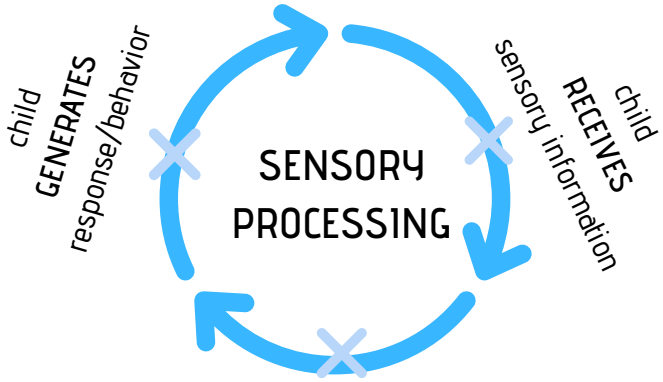
What is Sensory Processing?



child **PROCESSES** and stores information based on experiences

Difficulty at any of these steps can result in

SENSORY DYSFUNCTION

which may be contributing to unusual behaviors, emotional outbursts, or difficulty completing every day activities

What might this look like in my child?

Every child uses information from their environment differently and has their own unique sensory experience.

SEEKER

Busier and more engaged in sensory experiences

May make noises while working, fidget, always touching things, chew on things, lack consideration for safety, very active and excitable

SENSOR

React more quickly and more intensely than others

Might appear cautious in some situations due to being overwhelmed, aware of everything in their environment without ability to handle it appropriately, may have meltdowns, cry, or hit others

AVOIDER

More likely to retreat from unfamiliar situations

Can be rule bound, ritual driven, or uncooperative because sensory input is difficult to understand/ organize or might feel threatening

BYSTANDER

Miss more sensory cues than others

React slowly to rapidly presented or may not notice things in their environment that others notice, can be difficult to engage

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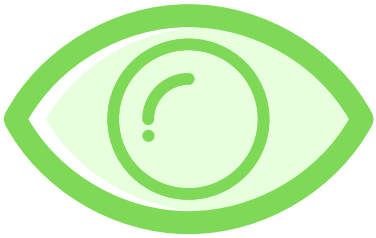
The Visual System

Vision is a dynamic process of identifying (what is this?), organizing, interpreting (what does this mean?) and understanding what is seen. Vision is a process that integrates sensory (what your body is taking in from the environment) and motor (how your body moves to react to information it gets) information generated by the brain and body to understand it and help you to decide what to do next.

What might this look like in my child?



What can I do to help my child?

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Unusual head tilt while looking at things
- Holds objects close to face
- Trouble finding objects in busy background
- Poor hand/eye coordination & depth perception
- Trouble copying work from whiteboard
- Confuses similar objects, shapes, and letters
- Difficulty spacing letters/words while writing

What can you do?

- Provide bright lights
- Create a colorful environment
- Utilize different shapes and objects
- Use of visual supports (contrasts, highlighting)
- Lava lamps
- Fish Tanks

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Eyes do not move together
- Difficulty focusing on faces or toys
- Inability to maintain gaze
- Sensitive to light
- Rubs eyes, covers eyes, squints
- Easily visually distracted
- Avoids eye contact

What can you do?

- Reduce lighting: turn off lights, dim lights, use blackout curtains
- Reduce visual distractions
- Provide sunglasses
- Limit screen time

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The Vestibular System

The vestibular system is the body's first fully mature system. It develops from the inner ear and helps the body to understand where the head is in space. It is important for balance, posture, and our ability to keep our head upright and stable during movement.

What might this look like in my child?

What can I do to help my child?

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Constantly spinning or swaying
- Enjoys jumping
- High activity level
- Appears impulsive or unsafe

What can you do?

- Swinging or spinning
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Stand while completing work
- Hang upside down
- Jump rope
- Somersaults

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Dizziness
- Appears clumsy
- Overly cautious
- Fearful of movement
- Dislikes being upside down
- Dislikes being held

What can you do?

- Rocking back and forth on a rocking chair
- Slow, linear swinging
- Yoga
- Stretching of the head and neck slowly
- Slow rocking: lying on ground with knees tucked into chest rocking back and forth

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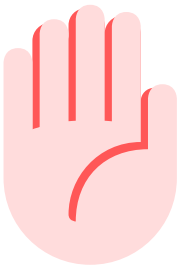
The Tactile System

The tactile system detects light touch, pain, pressure, and temperature. It helps inform us if each of these sensations are pleasant and safe or unpleasant and potentially dangerous. You may also hear this system referred to as the "somatosensory" system.

What might this look like in my child?



What can I do to help my child?

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- High pain threshold
- Enjoys different textures
- Chews on everything, including inedibles
- Touches everything, appears very curious
- May not notice if they bump into things
- Holds things tightly
- Enjoys foods with intense flavor and textures
- May over-aggressively pet animals

What can you do?

- Create opportunities to touch different textures and materials: i.e. sensory bins
- Utilize chewies
- Sensory brushing (Wilbarger protocol - requires training)

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Touch can feel painful and uncomfortable
- Dislikes having things on hands and feet
- Does not like brushing hair and teeth
- Avoids certain food textures and temperatures
- Avoids standing in lines near others
- Does not like when hands are dirty
- Dislikes clothing textures, tags, seams
- May walk on toes
- Difficulty at bath time

What can you do?

