

A visual schedule limiting child's touch sensory-seeking behaviours to certain times only:



3. Give your child CONTROL over the sensations they experience. Empower your child to decide how they want to deal with the sensation by teaching methods to reduce it. For example, give your child ear plugs and explain that they can be put on to reduce the volume of sounds when they get too uncomfortable.

It is better to gradually expose your child to sensory experiences (even ones they do not like) than to help them avoid it. Learning to cope with different sensory experiences is a valuable skill to have. Nevertheless, be sensitive as well to your child's needs. Some children might still need a quiet corner or separate room to calm down in if they are unable to cope. You could use a stress scale for your child to indicate when they get to a level where they need a quiet corner.

4. MODIFY the environment. It may be possible to make a place more sensory-friendly for a child, especially at home. Sound reduction can be achieved by covering floors and surfaces with carpet or soft furnishings. Softer or dimmed lighting, and the use of calmer colours like greens, blues and browns, can make a room more soothing. Avoid over-stimulating objects, like electronic devices, flickering fluorescent lights, or highly-patterned fabrics, in bedrooms. Keeping a room tidy and uncluttered can also reduce visual sensory overload. Some children also feel calmer with weighted blankets, and some need textured items in the room to touch as a calming technique.

References:
Peter Vermeulen (2019). Are sensory issues in Autism really sensory? The predictive mind and sensory processing. ICC, Birmingham. Retrieved from <https://network.autism.org.uk/sites/default/files/ckfinder/files/Are%20sensory%20issues%20in%20autism%20actually%20sensory%20-%20Peter%20Vermeulen.pdf>

Other resources:
1. <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/sensory-world.aspx>
2. <https://childmind.org/article/sensory-processing-issues-explained/>

This brochure is developed by the Department of Child Development.

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Coping with Sensory Processing Issues



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What are sensory processing issues?

Everyone interprets and responds to various sensory experiences differently. Some children with sensory processing issues may have difficulties receiving and responding to information from their senses. The senses include vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and movement. Sensory processing issues include *hypersensitivity*, *hyposensitivity*, and sensory-seeking behaviours, that are explained below. Sensory processing issues are more common in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Sensory hypersensitivity

Certain sensory experiences in our daily lives, like the honking of a car horn or bright lights, are tolerable to most people. However, some children are hypersensitive, or over-responsive, to sensations. They react differently because their brains perceive and interpret these sensations differently. What may seem like a normal sound to most of us may be unbearably loud for a child with sound hypersensitivity. Children with sensory hypersensitivity get easily distressed and may respond with challenging behaviours or meltdowns. Hypersensitivity to various sensory inputs may also make a child appear to be hypervigilant or anxious, easily distracted and lose focus easily.

Sensory hyposensitivity

Conversely, children with sensory hyposensitivity are less sensitive and hence less responsive to sensations. Some examples of hyposensitivity include a lack of response to sensations such as pain, touch, smell

and sound. Sensory hyposensitivity can be harder to detect in children because it may not produce the same challenging behaviour or meltdowns as hypersensitivity. Some children with hyposensitivity cannot tell when they are hungry or full, or if they need to use the toilet. A child may be accidentally injured and show hardly any reaction to the pain, even though the injury is sometimes quite severe.

Sensory-seeking behaviours

Sensory-seeking refers to the craving for sensory stimulation. Some examples include children licking or biting toys beyond the age of two years, or rocking or spinning their body repetitively. Some may like to rub certain textures, or repeatedly bang or drop objects to hear the sounds.

What are some steps I can take to help my child cope with sensory processing issues?

1. IDENTIFY these sensations. Observe and identify what sensations your child likes, dislikes or does not respond to. Accept and validate your child's sensory experiences and responses. Take any discomforts seriously. Determine whether your child's reactions are appropriate or not, and if they are restricting normal activity or daily life. Explain to your child that what they are feeling is valid and (usually) temporary, and that there are ways to cope. Children with hyposensitivity may need to be taught to be more aware of certain sensations and how to react appropriately (e.g. if they see a cut or a bruise, they should report it to a caregiver).

2. Make sensations PREDICTABLE for your child.

Unpredictable sensations may give rise to stronger reactions. For example, when we tickle someone suddenly, the person tickled is likely to burst out laughing as the tickle is unexpected. However, when we try to tickle ourselves, we do not achieve the same effect. This is because our brain is able to expect what will happen next. Making sensations predictable can therefore help to reduce reactions.

Give your child enough information about new situations. Use 'wh' questions to guide you, such as telling them what will happen and when, who is involved, where it will take place, and why. For example, if your child is sensitive to sound, tell your child that every morning before lesson starts, the teacher will play the National Anthem through the speakers. It will be loud, but only for a short while.

Be mindful of upcoming new situations for your child, such as dental checks in school. Prepare them using the 'wh' guide and plan a calming or coping strategy in advance. Some calming strategies include breathing techniques, deep pressure massage, or progressive muscle relaxation.

Visual schedules and social stories can be used to explain sensory stresses or inappropriate sensory-seeking behaviours, and to teach coping strategies. Praise your child and provide small rewards (e.g. stickers) when your child is able to show appropriate coping behaviours.

A social story for oral sensory-seeking:

Sometimes, I like to put things in my mouth.
I might put a toy in my mouth.

Toys are for playing. Toys are not to be put into our mouths.



I will try my best to only put food in my mouth.



My teacher will help me to only put food in my mouth.

