



IMMANUEL COLLEGE

PARENT RESOURCES

Sensory Processing Difficulties (SPD)

WHAT ARE SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES?

Some children have difficulties organising and responding to information through their senses. Certain sounds, sights, smells, textures, and tastes can create a sensory overload. Bright or flickering, loud noises, certain textures of food, and scratchy clothing are just some of the factors that can make children feel overwhelmed and upset.

SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES:

Children may be oversensitive to sensory input, undersensitive, or both. This can cause difficulty with learning and everyday life.

HOW WILL MY CHILD MANAGE AT SCHOOL?

It is advisable to have a discussion with our Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in order to highlight any concerns you may have. They will be able to assess your child's individual needs and design a bespoke programme of support.

In some circumstances, we may suggest an application should be made for an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) in order to provide emotional support for your child.

The school has a toolkit of strategies to help support children with SPD.

THERE ARE 2 TYPES OF SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES:

Oversensitivity (hypersensitivity), which is where children sensory avoid because they find it unbearable. They can react to loud noises, busy places, textures, strong odours e.g. perfume.

The other is undersensitivity (hyposensitivity), meaning children sensory seek, wanting to touch everything. These children can often have a high pain threshold, which is why they seek out rough play. They often have a need to be on the go and like spicy, strong flavours and pressure.

Some children are both oversensitive and under-sensitive. Dependent on the environment and situation may mean they can change throughout the day. Children who become sensory overloaded can often have meltdowns because they feel out of control with the environment.



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A CHILD WHO IS SENSORY AVOIDING MAY:

- Want to avoid large crowds and look for a quiet space.
- Show a reaction to bright lights and loud noises.
- Hate wearing itchy clothes, labels or tight-fitting clothing.
- Doesn't like to be hugged.
- Have a limited diet; refuses to try new food and textures/smells.
- Struggle with changes to routines and new places.

SENSORY SEEKING CHILDREN CAN BE THE OPPOSITE AND MAY:

- Be fidgety and always on the move.
- Have poor concentration skills, are easily distracted or can be clumsy, or have poor coordination skills.
- May have a high pain threshold.
- Can exhibit risk-taking behaviour.
- Will ensure their behaviour can't be ignored.

WE HAVE 5 SENSES: SIGHT, SMELL, TASTE, TOUCH AND HEARING.

However we also have lesser known senses:

- **Interoception**: this helps us understand and feel what is going on in our body.
- **Proprioception** is body awareness.
- **Vestibular sense** is spatial awareness.

Your child may also need help with these as children who are sensory avoiding can struggle with where they are in relation to others around them.

It is useful to note that a child with Sensory Processing difficulties can also present with ADHD or Autism traits. If you feel that this is the case with your child, then seek advice from your GP.

Keep in mind that children can be both sensory seeking and sensory avoiding. This can be dependent on the situation they find themselves in. Observe how your child responds to particular things, as this will give some insight into their ability to regulate their emotions and what triggers changes in their behaviour.

SPD can affect every aspect of a child's functioning - from their posture, to catching a ball, focusing in class and making social relationships. Once these have been established, it is useful to look at these challenges individually in order that suitable strategies can be put in place.



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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP AT HOME:

Playdough - really helps with strengthening fine motor skills, try rolling playdough into the same size balls. If your child doesn't like the smell, make your own.

Twister - a great game for stretching muscles and joints, which encourages body and spatial awareness.

Sensory boxes - use shoe boxes filled with sand, shaving foam or rice. Put plastic spoons or small cups in, as these are great for scooping and pouring. This can encourage your child to explore their senses in a contained way.

Finger and food painting - great for sensory seekers, as this tidy activity can help to introduce new textures.

Sensory-friendly fidget toys - like stress balls or silly putty can allow your child to seek their sensory stimulation in a discreet way.

IF YOUR CHILD IS OVERSENSITIVE TO CLOTHING, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- During colder months - layer up rather than them wearing a thick winter coat and put away summer clothes that they may feel more comfortable in.
- Cut labels out of their clothing.
- Try different types of materials; some shops now sell allergy/itch free school uniform.

WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD IF THEY ARE NOISE SENSITIVE:

- Where possible pre-warn them that a loud noise might happen.
- Ear defenders help to muffle sounds when out and about. Take care not to totally block noise as this can cause safety issues.
- Teach your child what important noises mean and sound like i.e. sirens, alarms.
- White noise like a washing machine or a fan can sometimes be comforting to SPD children as these could soften other loud noises.

CERTAIN FOODS MAY PROVE CHALLENGING FOR YOUR CHILD:

- If they are fussy eaters try to establish if it is the texture or taste they have issues with. Some children may prefer crunchy food not smooth.
- Try separating foods on a plate or buying plates with dividers.



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IF YOUR CHILD IS SENSITIVE TO TOUCH:

- Give advance warning if you need to be touch them - eg: "I need to brush your hair now."
- For children who don't like hugging, try allow bumps or fist bumps. Tell friends and relatives this is preferred over hugs.
- The use of weighted blankets or extra blankets can sometimes help your child to sleep.
- Let your child help with housework by doing 'heavy work' like vacuuming or getting the shopping out of the car as this can really them to calm down if they are feeling overwhelmed by touch.

LET FAMILY AND FRIENDS KNOW HOW YOUR CHILD MAY BE FEELING OR SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE SO THEY CAN SUPPORT THEM.

- These may include issues such as:
- Brushing teeth or hair
- Hating liking bright lights or loud sounds
- Being a picky eater
- Having poor gross or fine motor skills
- Sometimes not liking to be touched
- Sometimes wanting to be squeezed or feel pressure
- Being particular about what they wear
- Getting overstimulated
- Being fearful or over - anxious
- Losing people or objects/ not liking smells
- Having poor body awareness
- Clinging to trusted adults
- Losing my balance/ falling over



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PARENTS/CARERS WELL-BEING

Parenting/caring can be rewarding, but at times physically and emotionally draining. To enable you to support your child effectively, you need to ensure you are monitoring your own well-being. Keep a check on your personal physical and mental health and seek your own support when needed.

USEFUL SPD CONTACTS/INFO

www.sensoryprocessingdisorderparentsupport.com

www.sensorysmarts.com/helpfulwebsites

http:spdsupport.org

Speak to your GP or occupational therapist for further advice.

USEFUL PARENT/CARER SUPPORT

www.nhs.uk/reach4wellbeing

www.supportline.org.uk 01708765200

www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/send/send-info

www.earlyhelphub.co.uk 01905822666

RECOMMENDED READING