- Wear comfortable and loose clothing
- Warn child / ask permission before you touch them
- Introduce new textures slowly
- Use deep pressure or vibration prior to an activity/task the child dislikes

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The Auditory System

The auditory system allows an individual to sense, process, and understand sounds coming from their environment. This system's main functions include: processing the frequency of sound, recognizing and comprehending language, and filtering out sound. In general, this system allows us to distinguish what sounds are important and which are not.

What might this look like in my child?

What can I do to help my child?

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- May not respond to name being called
- Constantly responds "what?"
- Difficulty understanding others
- Listens to music and TV at high volumes
- May hum and make noises often
- May be very loud when completing activities
- Difficulty with reading and writing

What can you do?

- Write down directions or use gestures when speaking to them
- Encourage use of toys that have music or sounds
- Use songs to enhance learning new skills
- Read sound books
- Play music in the background
- Have child sleep with fan or music

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Dislikes loud noises-covers ears frequently
- Reacts to background noises most people wouldn't notice
- May refuse or dislike loud public places
- Easily distracted
- Struggles academically
- May hide/cry from loud sounds (i.e. vacuum)

What can you do?

- Shut doors and windows to reduce outside noise
- Noise canceling headphones
- Prepare child if loud noises are expected
- Offer gum or crunchy snack or play light music as a distraction from irritating background sounds

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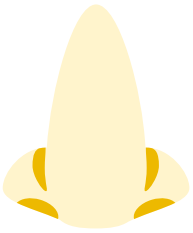
The Olfactory System

The olfactory system detects scents in our environment and tells us if these scents are pleasant and safe, or unpleasant and potentially dangerous, to our bodies. This system is highly linked to the gustatory system (taste) and difficulties in this system can contribute to feeding issues.

What might this look like in my child?



What can I do to help my child?

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- May often smell/sniff different items: shampoo, lotion, clothing, food, perfume
- May not notice smells or have a reaction to strong or unpleasant smells
- May lick objects to get a better sense of that item

What can you do?

- Scented play-doh or slime
- Scratch and sniff stickers
- Mr. Sketch markers
- Cooking/baking activities
- Scented sensory bins/bottles
- Strong smelling bath products
- Mint or cinnamon essential oils/scents

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Finds smells of food/objects overpowering
- May be a picky eater
- Makes faces or complaints about scents
- Avoids situations where they know they will encounter an unpleasant smell
- May dislike certain people with distinctive scents (strong perfume, clothing detergent)

What can you do?

- Unscented shampoos, lotions, and detergents
- Maintain a fragrance-free environment
- Allow child to choose shampoo, toothpaste, etc.
- Introduce new scents slowly
- Try to correlate smells with preferred foods

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The Gustatory System

The gustatory system allows us to detect taste from our environment and tells us whether that taste is pleasant and safe or unpleasant and potentially dangerous to our bodies. This system is highly linked to the olfactory system and difficulties in this system can lead to picky eating and other feeding issues.

What might this look like in my child?

What can I do to help my child?

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Likes foods with intense flavor
- Places toys and other non-food objects in mouth
- Constantly chews on hair, nails, shirt, etc.
- Uses a lot of sauces and seasonings
- Enjoys vibrating toothbrushing

What can you do?

- Create a "No" bin to ask the child to place non-food objects in when trying to place in mouth
- Provide child with a small dish of sauce/seasoning to limit amount being used
- Chewing gum, crunchy cereal, dried fruits, raw vegetables
- Make time for oral activities: blow bubbles, drink liquids from a straw, blow up balloons

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Picky eater
- Finds some flavors too strong
- Dislikes certain textures
- May gag with non-preferred foods
- Dislikes the dentist
- Enjoys bland foods

What can you do?

- Gradually increase the amount of non-preferred foods on their plate during mealtimes
- Expose repeatedly to new foods
- Eat less preferred foods along with your child
- Positive reinforcement for trying new foods
- Do not force feed

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The Proprioception System

The proprioception system tells a person the location, position, and orientation of their body. It uses muscle, tendon, and joint movement to sense body position in space. This sensory process can be both conscious and unconscious.

What might this look like in my child?

What can I do to help my child?

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Stands too close to others, bumps into others
- Enjoys tight clothing
- Likes to be "squished" or hugged
- Enjoys tight spaces
- Difficulty navigating rooms/environments
- Breaks things easily, including pencils/crayons when writing
- Slams doors, walks loudly
- Misjudges weight of objects
- Does not like to over-extend joints/stretch
- Avoids rough play
- Holds objects very lightly
- Avoids weight bearing activities
- Avoids collisions
- Does not like clapping, slapping, or banging

What can you do?

- Deep pressure: massage, joint compressions, using mats/pillows to "squish" child
- Weighted blankets and vests
- Sitting in bean bag
- Heavy work: animal walks, pushing laundry basket, wheel barrow walks, carry books
- Apply deep pressure or have the child complete heavy work before doing school work

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