

# Sensory Processing

## What is Sensory Processing?

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Sensory processing is the ability to organise and interpret information we receive through our senses in order for us to respond appropriately. For example, a child may hear a teacher giving an instruction, they process this information and then they follow the instruction.

## What are our senses?

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Children learn about the world around them through their senses; by touching objects, listening to sounds and noises, looking at everything they see, tasting new foods. We all receive information from the following senses:

- **Tactile:** Gives information about touch, including temperature, pressure and pain.
- **Auditory:** Gives information about hearing.
- **Visual:** Gives information about vision.
- **Gustatory:** Gives information about taste.
- **Olfactory:** Gives information about smell.
- **Proprioception:** Gives information about body position.
- **Vestibular:** Gives information about movement.

## Why is this important for your child?

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Children with autism spectrum disorder may receive, process and respond to sensory input differently. This may impact on their ability to sit still, go to a shopping centre or have a bath. Some children are more sensitive to sensory input or avoid it, others may not register sensory input or they may seek more input to meet their needs.

Here are some common examples you may be able to relate to:

- Holds hands over ears to protect ears from sound e.g. loud unexpected noises, music.
- Easily distracted in the classroom e.g. noises, people coming in and out, artwork hanging from the ceiling.
- May not respond to their name called.
- Has trouble putting puzzles together.
- Avoids eye contact.
- Seeks movement activities, appears 'on the go' e.g. rocking, swinging, running.
- Has trouble keeping their balance.
- Avoids messy play activities e.g. painting, water play, sand play.
- Dislikes wearing shoes, socks or certain fabrics.
- Seems unaware of hot or cold temperatures and pain.
- Is a picky eater, avoiding food of particular taste, texture, temperature.

## Strategies to help your child

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Every child has their own individual way of processing sensory information. Every child also responds to sensory strategies differently. It is important to trial different strategies and see what is most effective for your child.

Here are a few ideas to help your child calm if they are upset, as well as some ideas to help your child be alert for learning.

### Calming Strategies

- **Auditory:** quiet music, soft voice, slow speech
- **Oral:** food you can suck or chew, blowing bubbles, use a straw
- **Vision:** soft/no light, remove clutter, block distractions (e.g. quiet corner, screen)
- **Tactile:** deep pressure massage, vibration, sit in bean bag, hug, roll up in a blanket
- **Proprioception:** weighted quilt/vest/lap item, heavy work, push against a wall
- **Vestibular:** slow linear movements (e.g. hammock, swing, rocking chair, rolling on a therapy ball)

### Alerting Strategies

- **Auditory:** music which is fast/varied sound/beat/volume, change tone of voice
- **Oral:** cold water, ice, chewy and sour sweets
- **Vision:** bright lights, stimulating environment
- **Tactile:** cooler room temperature, activities barefoot, light touch, hold or wear something cold, holding a fidget toy, gentle/quick skin rubbing
- **Proprioception:** wall/chair push ups, squeeze and stretch activities (putty, theraband), lying on tummy, tug-of-war, carrying books, pushing open door
- **Vestibular:** move'n'sit cushion, trampoline, frequent movement breaks, bouncing on a therapy ball

## How AEIOU incorporates sensory processing strategies

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- Each centre has a black sensory room with specialised equipment to provide a child with calming and alerting input (e.g. bubble machine, fibre optic lighting)
- Specialised therapy equipment is used depending on the individual child's needs (e.g. move 'n' sit cushion, chewy tube, therapy ball)
- Occupational Therapists embed movement experiences throughout the day to assist children to attend and remain alert (e.g. movement songs, outside play)

## Where can I get more information?

Please speak to the Occupational Therapist at your AEIOU Foundation centre for further information on sensory processing specific to your child.