



Understanding Your Child's Sensory Needs

A Parent's Guide to Sensory Processing

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1 What is Sensory Processing?

Sensory processing is how our brain receives, organizes, and responds to information from our senses. For some children, the brain processes sensory information differently — leading to responses that can seem confusing or challenging. This isn't about being "difficult." Sensory differences are real neurological variations.

The 8 Sensory Systems

- **Sight (Visual)**

Processing light, color, movement, and patterns

- **Hearing (Auditory)**

Processing sounds, volume, pitch, and background noise

- **Touch (Tactile)**

Experiencing textures, pressure, temperature, and pain

- **Taste (Gustatory)**

Sensitivity to flavors, food textures, and temperatures

- **Smell (Olfactory)**

Reactions to scents and odors in the environment

- **Vestibular**

Balance, movement, and spatial orientation

- **Proprioception**

Body awareness — knowing where the body is in space

- **Interoception**

Internal signals: hunger, thirst, needing the bathroom

Over-Responsive

- Covers ears with loud sounds
- Avoids certain textures or foods
- Gets overwhelmed in busy places
- Distressed by tags in clothing

Under-Responsive

- Seeks intense movement or pressure
- Doesn't notice mess on face/hands
- High pain tolerance
- Craves spinning, crashing, jumping



2 Strategies & Activities



Create a Calm-Down Space

Designate a quiet area with soft lighting, weighted blankets, noise-canceling headphones, or fidget tools where your child can self-regulate when feeling overwhelmed.



Build a Sensory Diet

Work with your therapist to create a daily schedule of sensory activities — movement breaks, deep pressure, oral input — that help your child stay regulated throughout the day.



Use Visual Schedules

Visual schedules and timers help children predict what's coming next, reducing anxiety around transitions and making daily routines smoother for everyone.



Respect Their Experience

If your child avoids textures, sounds, or foods, these are real neurological experiences, not defiance. Validate their feelings while gently expanding their comfort zone.

Calming Activities

● Deep Pressure

Bear hugs, weighted blankets, compression clothing, or a "burrito roll" in a blanket.

● Slow Swinging

Gentle, rhythmic swinging in a linear motion (front to back) is naturally calming.

● Water Play

Pouring, scooping, and playing with warm water engages touch in a soothing way.

Pro Tip from Our Therapists

Follow your child's lead. If they gravitate toward spinning, swinging, or jumping, their body is telling you what it needs. Build on these preferences for regulation.





3 When to Seek Help

You know your child best. If something feels off, it's always worth exploring. Consider reaching out to a pediatric occupational therapist if:

- ! Sensory reactions interfere with daily activities
- ! Your child avoids activities other children enjoy
- ! Meltdowns are frequent and disproportionate
- ! Teachers have expressed concerns about sensory behaviors
- ! Daily routines feel overwhelming for your family



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Get Started

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