

Respecting and Including Children with Sensory Over-Responsivities

In addition to providing opportunities for Restoring movement, the following is a brief list of accommodations and strategies for some of the most common over-responsivities. These strategies will help to build trust between you and the child as well as foster a greater feeling of safety within the environment as a child is working toward reducing over-responsivities to sensory input.

Generally, limiting unpredictable and uncontrollable input as much as possible through routines and anticipating environments/situations that may trigger aversive responses in order to “make a plan” with the child in advance will help to set the child up for greater success. At school, it is also important to the child not to be singled out as “different” but rather to find ways to secretly communicate with the teacher or use strategies that seem like errands or are build into the classroom culture as much as possible.

Tactile Defensiveness to Light Touch

- Ask the child for permission touch him/her - such as for a hug or to show a child how to do something.
- Always approach the child from the front and avoid imposed touch.
- Allow the child to sit on the edge of the circle or position him/herself in the front or back of the line to minimize unexpected touch.
- Respect his/her need to wear additional clothing layers/tight clothing to limit unwanted touch or brushing of clothing against the skin.
- Support the child’s ability to feel in control by having the child explore clothing at the store for weight and fit.

Auditory Over-Responsivity

- Explore the use of headphones and different types of ear plugs to wear in loud/noisy environments.
- Allow the child to option to sit toward the back or edge of the room close to a wall to minimize directionality and perceived intensity of sound.
- Support the child’s need to leave an environment if he/she can only tolerate it for a specific period of time before feeling overwhelmed (Plan participation/inclusion as tolerated).
- If using music in the class or at home, build sensational self-awareness and advocacy by having the child listen to the options for music and give feedback about what is tolerable/not averse.
- Warn the child before putting on music, starting the blender, running the vacuum, etc. depending on his/her specific sensitivities to allow time for the child to move to a space where the sound is tolerable.

Vestibular Over-Responsivity

(Aversion to Movement and/or Gravitational Insecurity)

- Provide access to deep pressure or an object such as a pillow to squeeze during imposed movement (ex: going on a carnival ride).
- Encourage the child to attempt movement but respect that the child may need to go slow and use additional resistive/proprioceptive input to minimize anxiety and disorientation.
- Do not force a child to climb high/have his feet off the ground (such as in bleachers at school) if the child seems fearful (gravitational insecurity).
- When doing Energizing Exercises - experiment to find out if over-responsivity is reduced when vision or pressure/holding a weighted object is added and accommodate accordingly.