



SENSORY PROCESSING INFORMATION PACK FOR SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION TO SENSORY PROCESSING

Our life is full of sensory experiences and we all respond to these in different ways. We touch, move, taste, hear, smell and see.

We may be **aware** or **subconsciously aware** of where we are and how we interact with the environment.

- Sometimes we seek sensory information to make us feel better (e.g. a cuddle).
- or**
- Sometimes we retreat from certain types of sensory input if it makes us feel overwhelmed (e.g. very loud noise or bright lights).

Most people are able to interpret sensory information with ease and therefore the sensory experience and activity are completed successfully. This can also be described as sensory integration.

There may be people who have different reactions to sensory information but this does not interfere with their level of functioning in daily life. For example, a child may not like a particular smell, taste or texture on their skin but this does not interfere with their participation in daily activities. Our individual likes and dislikes are what make us unique.

However, there are some individuals who have difficulty interpreting sensory information and this can impact on how they feel, think, behave and respond.

This can interfere with how they perform in play activities, at school, in life activities, with self-care tasks, learning and relationships.

Sensory processing difficulties can have a negative impact on a child in school in the following areas:

- Attention control.
- Emotional stability.
- Social communication.
- Self-regulation e.g. toileting, sleep.
- Motor skills e.g. handwriting, cutting with scissors, participation in P.E.
- Organisational skills.

HOW TO PROMOTE A SENSORY SMART SCHOOL

- Educate **all** school staff regarding sensory processing in general and share information with all staff if sensory strategies are in place for a particular child. Understanding the effect of sensory processing difficulties will help staff to identify and support children with sensory challenges more effectively.
- Implement a daily sensory-motor programme and other activities before work tasks to help all children get into the “just right state” of arousal to promote concentration (see further reading and appendices).
- Use visual supports such as visual timetables and task lists routinely to help those children who have difficulty communicating, listening and focusing.
- Consider the environment and what could be done to help promote positive sensory experiences. Consider the level of light, noise and clutter. Creating a quiet corner in the classroom or quiet room if possible where any child can retreat to take a break from the classroom routine may help over-sensitive children self-regulate. Having materials that provide calming effects will enhance the child’s experience.
- Having access to a sensory box (see later section for ideas) with alerting and calming equipment will encourage children to self-regulate their sensory needs as necessary.

HOW TO IDENTIFY CHILDREN WITH SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES

There may be a pattern of how a person reacts to sensory information. The table below describes different reactions to sensory information which may help to identify a pattern.

By identifying a pattern this will help you plan for inappropriate reactions and provide suitable strategies.

**** SEE BEHAVIOUR – THINK SENSORY ****

Reactions to sensory information

	OVER-SENSITIVE / LOW THRESHOLD	UNDER-SENSITIVE / HIGH THRESHOLD
HEARING	- Noise levels feel magnified - Dislikes loud noise - Is easily startled - Likes to “chew” to damp down noises - Is anxious before expected noise (school bell) - Talks loudly	- Enjoys loud noise - Fails to pick up expected cues (appears not to hear) - Makes noise for noise’s sake
VISION	- Dislikes bright lighting - Prefers darker environment - Is distracted by visual information e.g. clutter, visual displays, bright colours	- Takes more visual information to react - Likes bright environment, reflective or spinning light
TASTE / SMELL	- Dislikes strong tastes - Likes only bland tastes - Tastes or smells objects, clothes, people etc. - Likes consistent temperature of food really hot or cold - Over reacts to new smells - Gags easily	- Eats non-food items - Has lots of hard crunchy food in diet - Craves strong tastes - Underreacts to bad, strong or good smells

Continued overleaf...

	OVER-SENSITIVE / LOW THRESHOLD	UNDER-SENSITIVE / HIGH THRESHOLD
TOUCH	• Avoids touch • Loves or hates hugs • Mouths objects • Only likes certain textures of clothes • Dislikes messy play • Can react aggressively to another's touch • Feels pain easily and is sensitive to temperature	• Takes firm touch to respond to stimulus • Is sometimes heavy handed • Over-grips objects • Is sometimes too close to others • Does not seem to respond to pain temperatures
MOVEMENT	• Hates spinning, jumping • Becomes dizzy easily • Hates busy places full of movement (playground) • Avoids feet off the ground activities (swings)	• Is always on the go • Has difficulty sitting still • Is constantly fidgeting and tapping • Runs rather than walks • Is fast but not well co-ordinated
BODY AWARENESS (proprioception)	• Tries to stop certain sensory experiences from happening e.g. hit out to stop people coming too close • Creates own boundaries (e.g. needs to stand at the end of the school line) • Seeks isolation	• Bumps into or trips over things or people • Stands too close to others • Puts self in small spaces or corner of the room • Looks at feet when going down stairs • Be 'loose and floppy'

