

Sensory Experimentation Table

The following table contains a list of problems and well recognised 'over the counter' solutions that can be tried with appropriate caution. Before trying an activity ask yourself 'is my child able to safely participate in the activity?' and 'what am I hoping to change?' Do not carry out the activity if you do not feel your child will be safe.

Once you have tried the activity over several days ask yourself 'is this useful – is it working the way I want it to?' If you don't feel it is useful or working then try another idea or get some specialist help from a qualified practitioner (Occupational Therapists have a good knowledge of sensory processing and can be accessed through the NHS or privately).

It is important to bear in mind that the behaviours that are listed below may also be the result of other circumstances not necessarily sensory based difficulties.

The difficulties should only be seen as a concern if they are interfering with function. Development happens at different rates in different children and therefore there is only likely to be a sensory based difficulty if a cluster of the behaviours mentioned below occur and in more than one environment.

Never force a child to participate in any of the activities suggested – stress is anti-therapeutic and fun increases development...have fun!

Work with the child – be sensory detectives together! Help teach the child to have effective autonomy over their sensory environment.



Sensory System	Possible problems related to the sensory system	Possible solutions to try
Tactile (touch)	<p>Under-sensitive tactile system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears to have a dulled sense of touch • Doesn't register pain or react to cuts or bruises • Poor fine motor skills • Weak grip • Likes messy play more than most children • Likes rough n tumble activities more than most children • Poor body awareness • Child likes a lot of hugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more opportunities to experience activities that involve increased feeling through the skin. e.g. a Lego activity where the child is finding pieces in a box of other Lego is better than playing on a 'games' console or similar device. • Play 'What's in the Box/bag'. Introduce a number of objects previously seen by the child into a box or bag where they cannot see. They have to find the object you ask for. • Sand play and messy play is useful. • Creative activities using glue, clay, different textures are also useful. • Identify and encourage the use of fidget toys. These are toys or objects easily played with in the hand. They are quite often squeezy objects. They are often particularly effective in circle time/carpet time/assembly/ sat at desk for long period of time/getting to sleep at night. Try attaching or tying a small object to a child's mat on circle time, to trouser belt loops or buy a Fiddlit apron www.fiddlit.co.uk

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	<p>Over-sensitive system; Tactile selectiveness or Tactile defensiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance of touch • Dislike of hugs • Child becomes very disorganised, over emotional and/or out of control if he/she experiences games that involve a lot of touch e.g. rough and tumble • Avoids messy play • Wears long sleeves even though it is a very hot day • Child dislikes the textures of certain clothes or material on the skin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide different tactile experiences and activities but be aware that the child might not want to participate. Do not force the child to join in. • Avoid 'light touch' activities e.g. patting on the head or tickling. Particularly avoid unexpected touch. • Avoid touch from behind. • Use deep pressure touch activities. • Combine tactile activities with opportunities to experience proprioception – see below • Allow space around the child in class. • Always position the child at the back of a queue rather than the start so they are safe from behind touched from behind. • Identify and encourage the use of fidget toys. These are toys or objects easily played with in the hand. They are quite often squeeze objects. They are often particularly effective in circle time/carpet time/assembly/ sat at desk for long period of time. Try attaching or tying a small object to a child's mat on circle time, trouser belt loops or purchase a Fiddlit apron www.fiddlit.co.uk • Encourage the child to squeeze areas of themselves that are irritating them. • Avoid crowded places. • Avoid dressing the child in certain textures of clothing that cause irritation.

