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How Sensory Processing Issues



Affect Children in School

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What are Sensory Processing Issues?

- Some children have trouble modulating the information their senses take in:
 - Sound, touch, taste, sight and smell
 - Body awareness
 - Movement, as well as balance and coordination
- Children can be *oversensitive* or *undersensitive* to input or *both*, to an impairing or overwhelming degree



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Parents May Observe

- Children who are overwhelmed because of difficulty integrating information from their senses
- Unusual aversion to noise, light, shoes that are deemed too tight and clothes that are irritating
- Clumsiness and trouble climbing stairs (gross motor skills)
- Difficulty using a pencil or fastening buttons (fine motor skills)



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Baffling Behaviors

- Screaming if their faces get wet
- Throwing tantrums when you try to get them dressed
- Having an unusually high or low pain threshold
- Crashing into walls and even people
- Putting inedible things, including rocks and paint, into their mouths
- Dramatic mood swings and intense tantrums that are impossible to stop



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Fight or Flight Response

- Causes responses that may not be apparent to the rest of us
- Is why someone with sensory difficulties will shut down, try to escape the situation quickly, or become aggressive
- Another response for some “sensory children” is to gravitate toward the sensations and environments they find calming or stimulating



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Occupational Therapists

- Evaluate using a task analysis
- Design therapies to help children and adults acquire (or regain) the skills needed to perform the activities – or “occupations” of daily life
- Are master’s level health-care professionals, licensed by the state
- Consider a client’s physical well-being by also considering psychological, social and environmental factors that may affect functioning



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Occupational Therapists

- Help children with learning and attention issues improve their strength, planning, and organizational skills
- Help parents and teachers understand a child's capabilities
- Can provide services in a variety of locations and settings
- Can often be the first professional to work with a child that shows delays in mastering typical activities or displays unusual or disruptive behavior
- Evaluate a child's need for special equipment or assistive technology



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OT's Help With Sensory Issues

- Suggesting things like special seating, testing in a separate room
- Helping sensory seekers achieve an optimal level of arousal and regulation
- Providing movement activities like swinging and jumping
- Building sensory breaks into the day (walking, stretching, etc.)
- Providing calming input that helps children sit and focus



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Gross Motor Skills

- Involve major muscle groups
- Cause the child to struggle with balance, coordination, strength and endurance (walking, climbing, hopping, jumping, catching/throwing)
- Are enhanced by therapeutic activities like throwing/catching balls of various sizes and weights
- Are often addressed in tandem with physical therapy since some of their goals are so much aligned



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Fine Motor Skills

- Involve the small hand muscles
- Deficits cause lack of strength, motor control, dexterity
- Delays will make academics difficult (turning pages, writing, keyboarding)
- Are developed by practicing simple dexterity tasks under the direction of an OT
- Therapies are developed by OT's according to age and severity of deficits



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OT's Can Teach Self-Help Skills

To become proficient in self-help skills, children may need to work on fine motor skills

- Dressing and undressing (buttoning, zipping, tying shoes)
- Grooming (brushing teeth/hair, using the toilet)
- Eating (holding/using utensils)



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Treating Sensory Processing Issues

- Children experience *too much* or *too little* stimulation through their senses and have trouble integrating the information they are getting
- As a result, it's difficult, if not impossible, for them to feel comfortable and secure, function effectively, and be open to learning and socialization
- Key tools in Sensory Integration (SI) Therapy are bouncing, crashing, spinning



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Sensory Integration Therapy

- Specific movement activities, resistive body work, and brushing of the skin may help a child with sensory problems experience an optimal level of arousal and regulation
- Theories suggest this therapy helps “rewire” the brain so that children can appropriately integrate and respond to sensory input, allowing them to both make sense of and feel safer in the world



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The Additional Two Internal Senses

- Proprioception (body awareness)
 - Receptors found in joints and ligaments
 - Facilitate motor control and posture
- Vestibular (movement)
 - Receptors located in the inner ear
- Both tell the brain the body’s position and where it is in space, which is key to balance and coordination



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Sensory Integration Testing and Therapy

- Is a complex, ongoing forensic analysis of each child
- Begins with an evaluation for sensory defensiveness and cravings
- Considers observations and interviews with caregivers
- Often occurs in a setting outfitted with specialized equipment
- Can teach appropriate responses to sensations
- Provides physical outlets for children with behavior issues



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Sensory Diet

- Therapy needs to be carried over into the home and school
- OT's and caregivers work together to create a detailed schedule
- Therapies are specific to each child
- Home and school can be adapted to be "sensory smart"
 - Reduce visual clutter
 - Create quiet spaces
 - Provide weighted vests, blankets



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Practical Changes for Home and School

- Make sure your child's chair is a good fit for them; when seated, they should be able to put their feet flat on the floor and rest their elbows on the desk
- Try an inflated seated cushion or pillow so they can both squirm and stay seated
- Eliminate buzzing and flickering fluorescent lighting, if possible



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Practical Changes for Home and School

- Make sure your child's not sitting next to distracting sources of noise or light
- If the cafeteria is too stimulating, see about having a lunch buddy eat with them in a quieter room with a teacher or aide
- Have a clear visual schedule posted with plenty of preparation for transitions
- Be aware of what triggers negative reactions in your child's clothing



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Sensory Processing Therapies

- OT can help child understand where their body is in relation to other people and things, and the idea of personal space
- Provide sensory breaks such as walking in circles, jumping on mini-trampoline, or sucking on sour candy
- Allow for fidgets and chewable items, to provide sensory input
- Work on both fine and gross motor skills, so they're more confident, whether they're in gym class or taking notes




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