



The Parenting Buzz

Sensory Processing

Sensory Processing is the way a person's body is able to organise and respond to the information they receive through their senses. This may be information that comes from the person's own body or from the environment around them.

Our 8 Senses

- **Visual (sight)**
- **Auditory (hearing)**
- **Tactile (touch)**
- **Olfactory (smell)**
- **Gustatory (taste)**
- **Vestibular (balance / sense of head movement in space)**
- **Proprioception (movement / sensations from muscles and joints of our body)**
- **Interoception (internal / sensations relating to internal organs)**



What are sensory processing difficulties?

Sensory Processing Difficulties are when a person has trouble taking in information through their senses and responding to it appropriately. They may have reactions which may be considered an exaggerated negative response which can lead to avoidance of that particular stimulus. Or they may be under responsive, where the person may be unaware of or react slowly to certain stimulus, that would usually create a response (such as touching a stove).

Hypersensitive = oversensitive (take in too much sensory information).

Hyposensitive = undersensitive (take in too little sensory information).

How many people have sensory processing difficulties?

- According to Autism Spectrum Australia, between 69% and 95% of individuals with an autism diagnosis experience atypical sensory processing.

- According to The Raising Children Network, sensory processing difficulties affect up to 1 in 6 children.

- According to the Star Institute the prevalence of SPD is much higher in people who have Autism, ADHD, fragile x syndrome and those who are gifted.

SPD or Sensory Processing Disorder is not a recognised disorder in Australia. Sometimes this term is used when sensory processing difficulties get in the way of everyday life.

Symptoms of Sensory Processing Difficulties:

Here are some examples of behaviour which may be associated with sensory processing difficulties.

The child:

- *Runs away or hides from common sounds.*
- *Has difficulties settling during or after noisy activities.*
- *Does not like touch, noise, smells.*
- *Is in constant motion.*
- *Avoids brightly lit places.*
- *Avoids looking at faces or busy spaces.*
- *Avoids messy play.*
- *Refuses to wear certain items of clothing (e.g. pants with pockets or socks with seams).*
- *Avoids having a bath or swimming.*
- *Is difficult to settle after a minor cut or graze or doesn't seem to feel pain.*
- *Needs physical activities to help maintain focus throughout the day.*
- *Likes to watch lights turn on and off.*
- *Doesn't notice noises (such as alarms).*
- *Seeks out strong smells or walks away from strong smells.*
- *Eats only bland food or likes strong tastes (like salty or spicy food).*
- *Finds it hard to focus.*
- *Gets tired easily (particularly in busy environments).*
- *Has troubles getting to sleep.*
- *Has difficulty moving from one task to another.*
- *Has difficulty staying focused on tasks.*
- *Has difficulties reading (especially aloud).*

Support for children with sensory difficulties:

First talk to your doctor. Your GP can refer your child onto a health professional with expertise in sensory processing difficulties. For example, an Occupational Therapist (OT), psychologist or paediatrician.

References

Raising Children Network, 'Sensory Processing Difficulties', *raisingchildren.net.au*, *The Australian Parenting Website*, Australia, 9 September 2022, <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/sensory-processing-difficulties>, (accessed 13 February 2024).

Autism Spectrum Australia, 'Sensory Processing', Autism Spectrum Australia, Australia, March 2017, https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/uploads/documents/Fact%20Sheets/Factsheet_Sensory-processing_20170306.pdf, (accessed 13 February 2024).

1. Star Institute, 'Understanding Sensory Processing Disorder', Star Institute, Colorado, USA, no date specified, <https://sensoryhealth.org/basic/understanding-sensory-processing-disorder>, (accessed 13 February 2024).

1. Star Institute, 'Symptoms Checklist', Star Institute, Colorado, USA, no date specified, <https://sensoryhealth.org/basic/symptoms-checklist>, (accessed 13 February 2024).