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Vestibular (movement and balance)	Under-sensitive system or problems registering movement information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is always 'on the go' • Child appears to take excessive risks e.g. shows no fear when jumping from a big height • Difficulties learning to ride a bike • Poor sense of direction • Poor spatial awareness • Poor bilateral coordination (coordinating both sides of the body) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the child with ample opportunities to experience movement e.g. going to the park regularly, enrolling in extracurricular activities such as swimming, trampolining, sports clubs etc • Create a safe environment in which the child can experience movement. If purchasing a garden trampoline ensure it has a safety net. • Provide more practise with certain movement related skills such as riding a bike, learning to swing at the park independently etc • Split the child's school day into small sections allowing for a purposeful movement break between sections e.g. delivering the register, moving books, opening a window or cleaning a table etc
	Over-sensitive movement system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is fearful of movement • Child dislikes escalators or lifts • Child does not like playing on playground equipment • Child may be travel sick • Difficulty with transitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When travelling encourage the child to look out of the window and hold a toy/object that is easy to fidget with without looking e.g. a piece of blue tac or elastic band, squeeze toy. • Give the child the option to use the stairs rather than a lift or escalator • Encourage participation in the type of movement the child does enjoy. Never force a child to participate in an activity.

Sensory System	Possible problems related to the sensory system	Possible solutions to try
Proprioception (body awareness and concentration)	Under-sensitive system or problems registering proprioceptive information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears over forceful often damaging toys unintentionally • Walking into others whilst looking ahead • Tripping over • Falling from chairs • Poor fine motor skills – difficulties with precision movements • Poor body awareness • Poor use of force when writing • Emotionally fragile • Low self esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of lots of activities that involve effort and encourage the child to participate. The proprioceptive system is developed by pulling apart or pushing together tiny receptors all over our bodies in our muscles and joints. If we are moving and using effort, we are compressing or triggering these receptors. • Examples of activities include; helping with jobs around the house or school, gardening, pushing a shopping trolley, moving furniture/stacking chairs, swimming, trampolining, sports, playground equipment, running, cycling on a bike or an exercise bike, kneading dough or modelling with clay, tug of war, etc • Make sure there are rewards for help given. Remember the jobs mentioned above can be very tiring so the secret is to make it motivating for the child to participate little and often. • Create a 'fidget-box' or use a fidget apron www.fiddlit.co.uk . Make sure the child is able to use a fidget object safely and appropriately. • Chewing gum is useful tool to aid concentration or help a child remain calm. It is acknowledged that it is not normally tolerated in classrooms but there may be circumstances where it is useful at home or before/during a known stressful event. Make sure the child is deemed safe using chewing gum i.e. will not swallow. • Use of chewies.
Gustatory (taste)	Under-sensitive system or problems registering taste information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is unaware of food around their mouth. • Child often bolts food. • Child appears unaware of how much is in their mouth before adding more food. • Child complains that all food tastes the same 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try introducing crunchy and spicy foods such as salsa, peanuts, pretzels, carrots and celery (be allergy aware and consider safe swallowing of certain foods). • Encourage the child to eat a variety of tastes including stronger tastes. • Give visual instructions by showing how much food to put on fork before putting it into the mouth. Then emphasise finishing the mouthful before loading the fork again. • Provide the child with a serviette or piece of kitchen roll at mealtimes and encourage them to adopt the habit of wiping their mouths regularly throughout the meal and definitely at the end of a meal.

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	Over-sensitive taste system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over-reacts to food textures Can be an overly fussy eater Dislikes strong tastes Likes to eat the same food every day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide chewy toys and games such as party blowers, bubbles, toy harmonicas before eating. Encourage the child to put pressure on their lips, cheeks and gums before eating. You may find they want or need you to do this for them. If rubbing their gums try using the finger of rubber glove to cover your fingers. Be aware of any latex allergy. It may help to desensitise the mouth using an ice cube to rub around the child's lips and around his/her gums before meal times so that he/she is more able to tolerate different textures of food. Continue to offer a variety of food textures combined with the above techniques. Suck liquids, especially thick ones, through a straw. Provide chewy foods like liquorice, Gummy Bears, and chewing gum etc. make sure the child can safely chew the foods given. Try introducing crunchy foods such as peanuts, carrots and celery. (Be allergy aware). Also try the proprioceptive activities above. www.brookfieldsschool.org has a free food therapy booklet (if the link is unavailable email fiddlit@gmail.com)
Olfactory (smell)	Under-sensitive system or problems registering olfactory information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child doesn't seem to notice strong smells Child craves strong smells and will purposely smell them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the child with a range of food that have different smells. Use different smelling massage oils for massage and bathing products. (Be allergy aware).

