**How could I explain a sensory processing difficulty to another teacher or a parent?**

|  |
| --- |
| **SUMMARY:**  Sensory processing is the ability to   * accurately interpret sensory stimuli * automatically and efficiently process sensory information * respond in an expected or appropriate way   This is called self-regulation. |

**READ ON TO LEARN MORE:**

Everybody experiences slight differences in the way they respond to a sensory stimulus. This is OK. However, if a student’s response disrupts or blocks engagement for learning, the student may then be identified to have a sensory processing difficulty.

Some students feel sensations too intensely and over-react to the sensory stimuli.



Students who are over-reactive to sensory stimuli might:

* Prefer to sit alone
* Become distressed easily in busy or loud environments
* Seem distracted by things no one else can see or hear
* Find transitions a challenge
* Display behaviour difficulties (fight, flight, freeze)

For example, Justin can see the smallest pieces of fluff on the carpet. Justin often focuses on these

pieces of fluff when sitting on that mat for story time. He doesn't like lights and the fluorescent lights

in the classroom can give him a headache. He often fidgets and squirms. He can hear the

teacher talking in the next classroom. He hears Robert dropping his ruler. He hears Peter

moving his chair. Justin’s teacher is constantly giving him additional individual verbal

prompts to stay focused. For Justin, sound never stops!

Some students don’t feel sensations strongly enough and under-react to sensory stimuli



Students who are under-reactive to sensory stimulus might

* Stare into space or zone out
* Seem unfocused or distracted
* Require instructions to be repeated numerous times
* Be lethargic
* Act bored
* Seem tired

For example, Courtney blends into the background. She is cooperative and does not appear to be distracted. However, when the teacher presents a writing task to the students, one which they have done before and which requires minimal instruction, Courtney stares blankly at the page. She has no idea what to do or how to do it. She starts writing but when Mr Thompson collects the students’ work he notices that Courtney has written very little. Later when he marks the task, he becomes aware that Courtney’s response is not only minimalist, but also that she has not answered the question. Her writing goes off in a different direction to that on which the question is focusing.

Some students seek more sensory stimuli. Their body is in perpetual overdrive, craving constant and stimulating movement.

 

A student who is sensory seeking may

* Wriggle around when seated
* Have trouble staying on task
* Gravitate towards movement activities (jumping, spinning, running)
* Bump into other kids
* Chew items of clothing
* Make noises

For example, Jack finds it very difficult to sit still. When his teacher is talking he is looking around, playing with his shirt and wriggling. When it is time to go to his desk, Jack jumps up and down and bumps into other children. When completing work tasks, Jack taps his feet and chews on his pencil.

Sensory processing is at the very beginning of information processing and executive functioning: how we process information for learning.



Efficient sensory processing allows a student to

* STOP being impulsive or reactive to an unpleasant stimulus
* START noticing, attending and self-regulating.

**Sensory processing skills can be learnt!**