

# Sensory Processing Tip Sheet

## What is a sensory processing disorder?

Everyone processes sensations from their environment—using 8 different senses. People with a sensory processing disorder (SPD) interpret these sensations inefficiently. As the central nervous system mismanages them, they have difficulty responding appropriately. Individuals with SPD struggle to adapt to these sensations and often resulting in big responses, leaving the individual dysregulated.

A **pre-school aged child** may be experiencing a sensory processing disorder if:

- they are overly sensitive to sensory input—overreacting to taste, touch, light, sounds, or smells
- they seem unaware of the space around them
- they have difficulty with fine motor skills such as fastening, buttoning, etc.
- they appear clumsy and awkward, having difficulty moving their body through space
- they struggle with learning new motor tasks
- they are in constant motion—as if driven by a motor
- they struggle to understand personal space
- they are drawn to touch everything around them
- they have difficulty making friends
- they are difficult to regulate or calm down
- they struggle to transition from one activity to another
- they experience sudden, extreme mood changes, including tantrums that are unexpected
- they have low muscle tone and slumps when sitting or standing
- they do not seem to understand verbal instructions

In addition to the tendencies above, **school aged children** may also experience the following:

- easily distracted
- overwhelmed by social situations, especially when they don't go as expected
- slow to perform and complete tasks
- craves rough physical interaction
- confuses words that sound similar and misinterprets language—especially questions and directions
- lacks speech fluency
- struggles with rhythm

## How can I help?

Integration of a sensory diet is highly beneficial for an individual with a sensory integration disorder. The goal for these individuals is regulation—calming an over-active child, engaging an underactive child, moderating reactions to sensory input, reducing self-stimulating behaviors, and increasing productivity through teaching self-regulation strategies. Implementation of a sensory diet is done best in collaboration with everyone invested in the child, which includes parents, teachers, therapists, etc. Here is a list of strategies for that “sensory diet”:

### **Visual (Sight) Perception Strategies:**

- Minimize visual noise—hanging from walls and ceilings

- Use visuals—to organize, label, and give instructions
- Pair spoken language with a demonstration
- Use lamps instead of overhead fluorescent lighting or use covers for fluorescent lighting

#### **Auditory (Sound) Perception Strategies:**

- Minimize spoken directions
- Use earplugs or head phones
- Use social stories to explain the environment to help establish expected behaviors and reactions
- Slowly integrate an individual into a new environment through multiple visits—increasing what is expected on each consecutive visit

#### **Tactile (Touch) Perception Strategies:**

- When an individual pulls away from touch, acknowledge their resistance and discontinue
- Make exceptions for clothing that is “more comfortable”—making sure labels are removed
- Allow small hand fidgets—something squishy, smooth, textured, etc.

#### **Olfactory (Smell) Perception Strategies:**

- Promote minimally scented environments—candles, perfumes, dolognes, lotions, air fresheners, laundry detergents
- Have tissues available

#### **Proprioceptive (Body Position) Perception Strategies:**

- Facilitate up and down movements—jumping rope, throwing medicine balls at the floor, jumping jacks, squat jumps, etc. to energize a lethargic individual
- Engage individual in swinging movements to calm an individual
- Encourage crunchy or chewy snacks—bubble gum, licorice, skittles, pretzels, carrots, whole apples (slices don’t provide as much feedback), etc.
- Promote running for the sake of deep pressure

#### **Vestibular (Movement) Perception Strategies:**

- Implement heavy work such as stacking chairs, carrying books, taking garbage out, etc.
- Change positions slowly—sit to stand
- Allow breaks
- Play repetitive games with alternating and rhythmic movement

*Progress may be slow and regression is to be expected, but commitment to these strategies can help teach self-regulation to individuals with sensory processing disorders.*

Sources:

<https://www.spdstar.org/basic/symptoms-checklist>

<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageId=471>

<https://www.lifespan.org/lifespan-living/what-sensory-processing-disorder>