

A Sensory Life

Sensory Processing Differences and Challenges Tips for Helping Family Members and Caregivers

Children with sensory processing differences and challenges have difficulty detecting, organizing, or responding to sensory information received and interpreted in the brain. This includes the basic five senses (auditory, visual, touch, smell, taste) as well as two others, the **vestibular** and **proprioceptive** senses. We ALL have sensory processing differences; yet sometimes these processing difficulties impact daily life, development, behavior, and social interactions. Respecting the child's sensory needs and differences can completely change the child's response and your interaction with the child...**in a positive way.**

Here are some guidelines and suggestions for interacting with a child who has sensory processing challenges:

- Do not insist on eye contact, let it happen naturally.
- Do not take it personally if the child does not interact with you right away. Let the child warm up to the environment first. This may include retreating to a safe place in another room, or even under the table. The more you push the interaction, the more the child will retreat and shut down.
- Sensory meltdowns are extremely common. The fight or flight response can be triggered without any warning and often without an obvious reason. Sensory overload can occur in the blink of an eye.
- If you are visiting or spending time with the child outside of their own home, be sure you have a sensory retreat of some sort for the child to use as needed. This can be a quiet cozy place in another room, a squish box, play tent, pillow cave, etc
- Prior to ANY touch or hands on interaction be sure to give a verbal warning and approach with deep pressure touch. In general, light touch is not well accepted by the nervous system, and even more so with sensory kiddos.
- Refrain from a bunch of kisses, I know it is tempting, but this can cause extreme sensory overload. A nice big bear hug is a great replacement.
- Maintain a calm voice at all times, not speaking too fast. Too much laughter and excitement can be overwhelming.
- The child may need to use earplugs, nose plugs, or noise cancelling headphones, and/or sunglasses or a hat. Please respect this and allow it, indoors and outdoors.
- The child may need to hop, jump, or really get out the wiggles to help self-regulate, especially right when the child gets to your place or the new environment. Please be patient and give them a moment or two to do this, or however long they need to do this.
- The child may want to use an MP3 player with their favorite calming music, need a favorite toy or fidget, or an oral sensory tool. The child needs to have access to these sensory tools at all times.
- Please let the child inspect the surroundings and if they need to, let them touch and smell any new items in the environment, just let this happen and please do not draw attention to it.
- Large, chaotic group settings will likely be very difficult for the child, and may not be tolerated at all, please respect this.
- Even if a child is a sensory seeker and appears to be having fun in a loud, crazy, busy environment, the brain can quickly switch to a state of sensory overload and sensory dysregulation.
- Mealtime can be very difficult. Find more information on this topic here: asensorylife.com/feeding-challenges.html
- For further information on meltdowns, fight or flight, sensory retreats, self-regulation, sensory modulation, and so much more please visit the website listed below.
- *Understanding Your Child's Sensory Signals* and *Understanding Your BABY's Sensory Signals* are easy to read, practical handbooks which can be a great starting place for family members and caregivers in learning ways to help understand and respond to the child or baby's sensory cues and signals.

