

What you can do to help

- ◆ Reduce sensory challenges in your child's environment where possible. Children with sensory sensitivities will be more relaxed and comfortable in predictable, structured and organised environments. Avoiding certain situations, places or activities to avoid the reaction they bring out in your child means your child will not experience the things they find challenging and it will be harder for them to learn to tolerate them. Your child may become anxious about certain situations or environments, If this happens, prepare them for the activity to help them cope better with it. Reassurance is very important and needs to be given in a way that your child understands. Looking at pictures or photo stories, holding a familiar comforting toy, or using a picture timetable can be helpful.
- ◆ Introduce tactile strategies if your child avoids getting messy, reacts emotionally or aggressively to touch or has difficulty standing close to others.
- ◆ Introduce auditory strategies if your child has trouble functioning when there is a lot of noise, can't work with background noise and often holds hands over ears.
- ◆ Introduce calming strategies.

Everyone is different and not all strategies will be effective for your child. Please note that there is limited evidence that some of the strategies work for all children. Observing how your child behaves in different environments will give you an indication of what they may find alerting.

Useful Resources

"Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder" by Lucy Jane Miller

Children's rights

We are committed to upholding the rights of all children.

Child protection

We respect the need for confidentiality. The exception to this is when there are concerns about child protection. In these cases, having discussed our concerns with you, we would liaise with social care in accordance with Oxfordshire's safeguarding children procedures.

Leaflet created by Early Years Autism Project

Sensory Strategies: Sensory Over- Sensitivity



Reacting to different sensations and activities

We all understand and respond to information from the world around us in different ways. This is normal and part of what makes us individual. Young children in particular, may have a heightened response to some sensations and this can be part of normal development. We learn about the world through our senses - sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. There are two other senses: 'proprioception' (body awareness) and 'vestibular' (balance and movement).

Some children may show a heightened or dampened response to some sensations which can indicate a sensory sensitivity. However, it is important to remember that having a sensitivity in one area, during certain times of the day, does not always indicate a sensory sensitivity. Many children under the age of five, with no sensory processing issues, will find parts of their daily routing difficult e.g. bath time, hair brushing, visiting the supermarket and loud or unpredictable noises.

Many children with autism have sensory sensitivities, displaying either heightened or reduced responses to sensation (or a mixture of both). You may recognise a cluster of these responses in your child and may find the suggested strategies helpful.



- Over-reacts to noises
- Hides or covers ears in noisy environments
- Easily distracted by noise



- Over excited or anxious in busy environments
- Dislikes bright lights
- Poor eye contact



- Very picky eater
- Gags with utensils in mouth
- Dislikes specific flavours, temperatures or textures

- Dislikes face or hair washed
- Dislikes hugs or unexpected touch
- Avoids messy play activities
- Dislikes many clothes textures



- Car sickness
- Fearful of stairs, uneven surfaces, playground and climbing
- Likes to keep head upright



- Avoids/distracted by smells
- Gags with odours



These sensations may be intolerable for your child and their response may be to resist parts of the daily routine, they may appear anxious or try to control the environment or person to feel safe. A fight, fright or flight response is not surprising and can be interpreted by others around them as:

Unsociable behaviour

Excessively avoidant behaviour

Aggressive, impulsive or defiant behaviour

Irritable, fussy or moody behaviour

Excessively cautious

Unsettled behaviour during transitions or unexpected change