



Strategies for managing Sensory Processing Difficulties at home

Sensory Processing Difficulties (SPD) can be overwhelming for parents. When a child has extreme meltdowns and problems with daily tasks, it's difficult to know where to start.

The most effective way to support a child with SPD at home is to find out as much information as you can on sensory processing. There are some very good books available which can help (see some suggestions below) and that can explain how some sensory processing difficulties can affect the behaviour of a child, young person or adult.

It is important to learn how our senses impact on our day to day functioning, how these senses take in and organise this sensory information in order to enable us to produce an 'effective functional behavioural and emotional' response. By gaining new skills and knowledge about sensory processing, you will be able to identify some effective strategies that can help your child modulate themselves and improve their behaviour.

Making some environmental modifications to your child's bedroom may help, here are some simple strategies to get you started.

You can:

- Use dim, natural lighting,
- Bedrooms can be painted pale, pastel colours on walls,
- Provide a quiet / less stimulating corner of their room for your child to go to / use to calm down,
- Use blankets / sheets / play tents to sleep or just relax in,
- Have your child sleep in or under heavy blankets, weighted blankets, or a sleeping bag,
- Use beanbag chairs and giant pillows to sit on,
- Provide relaxing music on tape player or headphones, for example, ocean waves, rain, classical music, nature tapes, slow / rhythmic music, white noise or nature sound machines,
- Reduce visual distractions within the surroundings and keep toys / items / supplies neatly organized in bins and / or in their proper place.

A variety of sensory strategies you can put in place throughout the day will help a child or young person better cope with the sensory demands of their day to day environment. These sensory strategies, are suggestions to help your child cope with some of the daily challenges they face, all children or young people are different and not all strategies will work with your child. You may need to try a couple of these strategies before you find one that is most effective. Remember that a child or young person can be under responsive to sensory input or over responsive.

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Here are some examples of visual sensory need:

Visual - Sight

Under responsive:

- Bright / natural lighting, Bubble tubes, Light projectors / oil lamps, Fish tanks, Pictures or visuals.

Over responsive:

- Reduce visual stimuli, reduce bright lighting, use deep-coloured light bulbs, create a blackout space under the stairs, choose calming colours, reduce clutter and minimise items in the room. Auditory - Sound Under responsive: Use visual supports to back up verbal information, encourage listening to stimulating music, play an instrument, and Sing songs. Over responsive: Shut doors and windows to reduce external sounds. Wear ear plugs, use ear defenders, listen to relaxing music.

Auditory - Sound

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Over responsive:

- Shut doors and windows to reduce external sounds. Wear ear plugs, use ear defenders, listen to relaxing music.

Tactile - Touch

Under responsive:

- Use weighted blankets or sleeping bags. use fitted under garments, weighted jackets / backpacks / lap / wrist and ankle weights, reading and touching textured books, tracing shapes on to your child's back and letting him guess what shape.

Over responsive:

- Gradually introduce different textures - have a box of materials available. Allow your child to complete activities themselves (e.g. hair brushing and washing) so that they can do what is comfortable for them, massaging helps, weighted blanket / or a lightweight blanket, use deep pressure touch.

Gustatory - Taste

Under responsive:

- Explore tastes: sweet, salty, sour, spicy, bitter, explore textures: crunchy, creamy, chewy, lumpy, chew gum / suck on lollipop, involve in food preparation, use food for messy play, use ice lollies / cubes, suck thick liquid through straw, use oral chews.

Over responsive:

- Explore textures, explore tastes sweet, salty, sour, spicy, bitter, involve in food preparation, use food for messy play.

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Olfactory - Smell

Under responsive:

- Essential oils and scented candles, smell flowers sniff spices and herbs, blindfold smelling game.

Over responsive:

- Use unscented detergents, use unscented shampoos, avoid wearing perfume, avoid air fresheners, introduce smells gradually to build up resilience.

Vestibular - Balance

Under responsive:

- Rocking chair, swings, roundabouts and seesaws, play a game walking up steps or curbs. bounce on therapy ball, roll over therapy ball, trampoline, rollovers.

Over responsive:

- On a swing set lying on their back, on the stomach, sitting, or standing, swing forward, backward, side to side, or rotating. bouncing on a ball, or jumping on a trampoline, catch a ball.

Proprioception - Body Awareness

Under responsive:

- Arm wrestling, carrying heavy back pack, weighted vest / blanket, climbing on monkey bars or a chin-up bar, dive, jump, roll, stretch and burrow using a crash cushion, roll a child in a rug or quilt, swimming, tug-of-war, row, row, row your boat, wheelbarrow walking.

It is important to recognise that these strategies are suggestions only, each child is unique and what will work for one child, may not work for your child. Try a few strategies, you should find at least one or more that is perfect for your child.