

A Sensory Life

Sensory Tips for a Dentist Visit

What may appear as behavior on the surface is a neurological condition which results in difficulty processing and perceiving sensory input from one or more sensory systems. My child may display a sympathetic nervous system response (fight or flight) during this visit due to the multi-sensory experience and various forms of unexpected, unfamiliar, and unpredictable sensory input.

A dentist visit can be difficult for typical children, but children with sensory processing difficulties are often defensiveness and over-responsive to sensory input and therefore have a lower threshold for pain and other forms of sensory input. Strange sounds, strange smells, and an enormous amount of oral sensory input and facial/tactile input are involved.

Here are some ways in which we can help my child during the visit....

- Please place the weighted x-ray blanket on my child as soon as he/she gets in the chair and leave it there the entire visit for proprioception, to help provide calming sensory input.
- My child may need to use earplugs, nose plugs, or noise cancelling headphones, and/or sunglasses.
- My child may need to hop, jump, or really get out the wiggles to help self-regulate right before getting in the chair. Please be patient and give them a moment or two.
- Let my child smell, touch, or taste unfamiliar pastes or gels that may be placed in the mouth first before the actual procedure.
- If possible and safe, let my child hold and manipulate the tools that you will be using in the mouth.
- The water may need to be a very specific temperature for my child to tolerate it in the mouth. Please honor this.
- My child may not want to interact with you...it may just be best to be silent, please do not take this the wrong way.
- My child may like to use an MP3 player with their favorite music or hold a favorite toy.
- Please let my child inspect the surroundings and let them touch and smell new equipment prior to any hands on procedures or even making them get in the chair.
- PRE-WARN my child that the seat will be moving.
- Encourage my child to take deep breaths throughout the appointment, this can help with self-regulation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this sensory awareness handout, and most of all, thank you for being respectful of my child's sensory needs and differences during the dental appointment.