With low thresholds, children notice things quickly; with high thresholds children may miss things

In general, children who are under-sensitive (high threshold) benefit from sensory rich environments and will enjoy novelty and unpredictability. Children who are over-sensitive (low threshold) prefer calm environments with a structured routine. If you have children who are under-sensitive and over-sensitive in the same class then as a rule it is easier to create a calm environment to meet the needs of an over-sensitive child and add alerting activities/equipment for the under-sensitive child.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

CALMING STRATEGIES	ALERTING STRATEGIES
<i>When a child is over stimulated and feels anxious, these activities and strategies may help them to feel calmer</i> • Sitting under a blanket • Wearing headphones to mute noise • Hands on their head and gently pressing down • Tucking legs up (knees towards chest) and squeezing • Slow rocking (rocking chair) • Bear hug / self hug • Calming scents (to be used with caution and not to be used if child has allergies) • Squeezing and relaxing hands using a small fidget toy • Snuggling into a small space • Sucking a thick yoghurt or thick milkshake through a straw	<i>When a child is not alert enough to pay attention to a task, these activities and strategies may be helpful</i> • Introduce up and down movements for short periods of time only • Jumping Jacks • Clapping activities and games • Making faces – open mouth and eyes wide or screwing up face • Stamping on the spot • Eating crunchy / chewy food • Drinking cold drinks with ice in
<i>Longer lasting ideas</i> • Press ups or chair press ups at regular intervals throughout the day • Help around the school in the form of a 'to do' list with moving furniture and doing heavy work activities e.g. pushing the snack trolley, moving pot plants and carrying heavy objects (within the child's capability) • Put a heavy coat or blanket over the shoulders as part of chill out time • Make a sensory corner with favourite sensory toys / activities	<i>Longer lasting ideas</i> • Include in daily routine regular bursts of activity including jumping or chair push ups • Alerting activities can also be carried out before the child has to pay attention and engage in a task

Continued overleaf...

We hope that we have given you a greater understanding of the impact that sensory processing difficulties can have on daily life. Advice and strategies that have been suggested can be implemented at school, nurseries and home and will help to manage some of the sensory challenges faced by some children. For lots of children this is just the approach they need.

WHAT TO DO IF DIFFICULTIES PERSIST?

If, however, sensory processing difficulties continue and affect your child's participation in daily living skills, then a referral to the children's Occupational Therapy Service can be made through your school doctor.

Please refer to Appendix A for referral pathway

If the referral is accepted, an assessment of your child's sensory processing ability will be completed, and specialist advice will be given to school and home to use every day.

Any queries about using this pack please call the Paediatric Occupational Therapy Team at the Countess of Chester Hospital on 01244 363260.

USEFUL RESOURCES AND LINKS FOR SENSORY PROCESSING

READING

- 'Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorders' *By Lucy Jane Miller and Doris A Fuller* (ISBN: 978-0-399-53307-5)
- 'Learning Through the Senses Resource Manual: The Impact of Sensory Processing in the Classroom' *Northern Territory Government (2006) San Antonio, TX: Harcourt*
- 'The Out of Sync Child Has Fun: Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder' *Carol Stock Kranowitz (2006)* (ISBN: 978-0-399532-71-9)
- 'Asperkids: An Insider's Guide to Loving, Understanding and Teaching Children with Asperger Syndrome' *By Jennifer O'Toole*
- 'Sensory Circuits: A Sensory Motor Skills Programme for Children' *By Jane Harwood (2008)* (ISBN: 978-1-85503-471-6)

VIDEO

- Temple Grandin talks about her life and achievements living with autism and sensory processing difficulties
<http://www.autism.org.uk/news-and-events/nas-conferences/previous-conferences/2012/an-evening-with-temple-grandin.aspx>

SPECIFIC EQUIPMENT

Type equipment name (Body Sox, move 'n' sit cushion) into a search engine to find suppliers

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- **Sensory Plus**
<http://www.sensoryplus.co.uk/>
Sensory Plus offer a wide range of sensory activities and toys, as well as teaching and training days and events for professionals and parents.

Continued overleaf...

- **National Autistic Association**

www.autism.org.uk

Has information and resources for sensory processing difficulties. A leading UK charity for people with autism (including Asperger Syndrome) and their families.

