

# Sensory Processing Factsheet



This document is a guide that accompanies Lifestart's *Making Sense of Sensory Processing* webinar.

## What is sensory processing?

Everyone's bodies are constantly processing sensory information throughout the day. It is how our bodies understand the world around us. Sensory processing is a term that describes how our bodies take in sensory information (from within our bodies and in our environment), process that information and then produce a response. For example, you may smell something and process it as a flower and then decide whether you enjoy the smell or not.

## What are the senses?



Sight



Sound



Taste



Smell



Touch



**Interoception**  
(body feelings like hunger, anger and the need to use the toilet)



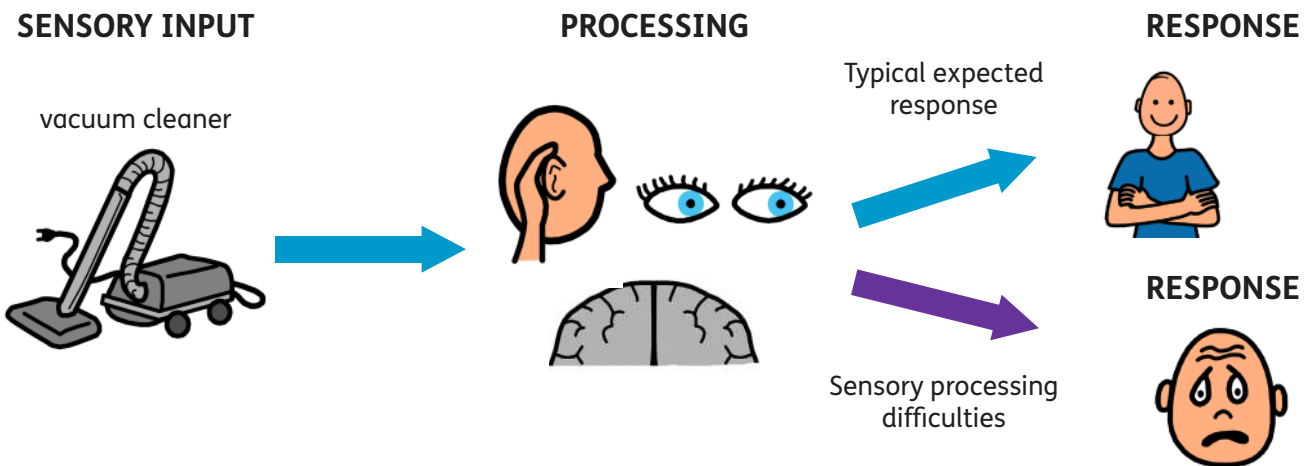
**Proprioception**  
(input to joints and muscles that informs the body's awareness)



**Vestibular**  
(movement and balance)

## What are sensory processing difficulties?

Some people react in a different way to others when they see, hear, touch or feel certain things. Everyone has their own unique sensory preferences. However, these sensory preferences become a problem when the response impacts on a child's ability to participate in everyday activities and routines.



## How might a child respond to sensory input?

**Sensory seeking:** Intense craving for sensory experiences and will actively seek this out, often in ways that are not matched or appropriate to the environment. For example, running around during group time to seek movement.

**Sensory avoiding:** Overreacting or reacting for longer than is expected. They may display negative emotions or behaviours. For example, strong reactions to tasting foods they do not like.

**Sensory under responsive:** Less of a response to input than would be expected for the situation. They take longer to respond and require more intense input before they respond. For example, not processing the auditory information that their name is being called in the classroom, or not noticing shoes on the wrong feet.

**Sensory modulation difficulties:** Some children have difficulty modifying their behaviour to match the task. For example, they may need constant prompting to use their "inside voice".

Many people will not fall into the same category for everything. For example, they may seek movement but avoid light touch.

## SENSORY SEEKING

- I am always on the go
- I like to chew on my clothes
- I like to touch everything
- I need to wriggle in my seat
- I get too close to my peers when we play



## SENSORY AVOIDING

- I am a very fussy eater
- I dislike haircuts
- I overreact to loud noises
- I need you to cut my tags off my clothes
- I do not like getting my hands dirty

An Occupational Therapist (OT) can help you to understand more about a child's sensory needs. You can then work together to discover ways to help a child manage their day to day activities.

## Sensory regulation

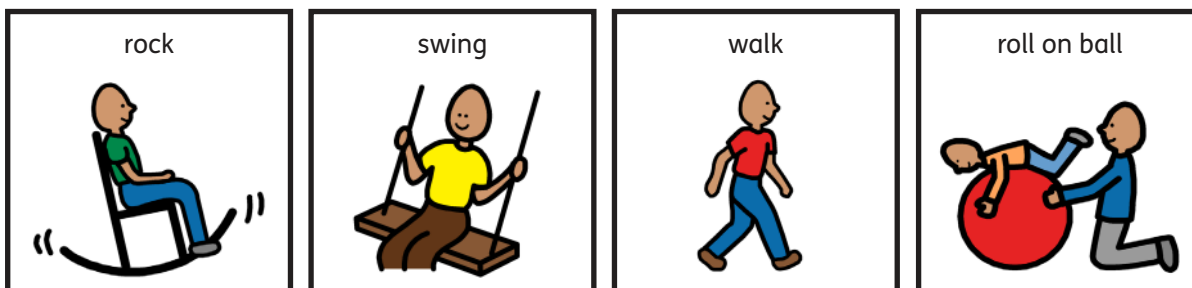
When a person is calm and alert (because their sensory needs have been met), they are ready to play, learn and interact with others. Occupational Therapists sometimes call this sensory regulation. Understanding a person's sensory needs is important so that they and the people around them can implement sensory regulation strategies to address their unique sensory needs. This will help to avoid "meltdowns/shutdowns" and improve their participation in everyday routines and activities.

