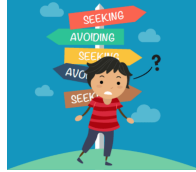


Sensory Processing And Children with Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder is often associated with sensory challenges. Children with autism can be Hyperreactive or Hyporeactive to sensory input. Some may experience more than others but it's important to remember that we ALL have sensory issues!



HYPER-REACTIVE/OVER RESPONSIVE

When a child is **MORE** sensitive to what they experience through their senses. They may experience it more intensely and be overwhelmed easily by increased amounts of auditory, visual, vestibular, and tactile (touch) input in their environment and from their bodies.

Hyper-Reactive Children Look Like:

- Holds hands over their ears/eyes; becomes easily upset in loud/busy spaces
- Afraid of having their feet off the ground (climbing, going down slides, swinging)
- Doesn't like to be touched, doesn't like to play with messy tactile media (glue/paint)
- Has difficulty staying in close proximity to peers
- Difficulty brushing teeth/eating a variety of different textured food
- Easily distractible/difficulty attending to tasks, following directions in a busy room
- Selective in types of clothes worn/not wanting to wear specific clothing articles

What can we do to help?

- Dim lights or have an enclosed area available (small tent)
- Quiet voices, turn down radio/television (use soothing music to drain out loud put)
- Sunglasses or visor
- Ear plugs or headphones in noisy environments
- Expose child to various types of tactile input in graded amounts (rice/beans/bath foam)
- Engage in activities that provide heavy work which helps to calm the body down prior/during/after being exposed to input that is distressing (Go to the park, pulling, pushing, climbing)
- Choose foods that have a 'chewy' consistency (Bagels, Twizzlers, Fruit Snacks) and avoid those that are extremely hot/cold/spicy
- Choose clothing that addresses personal sensitivities (no seams/tags) and choose clothing that is tight fitting to the body (Under Armour or swim shirts 2 sizes too small)
- Take it slow/grade task when a child fears moving their body in space (go up one step/come down, choose lower slide at the park/go down with child)



HYPO-REACTIVE/UNDER RESPONSIVE:

When a child is **LESS** sensitive to things they experience through their senses. They may not register or attend to certain sensory stimuli (auditory, visual) in their environment and from their bodies (proprioceptive/vestibular). They may appear more unaware of the environment around them.

Hypo-Reactive Children Look Like:

- Constantly in motion, craves movement such as jumping, crashing, bumping
- Difficulty sitting with peers/squirms and fidgets in seat
- Difficulty with attending to tasks, following directions
- Places objects in mouth/biting
- Demonstrates impulsive and unsafe behavior
- Needs to touch objects and people
- May not feel pain or temperature/unaware of bumps and cuts

What can we do to help?

- Sensory toys (e.g., safe chewies and fidgets)
- Opportunities for rocking, swinging and other sensory enriched activities (playground, walks, hikes)
- Choose foods that are more extreme in taste/texture/hot/cold (Sour gum/ lollipop, minty chapstick)
- Give frequent breaks to move their body if engaged in a sitting activity (have a list of their top movement activities that they can choose from (jump/hop)
- Weighted blankets (Be careful of too much weight and Never leave it on a sleeping child! The child should be able to remove it on their own!)
- Fun opportunities to practice physical skills (catching, dancing, jumping, running, etc.)
- Engage in fun activities that require pushing, pulling, weight bearing (animal walks)
- Make obstacle courses in the home with household items (blankets, pillows)/make an obstacle course at the park and incorporate the playground equipment

