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Sensory Processing Disorder

Formally known as sensory integration dysfunction, sensory processing disorder (SPD) is a neurological condition in which the brain has difficulty receiving and responding to sensory information (e.g., smell, touch, taste, etc.) that an individual perceives, thus, resulting in atypical responses.

Individuals with SPD can be hypersensitive (over responsive) and or hyposensitive (under responsive) to things in their environment. For example, some sounds may be painful or overwhelming to a child, but the child could be hyposensitive (less responsive than others) to touch and would seek tactile input. Like many illnesses, SPD exists on a spectrum. Children are typically considered for an SPD diagnosis when a child has atypical responses that begin to affect normal functioning and disrupts their everyday life.

Here is a chart of different atypical responses for hyper- and hypo-sensitivity to different senses.

Sensory Processing	Hyposensitive (less than others) Responses	Hypersensitive (more than others) Responses
Auditory Processing (hearing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often speaks very loudly • Appears to not hear what you say (e.g., tunes out what is being said or appears to ignore you) • Doesn't respond when name is called • Has difficulty paying attention • Likes excessively loud audio (e.g., music, T.V., games, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds negatively to unexpected or loud noises (e.g., cries, covers ears, or hides when the hair dryer or vacuum is turned) • Covers ears to protect ears from sound (e.g., baby crying, dog barking, vacuum cleaner, etc.) • Is distracted or has difficulty functioning if there is a lot of background noise (e.g., radio, tv, etc.)
Visual Processing (sight)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watches everyone when they move around the room • Looks at fast-moving objects (e.g., fans) • Prefers to watch brightly colored television shows with fast-moving characters • Has difficulty finding differences in pictures, objects, words, or symbols • Focuses on the details of things instead of the whole picture • Has difficulty judging spatial relationships (e.g., might bump into things or miss a step down from a curb) • Prefers light-up toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is bothered by bright lights after others have adapted to the light • Covers or squints eyes to protect eyes from light



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<p>Tactile Processing (touch)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys strange noises/seekes to make noise for noise's sake • Seeks all kinds of movement that interferes with daily routines (e.g. can't sit still, fidgets) • Seeks out messy play • Becomes overly excitable during movement activity (e.g., throwing or kicking the ball, chase, etc.) • May be self-injurious (e.g., pinching, cutting, biting, head banging, etc.) • Has a high pain tolerance • Likes to touch people and objects • Doesn't seem to notice when face or hands are messy • Jumps from one activity to another; thus, interrupting play • Leaves clothing twisted on body • Often is not aware of being touched unless there's a lot of force or intensity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expresses distress during grooming (e.g., nail clipping, hair cutting) • Avoids going barefoot, especially in sand or grass • Reacts emotionally or aggressively to touch • Withdraws from splashing water • Has difficulty standing close to other people • Rubs or scratches out a spot that has been touched
<p>Vestibular Processing (movement)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys high-level movement activities (e.g., jumping, running, turning) and roughhousing • Likes swinging, rocking, sliding, and climbing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becomes anxious when feet leave the ground • Fears falling or heights • Dislikes activities where head is upside down (e.g. somersaults, roughhousing)
<p>Olfactory/Gustation Processing (taste/smell)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May smell, licks, or eat nonfood items (e.g., dirt, crayons, etc.) • Does not notice or has a hard time discriminating noxious odors • Prefers foods with intense flavors (excessive spicy, salty, sour, or sweet) • Likes to mouth objects, even past 2 years of age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids certain tastes or food smells that are typically part of children's diets • Will only eat certain tastes (e.g., salty or sweet) • Limits self to particular food textures/temperatures (e.g., crunchy foods or cold foods) • Picky eater, especially regarding food textures

This information was obtained from Short Sensory Profile by Winnie Dunn, Ph.D., OTR, FAOTA.