



A Sensory Life

Sensory Differences Awareness Checklist

Please note: This checklist is intended to be used as a tool and a guide in becoming more aware and in tune to your child's sensory needs and differences. This is not a diagnostic tool, nor is the number of areas you check off an indicator of a disorder. The checklist includes many of the most common sensory preferences and differences, and is divided into categories based on the sensory system and how the brain and nervous system may be processing the input. After completion, take note of the categories where you have checked off the most items. This will help guide you in determining the sensory systems that may need the most attention and support.

The items listed in this checklist are sensory signals and cues which your child is giving you in regards to how their sensory systems are processing and the response to that input. You will find ideas to help and a sensory explanation for most of these items in one of the two books written by Angie Voss, OTR: *Understanding Your Child's Sensory Signals* or *Understanding Your BABY's Sensory Signals*.

TACTILE INPUT

Over-registration/Tactile Avoiding

- Becomes fearful, anxious or aggressive with light or unexpected touch
- As an infant, did/does not like to be held or cuddled; may arch back, cry, or pull away
- Distressed with diaper changes
- Appears fearful, or avoids standing in close proximity to other people or peers (especially in lines)
- Becomes frightened when touched from behind or by someone/something they cannot see (such as under a blanket)
- Complains about having hair brushed
- Bothered by rough bed sheets (example: old and "bumpy")
- Avoids group situations for fear of unexpected touch
- Resists friendly or affectionate touch from anyone besides parents or siblings (and sometimes them too!)
- Dislikes kisses, will "wipe off" the place where kissed
- A raindrop, water from a shower, or wind blowing on the skin produces an adverse response or avoidance reaction
- Overreacts to minor cuts, scrapes, and or bug bites
- Avoids touching certain textures of material (blankets, rugs, stuffed animals)



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- Refuses to wear new or stiff clothes, clothes with rough textures, turtlenecks, jeans, hats, or belts
- Avoids using hands for play or approaches with a closed fist
- Avoids or dislikes messy play such as mud, glue, or finger paints
- Avoids getting messy with food textures
- Distressed by dirty hands and wants to wipe or wash them frequently
- Excessively ticklish
- Distressed by seams in socks and may refuse to wear them
- Distressed by clothes rubbing on skin; may want to wear shorts and short sleeves year round, toddlers may prefer to be naked and pull diapers and clothes off constantly
- Distressed about having face washed
- Distressed with haircuts, nail trimming
- Resists brushing teeth, may be extremely fearful of the dentist
- Refuses to walk barefoot on grass or sand
- Walks on toes on new surfaces or textures

Under-registration/Tactile Seeking

- Craves touch or needs to touch everything and everyone
- Is not aware of being touched/bumped unless done with extreme force or intensity
- Is not bothered by injuries and shows no distress with painful stimuli
- Not aware that hands or face are dirty or the feeling his/her nose running
- Frequently hurts other children or pets while playing
- Repeatedly touches surfaces or objects that are soothing
- Seeks out surfaces and textures that provide strong tactile feedback
- Thoroughly enjoys and seeks out messy play
- Craves vibration



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Tactile Discrimination and Perception Difficulty

- Has difficulty with fine motor tasks such as buttoning, zipping, or fastening clothes
- Unable to identify which part of their body was touched if they were not looking
- Has difficulty using scissors, crayons, silverware
- Unable to identify objects by touch, uses vision to help; such as reaching into a backpack or desk to retrieve an item

VESTIBULAR INPUT (Movement)

Over-registration/Vestibular Avoiding

- Avoids/dislikes playground equipment which involves movement; slides, swings, merry go round
- Prefers sedentary tasks, moves slowly and cautiously, avoids taking risks
- Avoids/dislikes elevators and escalators
- Physically clings to an adult they trust
- Appears terrified of falling even when there is no real risk
- Afraid of heights; even the height of a curb or step
- Fearful of feet leaving the ground
- Gets carsick easily
- Fearful of going up or down stairs or walking on uneven surfaces
- Afraid of being tipped upside down, sideways or backwards
- Startles if someone else moves them
- As an infant, did not like baby swings or jumpers
- Fearful or have difficulty riding a bike, jumping, hopping, balancing
- As an infant, disliked being on tummy
- Loses balance easily and may appear clumsy
- Fearful of activities which require good balance
- Avoids rapid or rotating movements



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Under-registration/Vestibular Seeking

- In constant motion, can't seem to sit still
- Craves fast, spinning, and/or intense movement experiences
- Loves being tossed in the air
- Can spin for hours and never appear to be dizzy
- Always jumping on furniture, trampolines, spinning in swivel chair
- Loves being in upside down positions
- Loves to swing as high as possible and for long periods of time
- Is a thrill seeker, dangerous at times
- Always running, jumping, hopping instead of walking
- Rocks body, shakes leg, or moves head while sitting

