

## TOPIC: SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER (SPD)

**DEFINITION:** The difficulty in the way your brain takes in, organizes, and uses sensory information, which causes one to have problems interacting effectively in everyday life. Receiving this outside stimuli from your 7 senses is not being processed in the brain as a typical person would be able to do. The 7 senses are: visual (vision), taste, olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), vestibular (movement and balance), and proprioceptive (body position). One with sensory processing difficulties may struggle with interpreting sensory input, which may cause difficulties in one's movement, emotions, attention, or adaptive responses. SPD encompasses 3 main categories, which are Sensory Modulation Disorder, Sensory Discrimination Disorder, and Sensory-Based Motor Disorder, and their subtypes. Sensory modulation is how a child regulates his/her responses to sensations. When a child has difficulties with sensory modulation, he/she struggles with adjusting to his/her sensory experience. Sensory discrimination allows one to learn about specific qualities of sensory information such as, size, shape, direction of noise, texture, body position, and movement in space. A child with sensory discrimination struggles with distinguishing one type of sensory input from another. Sensory-Based Motor Disorders are classified in two subtypes: Postural Disorder (causes one to have poor posture and/or difficulties maintaining a stable posture when standing or sitting; struggles to organize his/her movements) and Dyspraxia (disruption in sensory processing and motor planning).

### CHARACTERISTICS:

#### Sensory Modulation Disorder

- *Sensory Over-Responsivity - hypersensitive (sensory defensiveness, avoiders)*
  - *These children may be bothered by or cannot tolerate certain sounds, smells, textures, or tastes. They may have strong emotional reactions, which can create avoidance, distractibility, anxiety, discomfort.*
- *Sensory Under-Responsivity - hyposensitive (decreased awareness, poor registration)*
  - *These children may seek out or crave feedback or a response from the environment.*
- *Sensory Seeking - hyposensitive (needs intense input, poor registration)*
  - *These children are often oblivious to any input and often appear lazy or tired.*

#### Sensory Discrimination Disorder

- *Difficulties perceiving details of information for differences or similarities*
  - *These children may not "get" sensory messages that others use to protect himself/herself, or learn about his/her environment, and to relate successfully to others.*

#### Sensory-Based Motor Disorder

- *Difficulty executing actions in gross motor, fine motor, and oral*
- *Difficulty stabilizing body during movement or rest to meet environmental demands or given a motor task*

### RECOMMENDATION FOR SERVICES:

If you are concerned your child is experiencing difficulty in processing sensory input to the point it interferes with daily life:

- Contact a therapist who is knowledgeable in sensory integration for a consult or evaluation
- Once in therapy, a sensory diet might be developed by your therapist. This diet or sensory strategies is to help a child achieve a calm and organized state to be ready to learn
- Each person responds differently to various sensory stimuli. Activities should be geared towards a person's interests and skills. One particular activity or technique may work one day but not the next.

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Applied Behavioral Analysis  
Music Therapy  
Occupational Therapy  
Physical Therapy  
Speech/Language Therapy  
Social Skills Groups

#### WHAT TO DO AT HOME:

- Provide deep pressure input - weighted blankets, firm hugs, using a "pillow corner," rolling a large ball on top of child
- Heavy work - pull, push, carry heavy items, animal walks, playing on playground equipment, jumping on floor or trampoline
- Vestibular - swinging, jumping, sitting on a move-n-sit cushion, rocking in a rocking chair
- Oral motor - chewing gum, eating crunchy or chewy snacks, drinking through a small straw, blowing bubbles
- Auditory - wear headphones or earbuds, pre-warn child before alarms or other loud noises when possible, seat child in a quieter or less busy area in a classroom
- Visual - avoid bright lights, decrease clutter around room, minimize number of distractions

#### References:

Ayres, Jean A., Ph.D. Sensory Integration and the Child. Western Psychological Services: Los Angeles, California, 1989.  
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Ostovar, Roya, Ph.D. The Ultimate Guide to Sensory Processing Disorder: Easy, Everyday Solutions to Sensory Challenges. Sensory World: Arlington, Texas, 2009.