



Understanding Sensory Processing: A Parent's Guide



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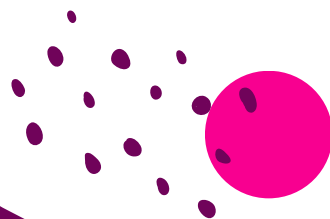


We understand that raising a child comes with its unique challenges and joys. Sometimes, you may notice that your child's responses to sensory experiences are different from other children's or that it may impact on their day-to-day activities. This document aims to provide you with valuable information about Sensory Processing, its types, Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), things to look out for, diagnosis, and practical strategies to support your child.



What is Sensory Processing?

Through sensory processing, we make sense of the world around us. Each of us have our own special way of feeling the world around us through our senses. These senses include sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, as well as the way our bodies move and balance.





Different Types of Sensory Processing:

There are three primary types of sensory processing:

Sensory Modulation:

This involves how we respond to sensory input. Some children might be overly sensitive (hypersensitive) to certain sensations, while others might seek out sensory input (hyposensitive).

Sensory Discrimination:

This is the ability to distinguish between different sensory stimuli. It helps us identify and respond appropriately to different sensations.

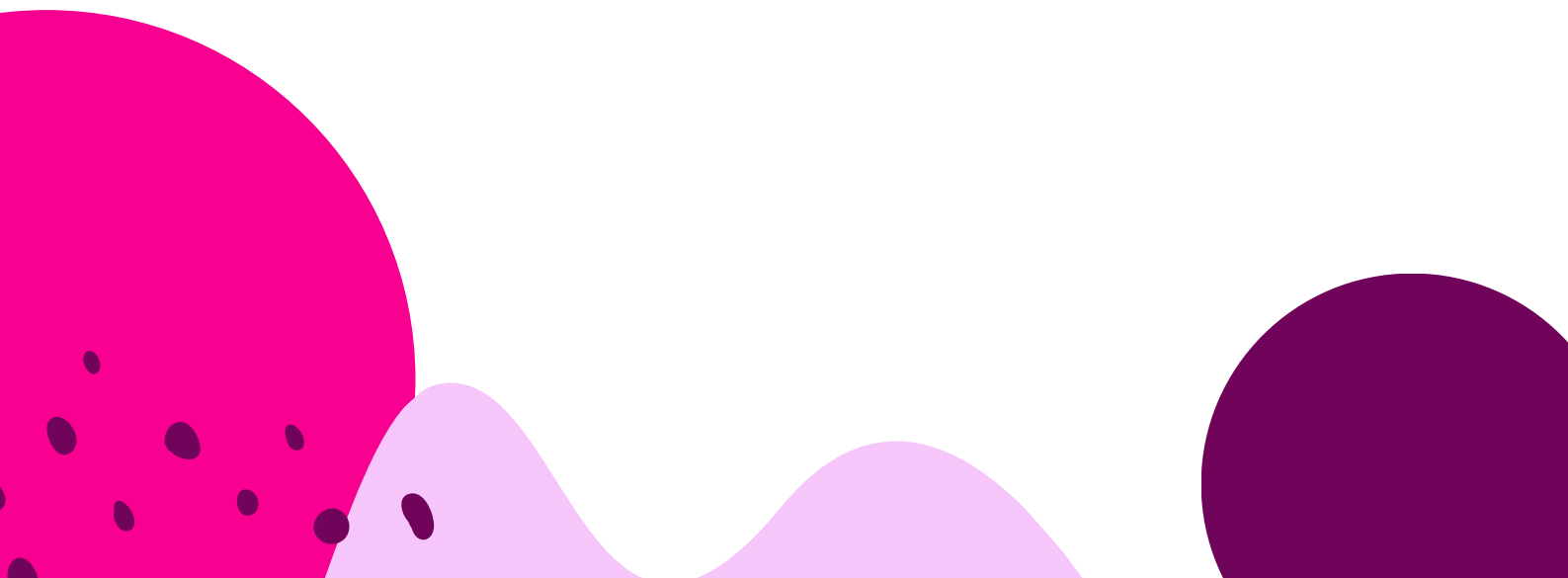
Sensory-Based Motor Skills:

These skills involve our ability to move our bodies in response to sensory input. This can include coordination, balance, and fine motor skills.



