

Sensory Processing Overview

The way the body analyzes and responds to the signals it receives from its environment. Thoughtful, guided exposure to playful sensory experiences ensures that children learn to process and appropriately respond to the sensory stimuli in their environments.



THE AUDITORY SYSTEM

Footsteps, the sound of the wind against your ears, a door creaking, a flushing toilet, even the sounds of someone giving you directions. All these examples have one thing in common: sound.

The auditory sense is how we receive and process the information from the sensory organs inside our ears. When we hear a sound, it travels to our brains to be analyzed so we can generate a response.



THE OLFACTORY SYSTEM

*Your favorite piece of chocolate, pancakes on a Saturday morning, rotting fruit in the trash, and your grandma's perfume. All these examples have one thing in common: **smell**.*

The olfactory system is how we pick up information about the odors around us and pass that information along a channel of nerves, where it eventually reaches the brain. Our olfactory systems can discriminate between thousands of different odors and help us recognize whether smells are dangerous, strong, faint, pleasurable, or foul.



ORAL SENSORY PROCESSING

*Biting, chewing, chomping, crunching, sucking, licking, and swallowing. All these activities have two things in common: **taste and texture**.*

Oral sensory processing is the way our brains receive input from our mouth and jaw. When we eat or drink, our mouths send information to our brains regarding what we're eating or drinking. This information includes the temperature, texture and taste. Our brains also receive proprioceptive information from the joints of the jaw as we bite and chew.



THE PROPRIOCEPTIVE SYSTEM

*Pushing, pulling, stomping, squeezing, jumping, bending. All these examples have one thing in common: **body position**.*

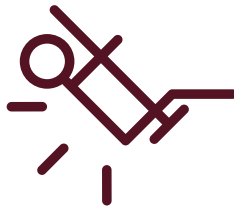
Proprioception refers to the way our joints and muscles send messages to our brains to provide information about our bodies' positioning and movement. This sense also allows us to grade the force and direction of our movements.



THE TACTILE SYSTEM

*Hugs, clothing, the grass or sand under your feet, the food you eat, the coffee you drink. All these examples have one thing in common: **touch**.*

The tactile sense is how we interpret the information we get from the receptors in our skin. When we feel an object in our environment, our nervous system receives this information and helps us understand and differentiate pressure, temperature, texture, traction, and other tactile qualities of the object. It also lets us determine exactly what it is that we are feeling.



THE VESTIBULAR SYSTEM

*Spinning, turning, flipping, climbing. These sensations all have one thing in common: **movement**.*

The vestibular sense has to do with balance and movement and is centered in the inner ear. When we move our heads, the fluid in the tiny organs of the inner ear moves and shifts, which constantly provides us with information about the position of our heads and bodies in space (*spatial awareness*).



THE VISUAL SYSTEM

*Determining the tint of our shirt to wear for the day, finding our socks in the sock drawer, tracking the teacher as she walks around the room. All these examples have one thing in common: **sight**.*

The visual system is how we receive and process sensory information through our eyes. When we see an object, it is because of the perception of light. Light rays follow a path through the many different structures of our eyes, eventually relaying visual information to the visual cortex in our brains. Here, the brain identifies the object and gives it meaning. We are able to perceive details like color, three-dimensional depth perception, and the location of the object in space.

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)

Sometimes children experience difficulty with processing or tolerating one or more types of sensory input. Several possible medical reasons can cause this difficulty, but one of the most common is Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). For children with SPD, their bodies do not organize and integrate sensory information properly, which makes it difficult for those children to generate appropriate responses to their environments. This can result in a wide range of confusing and sometimes negative behaviors.



YOUR UNIQUE MAGIC 7: SENSORY PREFERENCES

We all have different voices, hair colors, thoughts, and opinions. And each of us has our own unique sensory makeup too. We all have our favorite smells, tastes, and activities that “fit” with our sensory systems. These are our “sensory preferences”.

Our sensory preferences can change depending on the time of day, our mood, how much sleep we’ve had, if we’re sick, and for lots of other reasons. Let’s learn about some of our sensory preferences. Circle your answer to each question.

