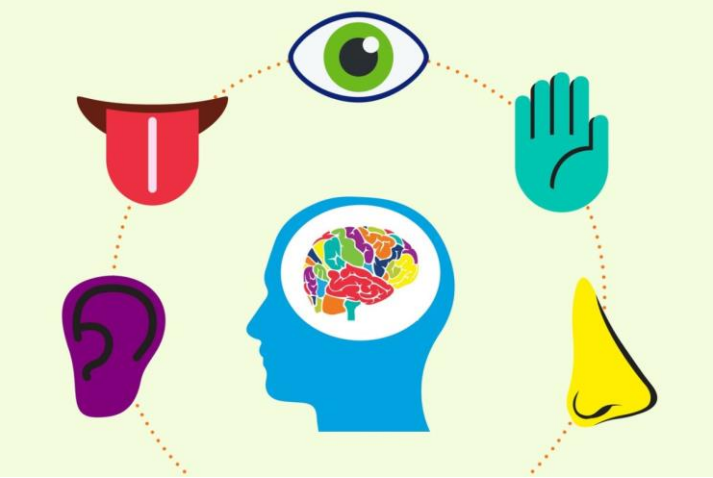
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Sensory Processing Issues in Children

By: Dr. Pamela McCaskill, Ph.D.

I am often asked "does my child have sensory processing disorder?" My quick answer is "No" because that is not an actual term and should not be diagnosed. However sensory processing difficulties are very legitimate…ask any parent who is raising a child with these challenges! Basically, sensory processing difficulties means that a child (or adult!) has trouble managing information that comes in via their senses.

We are all familiar with the senses of taste, smell, sound, touch, and sight, but did you know we have other senses that can be affected, too? Interoception is a lesser-known sense that helps you feel what is going on in your body (i.e., urge to urinate). Proprioception and the vestibular sense (spatial orientation) helps us to know where our body is in relation to other people and the environment.



There are 2 types of sensory processing challenges:

1. Children who are **hypersensitive,** tend to present as being easily overwhelmed. They are startled by sudden noises or bright light, sensitive to textures (clothing, foods) and may get upset about small changes in routine.

2. Children who are **hypo-sensitive,** tend to seek out physical contact, play rough, and have a higher tolerance for pain. They seem to be more constantly on the move, easily distracted, uncoordinated, and invasive of other people's space.

Some children may be hyper-sensitive (avoidant) in certain situations and hypo-sensitive (sensory seeking) depending on how the, making it a struggle to figure out what your child may need most in the moment. The type of sensory input they may need/not need, is all dependent on how that child is self-regulating at that particular moment. More scientific research of the sensory pathways of the brain is needed to determine whether these difficulties are a separate condition or a result of other behavioral and developmental disorders.

Some common Occupational Therapy interventions for these difficulties include sensory integration therapy and a sensory diet in which the child participates in activities that are believed to help organize the sensory system. Psychologists or mental health therapists may work with the child using Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help manage the anxiety and behavior problems associated with sensory challenges. Common classroom accommodations include use of fidgets, quiet spaces, advanced notice of change in routine, preferential seating away from windows and exercise breaks.

Since the intervention or treatment is dependent on knowing the cause of the symptoms, it is important to get a comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation to develop the most effective course of treatment. At McCaskill Family Services, we offer these types of comprehensive evaluations and would be happy to work with you and your child to help them reach their optimal potential and find the best road to success.