

Sensory Processing Difficulty

Some children have difficulty handling the information their senses take in—things like sound, touch, taste, sight, and smell. There are also two other less well-known senses that can be affected—the first is a sense of body awareness, while the second involves movement, balance, and coordination. Also, children with sensory issues can be oversensitive to input, under-sensitive to input, or both.

While sensory processing issues are often seen in autistic children, they can also be found in those with ADHD, OCD and other developmental delays—or with no other diagnosis at all.

Key Characteristics:

We may see children who:

- Are unable to tolerate bright lights and loud noises like ambulance sirens.
- Refuse to wear clothing because it feels scratchy or irritating—even after cutting out all the tags and labels—or shoes because they feel “too tight.”
- Be distracted by background noises that others don’t seem to hear
- Be fearful of surprise touch, and avoid hugs and cuddling even with familiar adults.
- Be overly fearful of swings and playground equipment.
- Often have trouble knowing where their body is in relation to other objects or people.
- Bump into people and things and appear clumsy.
- Have trouble sensing the amount of force they’re applying; for example, they may rip the paper when rubbing out, pinch too hard or slam down objects.
- Run off, or bolt, when they’re overwhelmed to get away from whatever is distressing them.
- Have extreme meltdowns when overwhelmed.
- Have a constant need to touch people or textures, even when it’s not socially acceptable.
- Not understand personal space even when children the same age are old enough to understand it.
- Have an extremely high tolerance for pain.
- Not understand their own strength.
- Be very fidgety and unable to sit still.
- Love jumping, bumping and crashing activities.
- Enjoy deep pressure like tight bear hugs.
- Crave fast, spinning and/or intense movement.
- Love being tossed in the air and jumping on furniture and trampolines.

Strategies we use in the Classroom

We may need to:

- Make sure the chair is a good fit for the child. When the child is sitting at his desk, he should be able to put his feet flat on the floor and rest his elbows on the desk.
- For the child who needs to move a bit, we use an inflated seated cushion so he can both squirm and stay in his seat.
- Some kids are better off if they sit close to the teacher. However, if your child is easily distracted by noise, he may end up turning around often to where the noise is coming from.
- If possible, eliminate buzzing and flickering fluorescent lighting.
- Make sure the child is not sitting next to distracting sources of noise.

- Provide sensory breaks such as walking in circles, carrying heavy books or pushing against an object e.g. the wall, in order to get the input they crave.
- Allow for fidgets and chewable items to provide input.
- To avoid meltdowns or bolting, allow the child to miss school assemblies, or sit near a door so that he can take breaks in the hallway with a teacher when he starts to feel himself getting overwhelmed.
- If the hall is too stimulating at lunchtime, we could let children eat in a quieter room with a friend.
- Provide a clear visual timetable and give plenty of preparation for transitions.

Specific Interventions which we Provide at Claremont School:

- Sensory Circuits.
- Referral to an Occupational Therapist (OT) who can diagnose such a condition. We can run programmes provided by the OT in school on an 1:1 or small group basis if necessary.