- | | |
|--|--|
| Do you like going to see movies in the movie theater? | Do you like being in a crowd for a sporting event? |
| YES NO SOMETIMES | YES NO SOMETIMES |
| Do you like trying new foods? | Do you like getting messy with finger paint or playing in the mud? |
| YES NO SOMETIMES | YES NO SOMETIMES |
| Do you like to be outside in the bright sun? | Do you like to climb high on the jungle gym? |
| YES NO SOMETIMES | YES NO SOMETIMES |
| Do you like quiet, gentle play? | Do you like doing flips, somersaults, and hanging upside down? |
| YES NO SOMETIMES | YES NO SOMETIMES |
| Do you like to go on rollercoasters or other rides? | Do you like drinking ice cold water? |
| YES NO SOMETIMES | YES NO SOMETIMES |
| Do you like quiet reading time? | Do you like the smell of perfume? |
| YES NO SOMETIMES | YES NO SOMETIMES |
| Do you like to play rough? | Do you like cuddling under a soft blanket? |
| YES NO SOMETIMES | YES NO SOMETIMES |

52 SENSORY CHALLENGES FOR BUSY KIDS

Create a Sound Lab

Build a DIY Rainstick

Play a Drum

Navigate a Maze Blindfolded

Make Your Own Rainstorm

Set up a Scented Experiment

Make a Clay Diffuser Necklace

Find Foods Blindfolded

Make Scratch & Sniff Stickers

Make a Sugar Scrub

Make Yogurt Smoothie

Try Blowing a Feather Across the Room

Challenge Your Friends to Ice Boat Race

Do a Taste Test

Try Mouthercizes

Stomp on Paint and Bubble Wrap

Do a Tin Can Relay Race

Play with Couch Cushions

Do Partner Yoga

Get Warmed up Before Homework

Make a Simple Sensory Bin

Write Your Name in a Sensory Bag

Mix Up Simple Playdough

Rub Your Feet on Marbles

Make a Touch and Feel Book

Play on a Swing

Walk Like an Animal

Do a Scavenger Hunt

Play Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Make a DIY Balance Board

Play a Game of Mirror Mirror

Make an Alphabet Sensory Bin

Make Simple Doodles

Create a Sensory Bottle

Play Ispy with a Twist

Go on a Sensory Walk

Find 7 Textures In Your Room

Drink Applesauce Through a Straw

Run Through an Obstacle Course

Make Shadow Puppets

Make a Fort out of Pillows

Make Homemade Granola

Do 15 Wall Pushups

Challenge Your Friends to Hula Hoops

Jump in Muddy Puddles

Make Ice Cream in a Bag

Create a Maze with Cardboard

Hide Marbles in Slime

Make Shadows with Your Body

Play Hide and Seek

Make a Sour Drink

Write Your Name in Shaving Cream



Simple Sensory Bins

Sensory bins are an excellent way to encourage tactile play. They are perfect for introducing new textures and exploring new sensations.

Sensory bins are containers filled with some kind of material that kids can feel and manipulate with their hands. The materials can be messy, clean, wet, or dry. Some of our favorite fillers include beans, noodles, and rice. Sensory bins can be adapted to children's individual sensory needs simply by changing the materials inside. A wide variety of materials is available for sensory bins. Refer to the printable guide in the *Sensory Resources* section of this book for some of our favorite options.



Instructions

1. **Choose your container.** This can be as simple as using a store-bought sand table or water table, or you can use one of the following:
 - Bathtub
 - Kitchen sink
 - Paper box lid
 - Shoebox
 - Underbed storage container

You can also use travel lunch boxes to make bins that are portable or extra large containers for groups of children to play with together.

2. **Choose your filler.** Fill your container with a material that your child will enjoy exploring with their hands. We like to fill the bin's base and leave plenty of room toward the top for exploration.
3. **Choose the Tools.** What you put in the sensory bin will help guide the children in their play. Spoons and bowls will encourage scooping and pouring while tongs and scoops will encourage sorting and comparing.

Materials

- Sensory bin fillers
- Container
- Scoops, cups, or bowls

TIPS

- If your child is hesitant to join in the play, start with dry materials and add only one material at a time. Gradually introduce new textures and encourage your child to slowly explore new sensory experiences.
- Try encouraging the child to play with the sensory bin using a familiar or comforting toy, such as by pushing a train or car through the bin.







Animal Walks

One of the easiest ways to include proprioceptive and vestibular input on a daily basis is with animal walks. Kids love pretending to walk and move like their favorite animals, and it's a fun way to work some proprioceptive and vestibular input into the daily routine.