PROPRIOCEPTIVE INPUT

(Body in space, body position and awareness, the brain's ability to communicate with the muscles and joints during any given task)

***Over-registration and proprioceptive avoiding are very rare, therefore this section only has one category.**

****Deep pressure touch is also a component**

Under-registration/Proprioceptive Seeking

- Seeks out jumping, bumping, and crashing activities
- Stomps feet when walking
- Has a limp, "floppy" body
- Frequently slumps, lies down, or leans head on hand or arm while at desk or table
- Frequently cracks knuckles
- Loves to be wrapped tight in blankets**
- Loves "tight" and small spaces**
- Prefers clothes to be as tight as possible**
- Enjoys bear hugs**
- Bumps into things/appears clumsy
- Difficulty turning doorknobs, handles, opening and closing items
- Often sits in a "W" sit position on the floor



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- Excessive banging on/with toys and objects
- Loves wrestling and roughhousing**
- Frequently falls intentionally
- Grinds teeth
- Loves pushing, pulling, dragging objects
- Frequently hits, bumps, or pushes other children
- Difficulty regulating pressure when writing or drawing, too light or too hard
- Often rips paper when erasing
- Complains about objects being too heavy
- Does not understand the meaning of too heavy or too light
- Seems to do everything with too much force (slamming doors)
- Plays with animals with too much force, often hurting them

AUDITORY INPUT

Over-registration/Auditory Avoiding

- Distracted by sounds not normally noticed by others; humming of lights, clocks ticking
- Fearful of the sound of a flushing toilet, vacuum, hairdryer, dog barking
- Startled or distracted by loud or unexpected sounds
- Distracted by environmental sounds such as lawn mower, garbage truck
- Frequently asks others to be quiet, to stop talking or singing
- Runs away or covers ears with loud or unexpected sounds
- Refuses or does not like to go to movie theaters, parades, gymnasiums
- Some voices may be very disturbing, even laughter

Under-registration/Auditory Seeking

- Often does not respond to verbal cues or to name being called
- Makes noise just to make noise
- Loves excessively loud music or TV
- Oblivious to certain sounds



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- Appears confused about where a sound is coming from
- Little or no babbling or vocalizing as an infant
- Needs directions repeated often
- Says “what?” frequently

ORAL SENSORY INPUT

Over-registration/Oral Sensory Avoiding

- Picky eater, extreme food preferences
- Only eats “soft” or pureed foods past 24 months of age
- Gags with textured foods
- Extremely fearful of the dentist
- Dislikes toothpaste and teeth brushing
- Prefers bland foods
- Only eats certain textures, sensitive to hot and cold foods, resists trying new foods

Under-registration/Oral Sensory Seeking

- Mouths objects excessively past age 2
- Bites or sucks on fingers
- Has difficulty with sucking, chewing, and swallowing
- Licks or chews on inedible objects
- Prefers foods with intense flavor
- Excessive drooling
- Frequently chews on hair, shirt, or fingers
- Seeks vibration to the mouth
- Prefers excessively spicy, sweet, sour, or salty foods



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OLFACTORY INPUT

Over-registration/Olfactory Avoiding

- Reacts negatively to smells which do not usually bother others
- Tells other people how bad or funny they smell
- Refuses to eat certain foods because of the smell
- Offended or nauseated by bathroom odors or personal hygiene smells
- Bothered by smell of perfume or cologne
- Bothered by household or cooking smells

Under-registration/Olfactory Seeking

- Will smell an entire room including objects and walls before interacting
- Unable to identify smells from scratch and sniff stickers
- Does not notice odors that others usually complain about
- Excessive use of smelling when introduced to objects, people, or places
- Uses smell to interact with objects

VISUAL INPUT

Over-Registration/Visual Avoiding

- Sensitive to bright lights, possibly headaches from the light
- Easily distracted from other visual stimuli in the room
- Has difficulty in bright colorful rooms
- Rubs eyes or has watery eyes after reading or looking at a screen
- Avoids eye contact
- Enjoys playing in the dark

Under-Registration/Visual Seeking

- Craves bright and colorful (often busy and cluttered) spaces
- Loves to line things up
- Loves to look at spinning objects
- Enjoys looking at shiny objects



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SELF-REGULATION DIFFICULTIES

- Difficulty accepting changes in routine
- Gets easily frustrated
- Impulsive
- Quick change in moods, unexpected
- Avoids eye contact
- Prefers repetitive play
- Excessive irritability
- Difficulty with transitions
- Difficulty calming self
- Cannot transition from sleeping to awake without distress
- Requires excessive help from caregiver to fall asleep