What is Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)?

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) occurs when there is a significant disruption in the way a child processes sensory information. Children with SPD may overreact or underreact to sensory stimuli, leading to difficulties in daily life, such as challenges in school, relationships, or daily routines.





Sensory Processing Checklist for Parents:

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) can vary widely among children and may manifest in various ways. If you notice several of the following signs or behaviours in your child, it may be a good idea to consult a specialist such as an Occupational Therapist. Keep in mind that this checklist is not a formal diagnosis but can serve as a helpful initial guide.

Sensory Seeking

☺ Behaviours:

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- ✓ Constantly seeks out sensory stimulation (e.g., spinning, jumping, crashing).
 - ✓ Excessively touches or chews on objects and clothing.
Frequently puts hands or objects in their mouth.
 - ✓ Seeks deep pressure, such as bear hugs or squeezing between cushions.
 - ✓ Craves loud or repetitive noises, like tapping or humming.

Sensory Avoidance



Behaviours:

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- ✓ Overreacts to everyday sounds, lights, or textures (e.g., covers ears or eyes when exposed to them).
 - ✓ Strong aversion to certain textures in food or clothing.
 - ✓ Avoids or becomes distressed in crowded or noisy places.
 - ✓ Refuses to wear certain clothing due to sensitivity.
 - ✓ Resists participating in messy activities (e.g., finger painting).



Sensory Overwhelm and Emotional Responses:

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- ✓ Frequent meltdowns or tantrums in response to sensory experiences.
 - ✓ Difficulty transitioning between activities or environments.
 - ✓ Becomes distressed when routines are disrupted.
 - ✓ Has heightened anxiety or fear reactions in response to sensory triggers.
 - ✓ Frequently covers their eyes or ears to block out sensory input.

Motor Coordination and



Balance:

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- ✓ Clumsiness, frequent tripping or falling.
 - ✓ Difficulty with fine motor tasks like buttoning, zipping, or handwriting.
 - ✓ Hesitation or reluctance to participate in physical activities or sports.
 - ✓ Poor posture and difficulty with balance.
 - ✓ Limited interest in climbing or playground equipment.

Social and Behavioural



Concerns:

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- ✓ Difficulty making and maintaining friendships.
 - ✓ Struggles with sharing or taking turns.
 - ✓ Frequent withdrawal or isolation in social situations.
 - ✓ Appears overwhelmed or anxious in social gatherings.
 - ✓ Sensory issues interfering with daily routines, such as getting dressed or eating meals.

Sleep and Eating



Patterns:

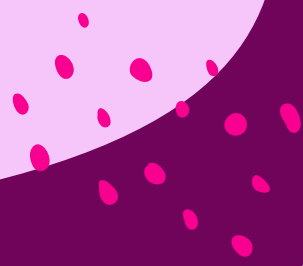
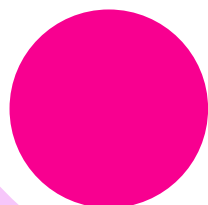
-
- ✓ Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.
 - ✓ Extreme pickiness or aversion to certain foods due to texture or smell.
 - ✓ Chewing on objects or clothing during mealtimes.
 - ✓ Overreacts to minor discomforts like clothing tags or seams.

Hygiene and Self-



care:

-
- ✓ Resists or becomes distressed during grooming routines (e.g., hair brushing, nail trimming).
 - ✓ Difficulty with toothbrushing due to sensitivity.
 - ✓ Avoidance of showers or baths due to sensory issues.





Attention and

! Focus:

-
- ✓ Difficulty concentrating in noisy or visually stimulating environments.
 - ✓ Easily distracted by sensory input (e.g., lights, sounds).
 - ✓ Frequent daydreaming or zoning out when overwhelmed.



If you notice several of these signs consistently impacting your child's daily life, seeking the guidance of a specialist who understands sensory processing can be a valuable step towards helping your child thrive.



Who Diagnoses Sensory Processing Disorder?

Occupational Therapists, Paediatricians, and Developmental Specialists are often the professionals who diagnose SPD. They assess a child's sensory behaviours and evaluate whether they significantly impact their daily life.



How is Sensory Processing Disorder Diagnosed?