- **Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation**

www.spdfoundation.net

Expanding knowledge, fostering awareness and promoting recognition of Sensory Processing Disorder. Tel: (303) 794 1182.

- **Rompa**

<http://www.rompa.com>

Rompa are a specialist sensory equipment company. They are very good for researching what items are available, but many of the products can be bought at high street toy stores or supermarkets.

The following link shows products have been designed and selected for the benefits they provide in enabling users to develop their senses. This category is divided into visual, tactile, auditory and aromatic to help you easily navigate to relevant products.

<http://www.rompa.com/senses.html>

- **LDA – Primary and Special Needs**

www.LDAlearning.com

LDA has a range of equipment for sensory processing difficulties as well as associated motor difficulties. Tel: 0845 120 4776.

- **One Place for Special Needs**

www.oneplaceforspecialneeds.com

A self-funded disability project, run by Dawn Villarreal in Illinois. Has a useful link for social stories including how to help with common sensory problems such as messy eater, dressing and haircut.

http://www.oneplaceforspecialneeds.com/main/library_social

- **Special Direct**

www.specialdirect.com

Equipment for sensory processing and associated motor difficulties.

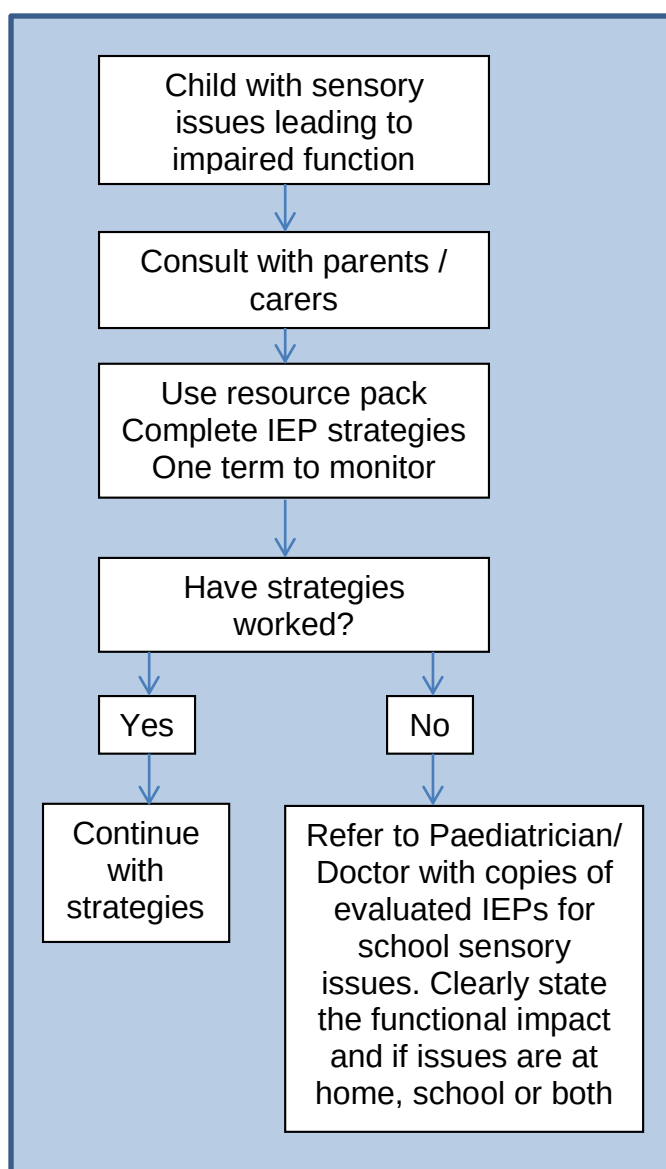
Tel: 0800 318 686

NB – The Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is not responsible for the content of external websites. The above links should not be understood to be endorsements for those websites, the site owners, or their products / services.