## What strategies can be used to support a child's sensory regulation?

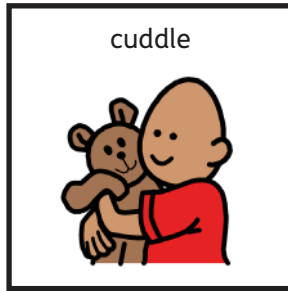
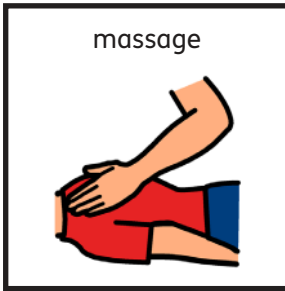
It is important to consider each child's individual needs when thinking about sensory strategies to support them. However, there are some universal strategies that can be helpful and these fall into three groups: calming, alerting and organising activities.

The following are examples of activities that people generally find calming.

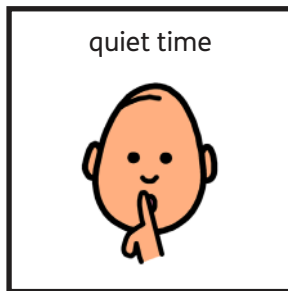
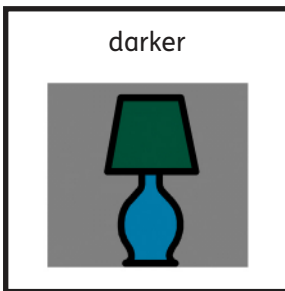
**Movement** - slow, rhythmic, linear (back and forth or up and down):



**Touch** - especially deep pressure

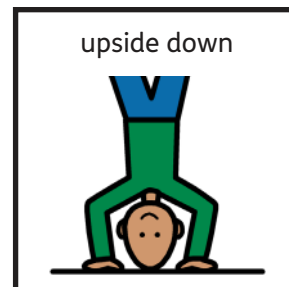
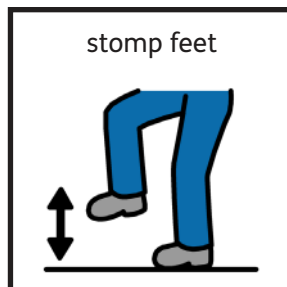
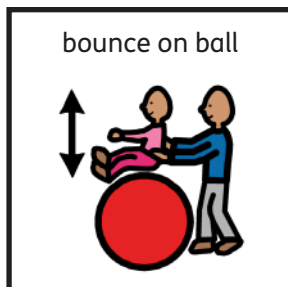
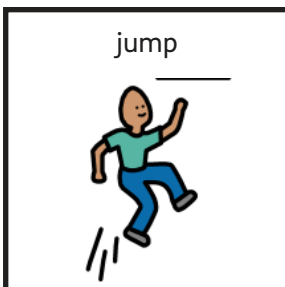


**Look and listen**



The following are examples of activities that most people find alerting.

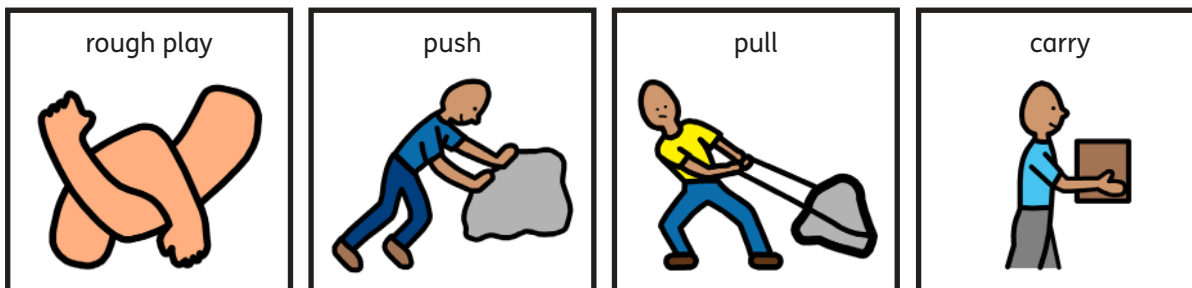
**Movement** – fast, erratic/arrhythmic.



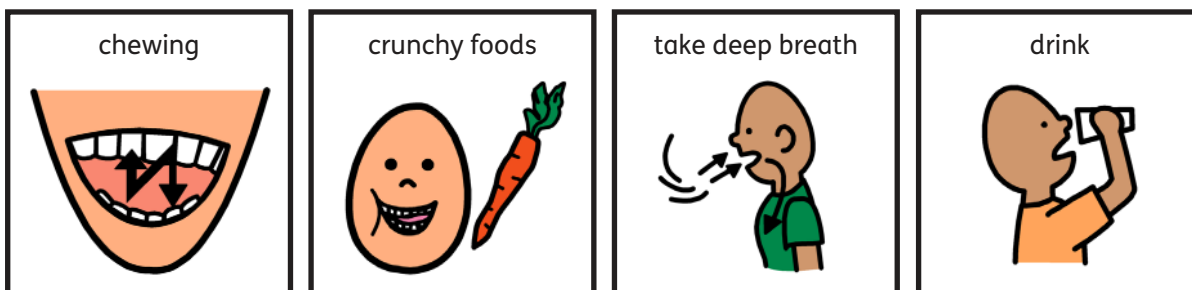
Organising activities will alert or calm depending on what the body needs.

The following are examples of activities that are generally considered 'organising' for most people.

**Heavy muscle work** – activities that make the muscles and joints work hard.



**Mouth activities**



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