Diagnosing SPD involves careful observation and assessment by a qualified professional. At Inspire Allied Health and Education Group our Occupational Therapists will consider a child's sensory responses, behaviours, and how these impact their daily activities. Parent and teacher input is also crucial in the diagnostic process and at Inspire Allied Health and Education Group we often gather this information through consultation and the completion of a sensory profile form.

If you suspect your child has sensory processing difficulties, here are steps you can take:

1. Talk to Your GP or Paediatrician: Start by discussing your concerns with your child's GP or Paediatrician. They can provide guidance and referrals to specialists if needed.

2. Consult an Occupational Therapist: Occupational Therapists are experts in sensory processing. They can assess your child's sensory needs and provide tailored interventions. You do not need a referral to see an Occupational Therapist.

3. Keep a Journal: Document your child's sensory behaviours, triggers, and challenges to provide valuable information to healthcare professionals.

4. Educate Yourself: Learn more about sensory processing and SPD through books, articles, and support groups. Understanding the condition is essential in providing the right support.



What is next to support a child diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder or sensory processing difficulties:

Supporting a child diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) or sensory processing difficulties requires a holistic approach that addresses their unique needs. Here are steps and strategies to consider:

- 1. Consultation with Specialists:** Work closely with healthcare professionals, including Occupational Therapists, Paediatricians, and Developmental Specialists, who can provide tailored guidance and interventions.
- 2. Understanding SPD:** Educate yourself and family members about SPD to gain a better understanding of your child's challenges and strengths.
- 3. Individualised Treatment Plan:** Collaborate with professionals to create a customised treatment plan based on your child's specific sensory needs and challenges.

Please note that if you have had a consultation with one of Inspire Allied Health and Education Groups Occupational Therapists, we will automatically provide recommendations to support your child's sensory processing difficulties.



Strategies to support children with sensory processing difficulties:

There is not a one size fits all to support children with sensory processing difficulties and it can often require a trained professional to work through a range of strategies to support your child. It is also not uncommon for your child's preferences and needs to change. Followed are some support strategies that we use and recommend at Inspire Allied Health and Education Group.

1. Create a sensory-friendly home environment:

Minimise sensory triggers (e.g., reduce clutter and noise).

2. Provide sensory tools and equipment: Provide aids such as fidget toys or sensory-friendly furniture.

3. Routines: Establish consistent daily routines to help your child know what to expect.

4. Visual Supports: Use visual schedules and timers to aid in transitions.

5. Sensory Diet: Implement a sensory diet designed by an Occupational Therapist to provide sensory input that helps regulate your child's sensory system.

6. Sensory Breaks: Allow your child regular sensory breaks when they become overwhelmed or anxious.

7. Positive Reinforcement: Praise and reward your child for their efforts and progress in managing sensory challenges.

8. Sensory Integration Therapy: Consider sensory integration therapy, which is a specialised approach provided by Occupational Therapists to address sensory processing difficulties.

9. Advocate: Work closely with your child's school to develop an Individualised Education Plan with accommodations and modifications.

10. Social Skills Training: If your child struggles with social interactions, consider social skills training to help them build and maintain relationships.

11. Behavioural Support: Seek guidance from Behavioural Therapists or Psychologists to address any behavioural challenges associated with SPD.

12. Encourage Emotional Expression: Provide a safe space for your child to communicate their feelings.

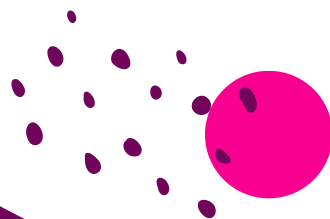
13. Emotional Support: Consider counselling or psychology to help your child manage anxiety or emotional responses related to sensory issues.

14. Peer Education: Educate siblings and close family members about SPD to foster understanding and empathy.

15. Self-Care: Ensure your child practices self-care routines to manage stress and sensory overload.

16. Celebrate Achievements: Celebrate your child's successes, no matter how small, to boost their self-esteem and motivation.

Whether you are at the beginning of your journey and have noticed that your child responds differently to sensory stimuli or have received a diagnosis of Sensory Processing Disorder or have been supporting your child's sensory journey for some time. Feel free to reach out to us at Inspire Allied Health and Education Group to arrange a consultation with our Occupational Therapists who specialise in Sensory Processing Disorders.





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