

Sensory Processing Disorder:

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is a condition in which the brain has trouble receiving and responding appropriately to information that comes in through the senses. SPD can affect people in only one sense—for example, just touch or just sight or just movement—or in multiple senses. One person with SPD may over-respond to sensation and find clothing, physical contact, light, sound, food, or other sensory input to be unbearable. Another might under-respond and show little or no reaction to stimulation, even pain or extreme hot and cold. In children whose sensory processing of messages from the muscles and joints is impaired, posture and motor skills can be affected.



Four SPD characteristics can be identified by Preschool age:

Over Responsive • Under Responsive • Sensory Craving • Motor Challenged

Teachers who are mindful of sensory processing sensitivities when they are setting up their classroom and while planning lessons can be a tremendous help to sensory sensitive children and their classmates. *For more information visit: www.spdstar.org*



Over Responsive

Children with over responsivity are among the most likely to cry, have meltdowns or hit back. These children are more sensitive to sensory stimulation than most people.

Under Responsive

Children with under responsivity are often quiet and self-contained, which may go undetected in infancy, but is more noticeable at toddler age and beyond when children's job is to play with others.

Sensory Craving

Children with Sensory Craving have an insatiable need for sensory experiences and actively search for sensation often in ways that are socially unacceptable. What may be perceived as bad behavior is sensory related.

Motor Challenges

Children with motor sequencing and planning difficulties have challenges in coordinating movements, such as dressing, playing catch or misjudging spatial areas.

A child with Over Responsivity may:

- feel typical rooms are too bright, too noisy, too hot, too cluttered, etc.
- have dramatic responses to sensory input
- have aversions to anything messy
- have extreme difficulty falling asleep
- dislike being held or rocked
- respond aggressively OR severely withdraw depending on coping strategy for experiencing too much sensory input

A child with Under Responsivity may:

- enjoy solitary activities
- choose no play at all
- not complain of being bored
- react with indifference
- not notice other people trying to get their attention
- have limited social interactions
- be exceptionally unmotivated to play
- not feel a cut or pain

A child with Sensory Craving may:

- appear fidgety
- be hyperactive
- be restless at school
- constantly seek sensory stimulation
- be frequently disregulated by sensory stimulation
- appear dysfunctional
- seem extremely disorganized
- become demanding when search for input is stopped
- climb on a person or seem to be to invade personal space

A child with Motor Challenges may:

- have difficulty moving well
- have challenges performing movement sequences
- appear awkward and clumsy
- be slow to reach milestones (crawling, walking, or riding a bike)
- be physically weak
- have poor core strength
- not have intrinsic motivation to seek physical activities

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Sensory Processing Disorder Red Flags

Preschool 3-4 years



Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) can affect one sense or multiple senses. Symptoms vary for children who have SPD. Consider the child's behavior over the last several weeks. If you recognize several symptoms in a child, screening for SPD may be warranted. *For more information visit: www.spdstar.org*



Sensory Over Responsivity

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reacts aggressively or severely withdraws when unexpectedly touched | <input type="checkbox"/> Excessively cautious and afraid to try new things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids messy play (finger painting, water, play dough) | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids swings or slides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upset at transition times (moving from quiet activity to louder activity) | <input type="checkbox"/> Afraid or shuts down in noisy classroom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fearful of unexpected loud sounds (noisy toys, fire alarm, toilet flush) | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids group activities & withdraws from relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reactive to food smells | <input type="checkbox"/> Complains of clothing tags or wears limited clothing items |

Sensory Under Responsivity

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does not cry when seriously hurt (e.g. not bothered by scrapes and cuts) | <input type="checkbox"/> Almost always prefers sedentary activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does not notice when touched | <input type="checkbox"/> May be unaware when he/she needs to use toilet or unaware when wet from toilet accident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Must be touched when his/her name is called to get attention | <input type="checkbox"/> Often spacey or tuned out in his/her own world |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seems indifferent to messy hands, face, or clothing | <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to perform a task using his/her hands without watching his/her hands |

Sensory Craving

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constantly enjoys crashing, bumping, and rough-housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Seeks vibration, watches spinning objects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excessively spinning, swinging, rolling | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry or explosive after being still for a short time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constantly touching objects and people "In your face and in your space" | <input type="checkbox"/> Makes disruptive noises & sounds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble turn taking in conversation, constantly talks | <input type="checkbox"/> Smells toys or objects |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Intense, demanding, hard to calm |

Motor Challenges

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor balance on playground equipment | <input type="checkbox"/> Slumps sitting in chair or on floor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desire for sedentary activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty running, jumping, hopping, skipping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor crayon/pencil grasp | <input type="checkbox"/> Delayed hand dominance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Takes a long time to do self-care activities like dressing | <input type="checkbox"/> Has difficulty organizing personal spaces |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has difficulty playing with small objects | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor planning and sequencing of tasks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor execution of timed tasks | |

Creating a Sensory Friendly Learning Environment

Preschool 3-4 years



If you have a student experiencing sensory sensitivities there are things you can do to ease his/her experience at school so they can be more successful in the classroom. This may also help you as a teacher and may help the other students in your class. For more information visit: www.spdstar.org



Sensory Over Responsivity

Stay on a regular routine so the kids know what to expect. Use a visual schedule and announce activity several minutes before activity will start.

To help regulate a child, encourage slow rocking, deep breathing, rolling up tightly in a blanket, sitting in a beanbag, using a weighted blanket or lap cloth.

Child chooses to have a "time in" (rather than "time out") by self initiating going into a small space to self regulate.

Kids just need a short movement to increase readiness to learn or a heavy work break and typically they will be ready to learn again.

Allow child to wear noise canceling headphones, play soft music, chant a phrase, or use a white noise machine.

Encourage jumping, running, movement interspersed before and after sitting activities (e.g., circle time).

For visual sensitivities, dim lights; watch a lava lamp.

Smell lavender, vanilla on an aroma bracelet to calm.

Increase organization in classroom to provide a calm context.

Sensory Under Responsivity

To arouse a child visually use bright lights; moving "star" across ceiling.

Encourage jumping, running, movement interspersed before and after sitting activities (e.g., circle time).

Play loud, arhythmic music

Incorporate push/pull activities; animal walks.

Use light wind from window or fan; provide fidget toys with light touch, e.g., feathers.

To increase interest in fine motor: use tools such as glitter pens, smelly markers, and gel pencils.

Smell mint, cinnamon, fresh air on an aroma bracelet can be stimulating.

Sensory Craving

Have seating that allows the child to stand/move easily, such as a "wobble" seat cushion, ball chair or bean chair.

Don't take away a child's playtime because their work isn't done. This will make the behaviors worse.

Provide movement activities with "thinking activities."

Have child take a brief walk at specified intervals.

Provide and let the child use fidget objects to keep hands and feet controlled.

Have child do "heavy work" (put chairs up on desks, push heavy box of balls out for outdoor play).

Provide smaller spaces when able.

Suggest chores/jobs such as delivering messages to the office.

Use interrupted movement activities such as stop and go games.

Use a calming activity after active time. (E.g. deep breathing after play).

Motor Challenges

Incorporate activities that will strengthen core muscles.

Incorporate motor activities with resistance.

Allow children to work in alternate positions (on their stomachs on the floor, standing, on a vertical surface such as the chalk/white board).

Have seating that allows the child to stand/move easily. Use a "wobble" seat cushion, ball chair or bean bag.