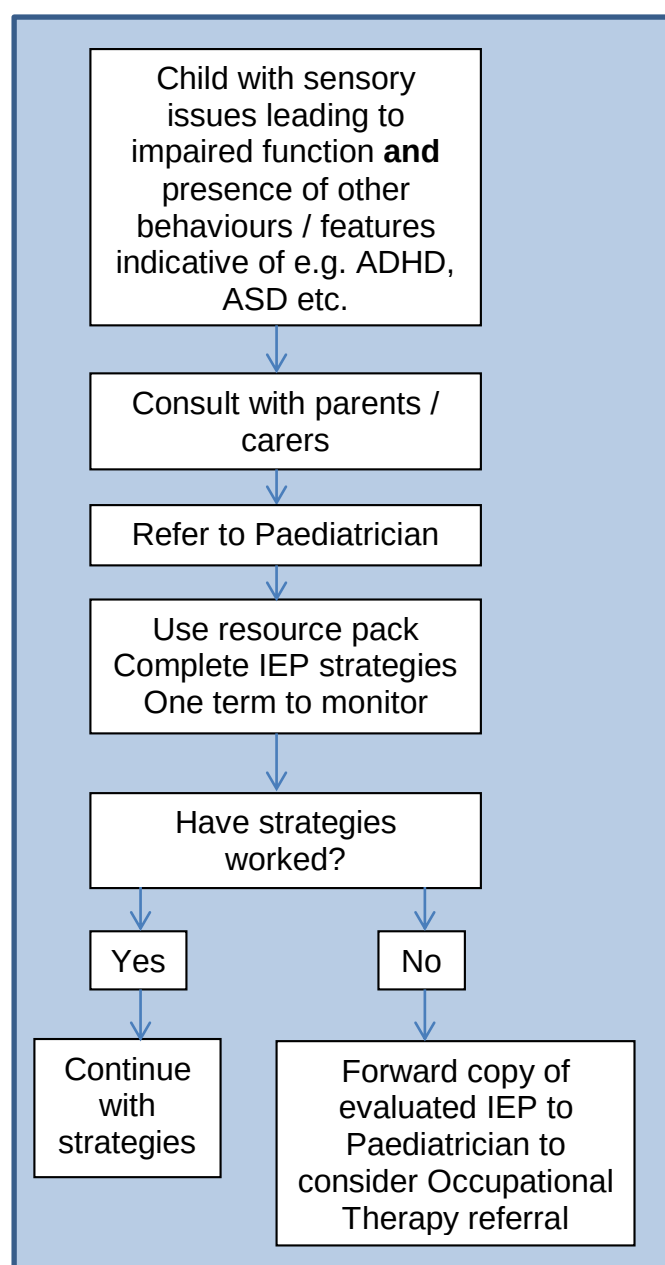
APPENDIX A: SENSORY PATHWAYS FOR SCHOOLS

Please use Table 1 unless the child also presents with behaviours that may indicate an underlying condition e.g. ADHD, ASD

1



2



APPENDIX B: SENSORY BOX IDEAS

Items to put into a 'sensory box' that can be easily accessed

Use a range of items, a few from each category, not all the items below. Swap items every now and again to maintain interest and help meet differing needs.

Make sure broken or damaged items are removed and replaced.

Touch

Koosh Ball, Hand massager, Tangle, Porcupine ball, Bracelet, Small knitted toy, Bean bag, Piece of flannel, Bag of lavender, Leather key ring, Whisk, Coconut shell, Grass rope, Sheepskin, Pumice stone, Loofah, Pine/Fir cones, Scrubbing brush, nail brush, makeup brush, paint brush, shaving brush



Visual



Coloured ribbons, non-breakable mirror, torch, spinning top, photos, postcards, glow stars, Toys painted with UV/Glow in the dark paint, Gold foil coffee bags, Tinsel tied up in a chiffon scarf, Unbreakable acrylic mirror, Flashing LED lights, Fibre optic torch and other light effects, Stickers, Fishing floats for night fishing, "Glow in the dark" stars, marbles, string etc. Bright clothing i.e. gloves socks, Road safety bands

Auditory

Different types of bottles filled with different substances i.e. sand, rice etc. Foil pom poms, Noisy torches, Beads, Slinkies, Balls with bells or sounds, Musical instruments, Musical loop ball with removable sound maker, survival blanket, headphones/ear muffs



Oral



Chewy tubes (either T's or P and Q), Access to a drink from a sports bottle, eating crunchy or chewy foods, sucking ice pops or ice cubes, bubbles

Continued overleaf...

Smell

Herb bag, Bag full of Lavender or other essence, hand wash, hand moisturiser, perfume on a piece of cloth, scented/perfume ball, laundry ball, wardrobe freshener, car freshener



Body awareness (proprioception)

Proprioceptive input can be achieved using different types of equipment

Sensory clothing

Weight jacket



Weighted belt



Wrist weights



Compression t-shirt



Weighted cap



Weighted compression vest



Weighted backpack



Sen-sational 'hug' shirt



Weighted blanket



Continued overleaf...

Sensory cushions

Move N' Sit cushion



Disco sit cushion



Weighted lap animals



Lap weight



Weighted shoulder lizard



Body awareness (proprioception) through movement

Body ball



Peanut ball



Body sox

