

# Sensory Processing

**This presentation will help staff:**

- **Understand what sensory processing skills are**
- **Know how you might notice if someone is having difficulties with sensory processing skills**
- **Select activities to support those who are having difficulties**

# About Sensory Processing Skills

- Children learn about their bodies and the environment around them by taking in information from their 7 senses.
- When thinking about senses, we often refer to:
  - Sight
  - Hearing
  - Smell
  - Taste and
  - Touch
- In addition to this, we have sense of:
  - Movement (vestibular) and
  - Position of movement (proprioception)
- As a child develops, they make sense of this information and lay down motor memories.

# About Sensory Processing Skills

- Children develop adaptive responses to sensation and this enables attention and the ability to use higher cognitive skills for academic learning.
- Some children do not process these senses as effectively as others. This results in difficulties with
  - Behavioural response
  - Attention and
  - Motor skill development.
- Children may be over responsive to stimulus, resulting in fight/flight /fright responses, or they may be under responsive, resulting in low arousal or sensory seeking.
- A child's sensory profile can be spiky and can also change. More information on this can be found at [www.multisensorylearning.lgfl.net](http://www.multisensorylearning.lgfl.net).

# Challenges with Sensory Processing

Difficulty processing sensory information can result in a range of presentations:

## Over sensitivity to stimulus

- Dislike of noise, touch, taste, smell, movement – more exaggerated response than other children
- Emotional outbursts or shut down
- Hitting out or running away
- Avoidance behaviours
- Seeking out certain movements to overcome sensitivity



# Challenges with Sensory Processing

**Difficulty processing sensory information can result in a range of presentations:**

## **Under sensitivity to stimulus (not registering)**

- Reduced awareness of pain
- Lack of response to sound, touch taste, smell or movement
- Seeking out additional sensory stimulus to alert themselves
- May appear like a daydreamer – often very good temperament
- Low muscle tone





# Challenges with Sensory Processing

Difficulty processing sensory information can result in a range of presentations:

## Coordination

- Difficulties with motor planning and bilateral skills
- Slow to learn new movements – more than other children
- Delayed motor skills development
- Difficulty learning school sport activities
- Cloning behaviours or avoidance
- Difficulty with self care



# Activities to Support

## Activities to support over sensitivity:

- Reduce stimulus where possible – sit away from classroom traffic, windows, not too close to peers etc.
- Provide activities that will calm the senses:
  - Deep pressure
  - Squashy corner in classroom
  - Jumping
  - Chair push ups
  - Class errands involving carrying objects
- Warn where possible if there is going to be something strong in stimulus – fire alarm tests, dinner hall smells, changing for PE and so on.



# Activities to Support

## Activities to support over sensitivity:

- Encourage the child to identify feeling over stimulated using a red card or similar indicator for showing that moving away from stimulus is required.
- Provide a safe space and be understanding if a child becomes overwhelmed
- Be firm in any activity requiring touch
  - Light touch will activate the protective touch sense, the body's protective warning system e.g. fight/flight/fear





# Activities to Support

## Activities to support under sensitivity

- Ensure learning tasks are presented in a stimulating way
- Promote lots of movement to wake up sensory systems - this can reduce sensory seeking behaviours
- Don't assume that passivity is good – check the child has heard instructions etc
- Monitor alertness and try to wake up the sensory system of the child if you feel they are under responsive to activity



# Activities to Support

## Activities to support coordination difficulty

### Sensory circuits

- Hold daily small group sensory circuits for children to practice movements with support in a non competitive way.
- This can be done as a breakfast club, lunchtime group or after school activity to prevent impacting learning time but is essential to support their ability to learn skills.

*For further information on this, Sheena Rufus recommends 'Sensory Circuits – A Motor Skills Programme for Children' by LDA publishers.*

*This gives a detailed approach to setting up sensory circuits and can be completed by willing TAs, LSAs and teachers.*

- Complete upper limb and handwriting warm ups (See Movement: Writing) before writing challenges are set – arm raises, arm circles, push hands together, open and close hands, wriggle fingers and so on.



# Activities to Support

## Activities to support coordination difficulty

- Provide visual cues for sequenced activities such as dressing or construction activities.
- Promote chair push ups, marching on the spot, jumping on the spot to give the body information about movement and positioning (See Movement: Focus).
- Get the child to talk through tasks as they are completing them.
- Repeat tasks that are difficult to provide practice.

