

Sensory Processing & Sensory Processing Challenges



Studies show that children who have special needs **“are 1.8 times more likely to be neglected, 1.6 times more likely to be physically abused, and 2.2 times more likely to be sexually abused than children without disabilities.”** Additionally, children with behavioral disorders were found to be at the highest risk of all types of maltreatment! Children with sensory processing issues fall into *this* category.

By familiarizing yourself with sensory processing and its potential challenges, you can help to better advocate for your child’s needs and help to protect them from further abuse and neglect!

What is sensory processing?

How the body and the brain recognize and organize information from the senses.

What are sensory processing challenges?

- An inability to respond appropriately to stimuli such as sights, sounds, smells, touch, and other sensory input related to balance and movement. Children may either over- or underreact to these stimuli.
- These challenges may be referred to as *sensory processing disorder* or SPD, though this is not a recognized diagnosis at this time.
- These challenges are often also seen in children with ADHD and/or Autism.
- Many children who experience trauma, like the children we work with, struggle with sensory processing issues.

What can you do if you suspect your child has sensory processing challenges?

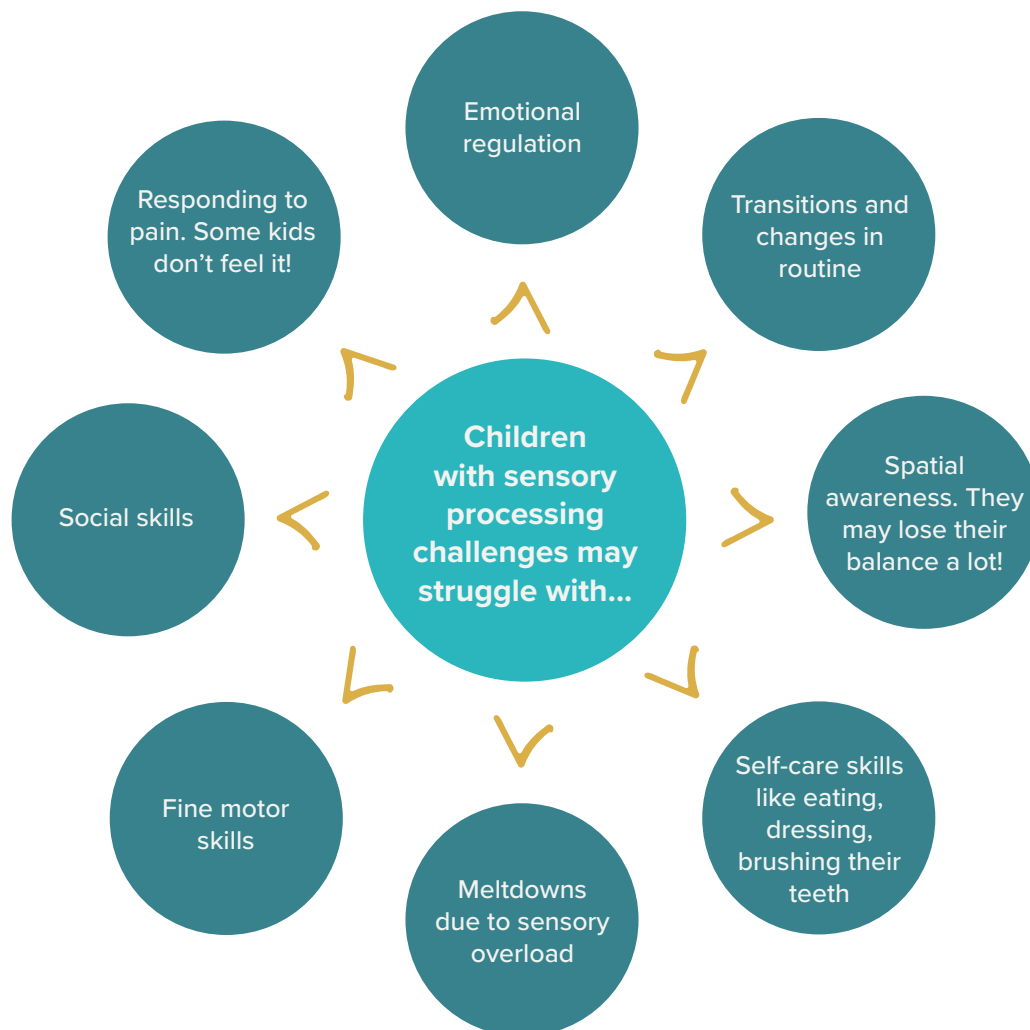
- Learn about sensory processing issues! A couple great books are: *The Out of Sync Child* by Carol Stock Kranowitz, and *Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder* by Lucy Jane Miller. Also check out the STAR Institute Website – sensoryhealth.org
- Talk to your child’s teacher or doctor. They are fantastic resources! They can help you to decide next steps.
- Try to identify your child’s triggers. This will help when you describe the behavior to the professionals AND help you to preempt a sensory meltdown.
- Let your child know that it’s OK. Living with sensory challenges can be tough but identifying the issue is the first step towards making things easier!

Sensory processing challenges are NOT...

- Children being **TOO** sensitive.
- Children being bad or needing discipline. The behavior that results from sensory challenges is what can be seen *visibly*. Caregivers need to get to the root of the issue in order to address the behavior.
- Consistent! Children with sensory processing challenges can respond to stimuli differently from day to day. Some may overreact, some may underreact...some may do both!

How to prevent abuse of children with sensory challenges...

- Be mindful of touch. It can be a trigger!
- Tell a child what you are going to do before you do it, especially if it includes a transition.
- Watch your child for clues that they're uncomfortable and respond accordingly.
- If your child is experiencing a sensory meltdown, they will not be able to be redirected, and their body will regulate them faster than their brain. Help them regulate by:
 - Walking
 - Swinging
 - Listening to music



Sources

Understood.com — Sensory Processing Issues Fact Sheet

Desch, L. W. & Hibbard, R. A. (2007). Maltreatment of children with disabilities. *Pediatrics*, 119(5), 1018-1025.