal Breaths
- Stretch
- Make silly faces
- Any kind of heavy work
- Phrases that help calm a child

#### Common Household Items

- Get wrapped up in a blanket
- Read a favourite story
- Puzzles
- Swinging or rocking
- Hold an ice cube
- Stuffed animals
- Colour or crafts
- Blow bubbles
- Dim lights
- Calming Music

#### Special Equipment

- Noise cancelling headphones
- Calming smells
- Crash pad
- Fidget toys
- Sensory toys
- Weighted blanket
- Squeeze toys
- Mermaid Fabric

### Vestibular Activities

#### No Equipment

- Spin
- Hang upside down
- Run
- Jump
- Skip
- Roll down a hill
- Dance
- Animal walks
- Yoga

#### Common Household Items

- Swing
- Hop Scotch
- Ride a bike
- Walk on an unstable surface (pillows, couch, cushions)
- Hang off couch
- Jump rope

#### Special Equipment

- Trampoline
- River stones
- Monster feet stilts
- Curvy balance beam
- Classic balance beam
- Balance board