Instructions

1. **Crab Walk:** Start by squatting down close to the ground. Lean backwards and place your hands on the ground behind you. Now walk sideways, while holding your bottom off the ground and keeping your back straight.
2. **Bear Walk:** Start in the standing position. Bend over and put both hands on the ground. Take a step, moving your right arm and right leg forward at the same time. Then take a step with the left leg and the left arm together. For an additional challenge, try keeping your legs and arms straight.
3. **Frog Jumps:** Start in a squatting position. Place your hands on the floor between your knees. Using your feet, jump forward and land with your hands and feet on the ground, back into a squatting position.
4. **Donkey Kicks:** Start in a standing position. Lean over and put both hands and both feet on the ground. Making sure that the area around you is clear, keep your hands on the ground and jump with your legs kicking behind you.
5. **Turtle Crawl:** Start in a kneeling position, fold forward over your legs and put your elbows on the ground with your palms facing the floor. Keep your bottom on your heels, and keep your elbows and hands on the ground. Reach forward with both hands and scoot your knees forward to meet your hands. Repeat.

TIPS

- The sky is the limit when it comes to animal walks. Let your child create his own animal movements for more sensory fun.



Sensory Bottles

Sensory bottles, discovery bottles, sensory jars, or calm down jars – whatever you call them, sensory bottles are simply clear containers filled with various materials as a way to encourage visual exploration.

Sensory bottles are helpful tools for babies, toddlers, and children of all ages. You can use them as a calming visual sensory experience or to challenge visual skills in kids.



Materials

- Clear plastic bottles
- Materials to fill the bottles (refer to the printable guide in the Sensory Resources section of this book)

Instructions

Making sensory bottles is simple. Wash a clear plastic bottle, remove the label, and fill with your favorite items to be discovered and explored. Here are two of our favorites:

1. **Galaxy Bottle:** Fill the clear plastic bottle $\frac{1}{4}$ full with baby oil. Next add water to fill the rest of the bottle. To give your bottle a “galaxy” feel, add two drops of blue food coloring and several drops of red food coloring until you get a color you like. Put the lid on and shake the bottle. The bubbles will almost sparkle, making it look like the bottle is filled with stars.
2. **Look and Find:** In a jar, place small items that match a theme, skill, or concept you are trying to teach, such as letters, numbers, or small toys that are seasonal. Fill the jar with a dry material such as rice or dried beans to cover all the items. You can make a list of objects for children to find in the bottle or just let them search for the objects on their own.

TIPS

- Refer to the printable shopping list of materials in the *Sensory Resources* section of this book to create your own sensory bottles. Test out a variety of objects and materials. You can try a bottle with one material, two materials, or even several. The possibilities are endless.



SENSORY PROCESSING 101



by
**Dayna Abraham,
Claire Heffron,
Pamela Braley, and
Lauren Drobnjak**

Thank you for reading Sensory Processing 101! We hope you love it and want to share it with others! If you like it, we would be so appreciative if you would click the retweet this image below to share on twitter!



