The ‘Hidden Senses’

The Vestibular Sensory System (sense of balance) is located in the inner ear and provides the body with information about movement (up, down, left or right), gravity and the speed of the movement. It tells us where our body is in space. The brain receives this input during movement activities.

The Proprioceptive Sensory System (sense of body awareness) provides information from the muscles, joints and tendons telling the body where it or the particular body part is at any given moment. The brain receives this input by doing ‘heavy work’ activities, e.g. pushing and pulling games, lifting or carrying heavy objects, playing with stiff putty, and lying under heavy blankets.
Sensory Processing is:

The ability of the brain to take in, sort out and process information from the world around us.

The ability to process sensory information and generate an appropriate and graded response.

This is an ongoing and constant process!

Examples:
- A cold shower
- Strong perfumes
- Woolly clothing or labels on clothes
- The feel of jelly in your mouth
- The taste of coffee
- Cluttered wardrobe
- Rollercoasters
- Background noise

How the Senses Respond

(over responsive)-Turned up

Just right-level

(under responsive )-Turned down
Difficulty with Sensory Processing

Difficulty with sensory processing happens when the brain cannot sort out, filter, organise, analyse, and connect or integrate sensory messages. It is like a “traffic jam” in the brain, with some bits of sensory information getting “tied up in traffic”. Certain parts of the brain then do not get the sensory information they need to do their job.

Behaviours we may see:
- Over-activity and/or under-activity
- Sensory seeking behaviour, e.g. touching things/ people excessively, squeezing people, chewing or smelling items
- Overly sensitive to sensory input, e.g. difficulty tolerating noises or messy play
- Difficulty concentrating and sitting still
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawal and avoidance
- Aggression
- “Shutdown”

How can we help?

It is important to remember that everyone responds differently to sensory information.
What are your sensory preferences?
How do you respond to noise, light, touch, movement, etc.?

We only need to intervene if sensory difficulties are affecting a child’s participation in daily activities!
- Think about your child and the behaviours they are displaying or finding challenging
- What sensory areas do you think your child is having difficulties with?
- Look for patterns

Become a Sensory Detective!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensations my child enjoys or seeks:</th>
<th>Sensation my child avoids/dislikes:</th>
<th>Sensations my child ignores/is slow to respond to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense</td>
<td>Calming</td>
<td>Alerting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Touch (tactile)</td>
<td>Deep pressure touch, bear hugs, massage, vibration</td>
<td>Light touch, tickle, extreme temperatures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smell (olfactory)</td>
<td>Calming scents such as lavender, vanilla</td>
<td>Strong scents such as lemon, spices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mouth (oral motor)</td>
<td>Licking, chewing or crunching, sucking or blowing, sweet soft or warm textures</td>
<td>Crunching strong flavours, cold temperatures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Dim lights, enclosed space such as a tent, slow moving objects such as lava lamps, clear and uncluttered environment, glitter bottle</td>
<td>Bright colours, flashing lights, spinning objects, busy cluttered environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing (auditory)</td>
<td>Quiet environments, slow tempo low pitch soft sounds, relaxation CDs, white noise</td>
<td>Loud volume, quick tempo music, high pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement (vestibular)</td>
<td>Back and forth movement (swinging), rocking, slow movement</td>
<td>Circular movement, spinning, fast unpredictable movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement (proprioception)</td>
<td>Heavy work for muscles and joints, e.g. pulling, pushing, lifting, jumping, climbing</td>
<td>Usually these activities are calming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tips for Creating a Sensory Friendly Home

- Create a quiet cosy chill-out space in your home.
- Create opportunities for big body movement activities (access to outdoors if possible).
- Create a daily visual schedule (for ideas see do2learn.com).
- Use of a timer to help with transitions between activities.

You may make a **cosy area** by blocking off a corner of a room, using a pop-up tent, using sheets & blankets to create a den etc.

Use your imagination and together create your own unique cosy area.

What do I put in it?

- **Textures**: Beanbag, cushions, blankets, favourite soft toy, fun things to feel (fidgets, playdough). Texture boxes (fill a lunch box with your favourite feely items – rice, slime, things from nature such as shells, pine cones, leaves and twigs).
- **Things to look at**: Torch lights, lava lamp, snow globe, fairy lights.
- **Thinks to listen to**: Headphones, soft music, home-made musical instruments.
- **Things to smell**: Scented hand lotion, scented playdough.
- **Oral Activities**: Blow bubbles, straws and cotton wool, whistles blow toys, snacks.

- **Be creative** with what you put into your cosy corner and be sure to include things your child enjoys.

Creating a Cosy Area

What is it?

It’s a safe calm space for your child to access throughout their day. It can be used when your child is upset, distressed or when they need some time to chill and relax!

How do I make it?

There is no set recipe or instructions for making a cosy area. You can make your cosy area fit your home, working with whatever space you have available!