



Sensory Modulation

What is sensory modulation?

- We receive information from ears, eyes, muscles, joints and skin.
- Everyone processes this information in a different way and these form our sensory preferences.
- Sensory preferences impact on what you notice, get bothered by, avoid, tolerate and love as well as how you feel and how you respond.
- They influence attention, concentration and reactions to daily challenges.



A child with sensory modulation difficulties may be:

Over responsive:

- A SMALL amount of sensory input can be too much.
- They find it difficult to stay calm because there is too much information bombarding their body and brain.
- These children may demonstrate sensitivity to certain input and may avoid these inputs.
- Children with an over responsive profile may display one or some of the behaviours listed below:
 - React strongly to unexpected or loud noises (e.g. vacuum cleaner, school sirens, hair dryer)
 - Struggle to complete tasks in an environment with lots of noise.
 - Be sensitive during grooming tasks (e.g. haircutting, face washing, fingernail cutting)
 - Removes or becomes irritated by certain textures of clothing.
 - Reject certain tastes or food smells

Under responsive:

- A child who is under responsive to sensory input requires MORE sensory input for it to be noticeable.
- Children may actively seek sensory input or might appear more easy going than other children.
- They may display one or some of the behaviours listed below:
 - Require more movement compared to peers their age (e.g. difficulties sitting still during mat sessions, may wriggle or fidget)
 - Lean into everything
 - Need to touch or touch everything or place objects into mouth
 - May demonstrate impulsive behaviour
 - Appear excitable or uninterested/bored
 - Have a harder time getting tasks completed in a timely manner
 - Doesn't respond when you call them

Ideas to support sensory modulation:

For children with an over responsive sensory profile, they will better participate in everyday activities when there is LESS sensory input in their surroundings. Some ideas to help these children regulate in an environment with too much sensory input include:

- Ear plugs or headphones to reduce noise
- Restructuring the environment to reduce visual clutter
- Reduce background noises (e.g. turn off TV, music or radio)
- Create quiet environments or a 'safe calming spot' for children to go to if sensory input gets too overwhelming or when trying new experiences.
- Build their capacity to work in an environment with more sensory input through graded exposure to sensory input (e.g. play listening games with music, slowly introducing certain textures/smells/touch)

For children who are under-responsive to sensory input they can benefit from implementing opportunities for MORE sensory input during the day to help them stay alert and focused. Strategies can include:

- Fidget toys
- Move n Sit cushions
- Heavy bean bags across their laps
- Helping to complete errands in the classroom e.g. hand out all books, run notes to office, stack chairs, carrying heavy objects, etc.
- Alternate between sitting/standing at desk
- Completing heavy work activities before high concentration tasks e.g. wheelbarrow walks, chair push-ups, animal walks, etc.
- Crunchy/chewing/ice cold snacks

However it is important to understand that not all sensory strategies work for every child and strategies will need to be trialled. The trial process will help to determine what the child's sensory preferences are and what strategies can be put in place to suit their needs. Your occupational therapist can help you to develop an individualised sensory program that can be implemented during the course of the day.

Good Luck!