

SENSORY TRIGGERS IN THE CLASSROOM

The classroom is an environment full of sensory information! Most children can cope with this. Some children find classrooms overstimulating (ie. over-responsive), while others will not receive enough sensory information to meet classroom demands (ie. under-responsive). Children may respond with behaviour that the class teacher may find challenging!

Here is a compilation of **sensory triggers** that your child may experience from the classroom environment as well as **behaviours** you may see exhibited in the classroom in response to these triggers.

VISUAL

- Glare from lighting
- Glare from whiteboards, computer screens or smart boards
- Glare from paper
- Too much visual information from art work, word walls and classroom decoration
- Busy carpet patterns
- Too much light from windows
- Room too dark (eg. lights switched off for an activity)

Children with difficulty processing visual information may exhibit behaviour such as squinting, covering their eyes, complaining about lighting, movement to avoid certain areas of the classroom, leaning over desk, unable to sit still, aggression, unable to complete tasks, unable to follow classroom routine, unable to copy information from the board, unable to transition from one task to another, constant head turning, staring at people, spins or flicks objects in front of eyes, etc.

TOUCH

- Light touch with a classmate whilst standing in line
- Light touch with a classmate whilst sitting on the floor
- Feel of carpet or floor surface when sitting on the floor
- Feel of the chair
- Temperature of the classroom
- Feel of blue tac, playdough, paint, glue or other craft supplies
- Feel of classmate's hair
- Messy play activities

Children with difficulty processing touch (proprioceptive) information may exhibit behaviour such as being unable to sit still on the floor or in their seat, leaning against furniture when sitting on the floor, fidgeting, playing with classmate's hair, pushing others, constantly hugging other children, biting, avoiding activities, unable to take off clothing despite the temperature, rocking on chairs, getting too close to other children/adults, etc

AUDITORY

- Sound of peers talking simultaneously
- Sound of a clock
- Sound of an electric light fixture
- Sound of a fan, air conditioner or heater
- Sound of paper crunching
- Sound of pencils or pens (eg. mechanical pencil clicks)
- Sound of computer keyboards
- Sound of electric pencil sharpeners
- Sound of music played in the classroom
- Sound of the school bell
- Sound of a fire siren
- Sound of a door closing
- Listening to multiple instructions

Children with difficulty processing auditory information may exhibit behaviour such as covering their ears, screaming, yelling, removing themselves from situation, refusing to participate, unable to complete tasks, unable to follow instructions given to the whole class, gets distracted easily, distressed when music is played, speaks too loudly, makes excessive or constant noise, etc.

MOVEMENT

- Sitting on the floor
- Sitting at a desk
- Keeping hands in lap
- Change of activities in the classroom
- Moving from indoor to outdoors (or vice versa)
- Moving from floor to desk sitting (or vice versa)

Children with difficulty processing movement (vestibular) information may exhibit behaviour such as rocking on their chair, leaning to the side of chair, kicking under the chair, holds head up with hands whilst seated, unable to sit cross legged, movement to different positions on the floor, leans on furniture or other children when sitting on the floor, fidgeting, touching other children, unable to transition between activities, unable to complete tasks, slumped posture, taking a long time to follow instructions, gets distracted easily, running instead of walking, holds onto something whilst walking, falls out of chair, etc

ORAL

- Pencils and other stationery items
- Paint, glue and other craft supplies

Children with difficulty processing oral information may exhibit teeth grinding, biting on clothing, biting on pencils, biting on furniture, biting other children, licking or digesting inedible objects, making noises/movement with their mouth, excess saliva, etc.

SMELL

- Disinfectant used to wipe tables, chairs, etc
- Shampoo from another child's hair
- Teacher's perfume
- Carpet/shoes/socks after the rain
- Another child's lunch (or their own lunch)
- Another child's shoes after being outside
- Another child's feet when shoes and socks have been removed for sport
- Glue, paint and other craft supplies
- Teacher's tea or coffee

Children with difficulty processing olfactory (smell) information may excessively sniff some items, avoid activities, have difficulty sitting next to other children, have difficulty completing activities, are easily distracted with certain activities, etc

"Children with **sensory over-responsivity** (sometimes called "sensory defensiveness" respond to sensory messages **more intensely, more quickly, and/or for a longer time** than children with normal sensory responsiveness". * This means that a sensation may be perceived as **"painful"** and the child may have a **"fright, flight, fight"** response.

Children who are **"under-responsive"** to sensory information in the classroom may generally be labelled as lazy, unmotivated, stubborn or simply "bad". Typically these children need sensory stimulation that is stronger, lasts longer and is more frequent than that of a typically developing child. *

Reference:

- * Miller, LJ (2006) Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)