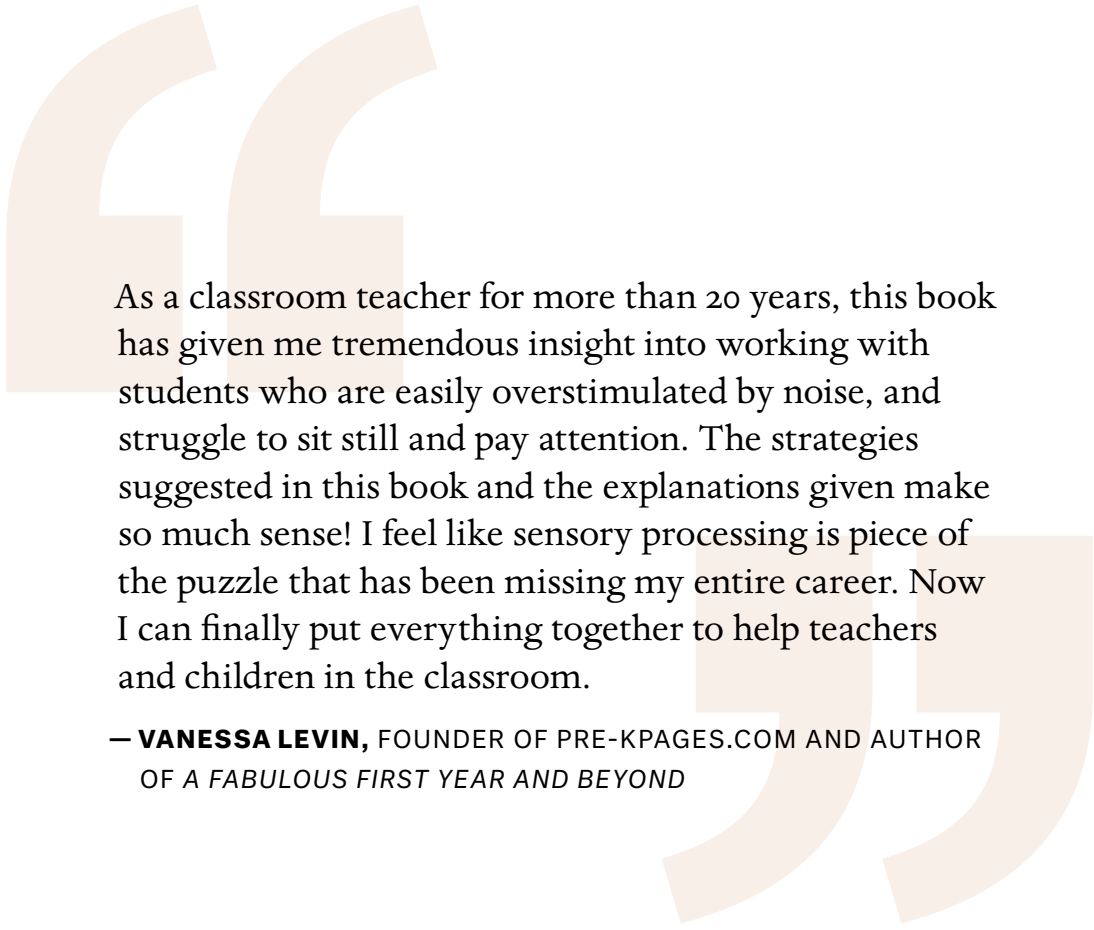
Sensory Processing 101 Endorsements

What a practical, reassuring, visually appealing, lovely book! Not just an excellent introductory “101” course on SPD, this is also an “All-in-One” resource book, with its engaging activities and reproducible review pages to slip in your pocket or share with others who care for children with sensory challenges.

— **CAROL STOCK KRANOWITZ**, AUTHOR, *THE OUT-OF-SYNC CHILD*

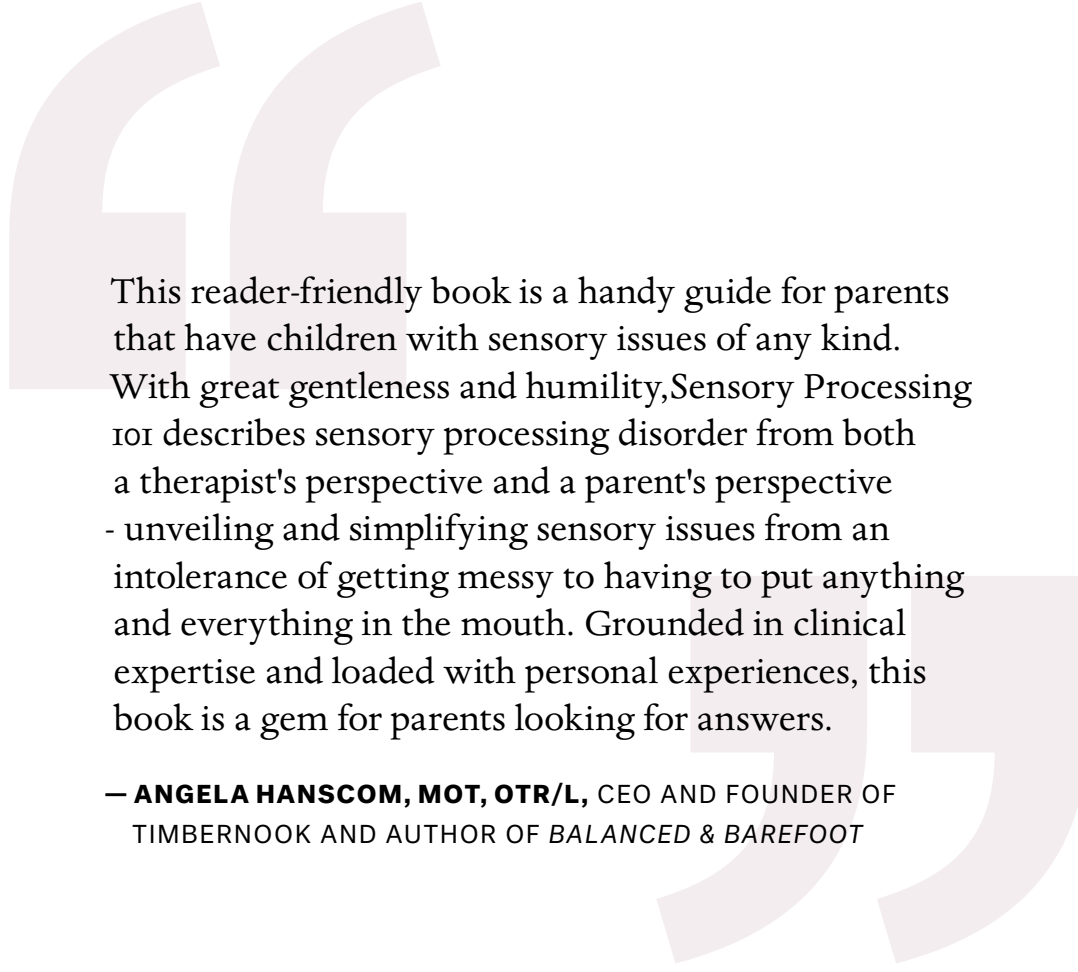
I am really excited about this book because I know it is going to help parents like me. As a mom of three boys, our family has dealt with our share of sensory processing issues. Even though I am a Physical Therapist, I didn't initially identify the cause of the problem which lead to frustration and tantrums. Once we knew what it was and what to do, everything changed for the better.