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	<p>Over-sensitive olfactory system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child may appear to over-use his/her sense of smell to smell objects that others wouldn't. • Child may gag or appear overly sensitive to certain smells. This may be apparent at meal times, in certain classrooms or whilst using perfumed products. • Child may appear to notice smells that others don't notice. • Child may be fussy about the food they eat because of its smell. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that the child cannot help gagging at certain smells and try, where possible, to allow for a change of environment if the gagging becomes a persistent problem. • Open a window. • Use neutral, unscented washing products if others affect the child. • Try to allow the child to eat food in a warm but well ventilated environment. It may help the child to eat in their own company or with a few friends rather than in a large dining hall.
Auditory (hearing)	<p>Under-sensitive system or problems registering auditory information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child doesn't seem to notice when their name is called • Child enjoys loud or unusual noises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to make sure that you gain eye contact with the child when you need their attention. • Understand that a child's lack of response may not necessarily be under their control. • Allow the child the opportunity to be noisy in a controlled environment. • Make sure that any MP3 players/iPods are played at a reasonable noise level to avoid damaging the ear.

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	<p>Over-sensitive auditory system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child over-reacts to school bells, fire drills, sudden noises • Child often places their hands over their ears • Child appears less able to concentrate in a noisy environment • Child makes own noises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the use of proprioceptive activities above. • Soft music played into ear phones may aid concentration and calm a child. Try using classical music. • Allow the child to work in a quiet environment throughout the day. This may involve the child working with a small group of friends outside the main classroom for sections of the day. • Allow the child something to fidget with something – see proprioception section above. • White noise can be downloaded from the internet and this can also be useful when played through ear phones. • Earphones (without additional noise) or a tighter fitting hat can provide relief from noise.
Visual (sight)	<p>Under-sensitive system, problems perceiving visual information or difficulties using eye muscles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child may not notice details in pictures. • Child may have difficulties with literacy. • Child may not write clearly/legibly. • Child may have difficulty distinguishing the foreground from the background e.g. find an object when it is hidden amongst others in a drawer. • Child may have difficulty recognising an object if it in a different place or is at a different angle. • Child may be unable to scan across a line of text or across visual field without losing their place of focus. • Child may have difficulties with ball skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice games such as; I spy, Where's Wally books, Kim's game, finding/sorting colours/shapes, puzzle books, word searches etc • Practise reading using a ruler under the line of text. • Use lined paper for writing. • Practise ball skills using large balls, beanbags or balloons to start with. Practise rolling the ball before throwing. • Make sure the child's eyes are tested regularly with an optician.

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	Over-sensitive visual system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour of child becomes more erratic in a busier/more visually stimulating environment. • Is visually distracted by others. • Notices everything that's happening in the room. • Child keeps head and eyes facing downwards most of the time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child to work in a less visually stimulating environment for specified sessions during the day. This may mean creating a suitable environment in the classroom such as a blank corner separated by dividers or, for younger children, a table covered in a sheet that the child can crawl under. • Child may like to wear sunglasses. • Make sure the child's eyes are tested regularly with an optician. • In the classroom, try the child sat facing a blank wall when working at a desk and sat directly in front of the teacher/whiteboard when listening to class discussion.

What else can you do to help?

1. Understand that poor performance may not be due to lack of effort.
2. Try to help the child organise tasks into more manageable steps.
3. Consider the position of the child in the classroom. Be aware of distraction (Light, colour, and noise), teacher position, whiteboard etc.

Useful websites:

Training, information and more activities to help with sensory processing:

- www.fiddlit.co.uk
- www.sensoryintegration.org.uk
- www.Alertprogram.com
- www.sensory-processing-disorder.com

Fidgets, sensory equipment, weighted equipment, chewies:

- www.fiddlit.co.uk – fidget aprons for school, home and those in beds and wheelchairs
- www.sensorydirect.com – sensory diet cards (lots of activities to experiment with)
- www.rompa.com - equipment and books
- www.smartknitkids.com - tag-less clothing and seamless socks

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