



Sensory Processing Disorder

Myth busting – What it Isn't

- An excuse for 'naughty' behaviour
- A way of children just getting out of class
- Undiagnosed ADHD (although children with ADHD may also have SPD)
- Bad parenting

What is Sensory Processing?

“Sensory processing” refers to our ability to take in information through our senses, organise and interpret that information and make a meaningful response.

What is Sensory Processing Disorder?

SPD is a complex disorder of the brain that affects developing children and adults. People with SPD misinterpret everyday sensory information, such as touch, sound and movement. They may feel bombarded by information, they may seek out intense sensory experiences, or they may have other symptoms.

What are our eight senses?

- Touch
- Taste
- Smell
- Sight
- Hearing
- Proprioception - our sense of called body awareness. It is essential to help the brain to know where the body and limbs are in space. It helps us to know how hard or soft we are pulling or pushing.
- Vestibular – our earliest sense to develop. It supports balance, postural control, muscle tone, spatial orientation and alertness.
- Interoception – our sense of the physiological/physical condition of the body. Hunger and thirst are examples of interoception. It is closely linked to our vestibular and proprioceptive senses and how we perceive our own bodies.

What causes SPD?

- Genetic or hereditary
- Prenatal exposure to chemicals, medications, toxins, smoke, drugs, alcohol, great emotional stress, virus, chronic illness or problem with the placenta
- Multiple births such as twins or triplets
- Prematurity or low birth rate
- Birth trauma
- Postnatal exposure to environmental pollutants, abuse, insufficient stimulation, lengthy hospitalisation and placement in care

What are the common signs of sensory issues?

Signs there might be a sensory issue, for both children and adults, may include:

- Being sensitive to sensory information (over-responding)
- Being slow to notice or being oblivious to sensory information (under-responding)
- Looking for more sensory information (sensory seeking or craving)
- Finding it difficult to plan and organise their movement (dyspraxia)
- Having poor balance and being clumsy (poor postural control)
- Having poor awareness of the qualities of sensory information (discrimination)

Children and adults with sensory issues may be over ('hyper') or under ('hypo') responsive.

Sensory Over-Responsive (Hyper-responsive)	Predisposition to respond too much, too soon, or for too long to sensory stimuli most people find quite tolerable
Sensory Under-Responsive (Hypo-responsive)	Predisposition to be unaware of sensory stimuli, to have a delay before responding, responses are muted or responds with less intensity compared to the average person
Sensory craving	Driven to obtain sensory stimulation, but getting the stimulation results in disorganization and does not satisfy the drive for more

What can we do in class to support an individual with a sensory processing disorder?

With many different senses, three different ways of reacting, and every child's response being unique, there is no one solution.

If a child gives firm bear hugs, this would suggest they like to feel deep muscle pressure. In that case a light touch or tap on this child's shoulder to get in line at school could be an unpleasant sensation, and could scare them into an overreaction. If a child is constantly fiddling, a stress ball in class could help their concentration.

To help a child manage their sensory processing disorder both at home and in school look at the activity, the environment and the individuals around them. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ***Would this activity result in the child under-reacting, seeking out sensations or over reacting? If so, can it be changed?***
E.g. Sometimes 10 minutes on a trampette can calm one child but over-excite another.
- ***Is the environment set up to help that child?***
E.g. If a child becomes scared by too much noise, is it possible to create a den or quiet reading corner? Perhaps a child who under-reacts may benefit from sitting on a wobble cushion to reawaken their senses.

Sensory diets

As a child becomes older, sensory diets can be a powerful behavioural tool in helping them to respond appropriately to their senses. A sensory diet is a personalised activity plan, designed to provide the sensory input a person needs to stay focused and organised throughout the day. Done well, it should help with attention, concentration, sensory reactions and self-regulation. The concept is that the child rates their body in relation to a car engine, if it is going too fast then you need to look at the activity to see why. The aim is to have the engine running 'just right'.

An occupational therapist (OT) with training in sensory processing disorders can help to devise a sensory diet, and offer advice which needs to be specific to an individual child.

Symptoms Checklist

School Age:

- Child is overly sensitive to stimulation, overreacts to or does not like touch, noise, smells, etc.
- Child is easily distracted in the classroom, often out of his/her seat, fidgety.
- Child is easily overwhelmed in the playground, during break and lunchtimes and in class.
- Child is slow to perform tasks.
- Child has difficulty performing or avoids fine motor tasks such as handwriting.
- Child appears clumsy and stumbles often, slouches in chair.
- Child craves rough play, tackling/wrestling games.
- Child is slow to learn new activities.
- Child is in constant motion.
- Child has difficulty learning new motor tasks and prefers sedentary activities.
- Child has difficulty making friends (overly aggressive or passive/ withdrawn).
- Child gets stuck on tasks and has difficulty changing to another task.
- Child confuses similar sounding words, misinterprets questions or requests.
- Child has difficulty reading, especially aloud.
- Child stumbles over words; speech lacks fluency and rhythm is hesitant.

(Taken from www.spdstar.org/basic/symptoms-checklist)

More information can be found at: www.griffinot.com/sensory-processing-disorder