

## Do You Have or Know Someone with a Sensory Processing Disorder?

A sensory processing disorder is a problem with the way a person takes in and organizes sensory information for self-regulation and skill development. It is believed that sensory processing disorders affect up to 15% of the population. They often coexist with Autism, ADD/ADHD, anxiety disorders, developmental delays, and individuals who were raised in sensory-deprived environments such as orphanages. As our world continues to advance technologically, we also are beginning to see changes in the way children's brains are developing and the impact it is having on their ability to adaptively respond to the world around them. What first appears to be extreme behavior, anxiety, impulsivity, clumsiness, or avoidance/disconnection may be signs that a person has a sensory processing disorder that has not yet been identified.

### Signs of a Sensory Processing Disorder:

Sensory Modulation Disorder	Sensory Discrimination Disorder	Postural-Ocular Disorder	Dyspraxia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easily distracted</li> <li>• hyper aware of touch and/or sounds in the environment</li> <li>• Rigid/Controlling behaviors</li> <li>• Defensive reactions to food and/or clothing textures</li> <li>• Easily distracted by sensory stimuli</li> <li>• Lack of response to sensory stimuli</li> <li>• Disconnected/Disengaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor force grading</li> <li>• Easily disoriented with movement</li> <li>• May/may not have anxiety with movement</li> <li>• May seek sensation via movement, bumping into peers, or putting objects in their mouth</li> <li>• May have poor balance and body control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not use vision to guide his/her body</li> <li>• May be unsafe or overly cautious</li> <li>• May avoid unpredictable environments</li> <li>• Falls/loses balances easily</li> <li>• Trips/Is Clumsy</li> <li>• Difficulty sitting still for long periods</li> <li>• May fidget/move around a lot</li> <li>• May seek sedentary play versus gross motor activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty completing daily activities</li> <li>• Difficulty following multi-step directions requiring motor skills</li> <li>• Often takes an awkward approach to novel motor tasks</li> <li>• Takes a long time to learn new skills</li> <li>• May have poor handwriting and/or fine motor skills</li> <li>• May avoid team sports or coordinated activities</li> </ul>
What is it?	What is it?	What is it?	What is it?
Over or under-responsivity to various types of sensory inputs that can worsen in times of stress. It is often observed as emotional outbursts, withdrawal, and negative responses to situations that don't seem to bother others.	Difficulty understanding the details of sensory information resulting in limited or inaccurate body feedback. It can result in disorientation, confusion, and clumsiness or trigger sensory-seeking behaviors to get more feedback.	Presents as poor postural control, tensing, and use of compensatory strategies such as relying on arm strength due to lack of dynamic body control. Inadequate use of vision to guide body movements impacts safety.	Presents as difficulty developing ideas about what to do with one's body and objects as well as difficulty planning/organizing and following through with activities. It is typically most obvious with new learning tasks, novel activities, or activities done infrequently.

### **What can you do if you suspect you or someone you know may have a sensory processing disorder?**

- Get an *evaluation* by an occupational therapist specializing in sensory processing disorders to determine your sensory profile and get supports in place.
- Do *calming activities* to help with self-regulation: Use rhythmic movement/music, pressure such as pillow squishing and lotion massages, and respiration activities such as blowing and deep breathing.
- Do *activating activities* combining movement (swinging/spinning), pressure (crashing into pillows), and visual targets/reaching activities to increase sensory feedback and engage the core body senses to support development of body control.
- Participate in supportive activities such as swimming, swinging, trampoline parks, and messy play as tolerated to increase sensory feedback, limiting participation in activities requiring more coordination until body skills develop.
- Connect with others with SPD on social media for support and ideas
- Choose a work environment that is open to using sensory supports and self-regulation activities to increase your ability to succeed in a multi-sensory world.

Sensory processing disorders impact all areas of a person's life and persist into adulthood if not addressed, impacting both the person and their family. They can also impact a person's desire to explore their world and be active learners. Knowing what you can do to support your sensory needs can make a big difference in your ability to handle new situations, gain independence, develop peer relationships, and succeed both personally and educationally. For more information, please visit [www.sensational-achievements.com](http://www.sensational-achievements.com).

Aubrey Schmalte, OTR/L

Sensational Achievements, LLC

Creator of Body Activated Learning: A Sensory-Based Program to Support Attention and Engagement in Children.