— **HOLLY HOMER, MPT**, FOUNDER OF KIDS ACTIVITIES BLOG AND CO-AUTHOR OF 101 KIDS ACTIVITIES THAT ARE THE BESTEST, FUNNEST EVER!



As a classroom teacher for more than 20 years, this book has given me tremendous insight into working with students who are easily overstimulated by noise, and struggle to sit still and pay attention. The strategies suggested in this book and the explanations given make so much sense! I feel like sensory processing is piece of the puzzle that has been missing my entire career. Now I can finally put everything together to help teachers and children in the classroom.

— **VANESSA LEVIN**, FOUNDER OF PRE-KPAGES.COM AND AUTHOR OF *A FABULOUS FIRST YEAR AND BEYOND*



This reader-friendly book is a handy guide for parents that have children with sensory issues of any kind. With great gentleness and humility, *Sensory Processing 101* describes sensory processing disorder from both a therapist's perspective and a parent's perspective - unveiling and simplifying sensory issues from an intolerance of getting messy to having to put anything and everything in the mouth. Grounded in clinical expertise and loaded with personal experiences, this book is a gem for parents looking for answers.

— **ANGELA HANSCOM, MOT, OTR/L**, CEO AND FOUNDER OF TIMBERNOOK AND AUTHOR OF *BALANCED & BAREFOOT*

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www.sensoryprocessing101.com

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www.ookb.co

Disclaimer: The activities in this book are intended for sensory play and exploration. These activities are not a replacement for therapy to address Sensory Processing Disorder in children. However, some activities may be appropriate for children who have sensory needs with the supervision and recommendation of an occupational therapist. All activities should be facilitated and supervised by an adult. Some of the activities in this book may not be appropriate for children who have allergies or sensitivities to certain sensory materials or foods used for sensory play.

How to Use This Book	VIII
A Note From the Authors	XI
PART 1: SENSORY PROCESSING EXPLAINED	
<hr/>	
CHAPTER 1: Sensory Processing & Sensory Processing Disorder - An Overview	2
What is Sensory Processing? A Therapist's Perspective	3
Sensory Processing Disorder: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	5
5 Common Myths About Sensory Processing, BUSTED!	6
CHAPTER 2: The Auditory System	8
The Auditory System: A Therapist's Perspective	9
The Auditory System: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	12
CHAPTER 3: The Olfactory System	14
The Olfactory System: A Therapist's Perspective	15
The Olfactory System: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	18
CHAPTER 4: Oral Sensory Processing	20
Oral Sensory Processing: A Therapist's Perspective	21
Oral Sensory Processing: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	24
CHAPTER 5: The Proprioceptive System	26
The Proprioceptive System: A Therapist's Perspective	27
The Proprioceptive System: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	29
CHAPTER 6: The Tactile System	32
The Tactile System: A Therapist's Perspective	33
The Tactile System: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	36
CHAPTER 7: The Vestibular System	38
The Vestibular System: A Therapist's Perspective	39
The Vestibular System: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	41
CHAPTER 8: The Visual System	42
The Visual System: A Therapist's Perspective	43
The Visual System: A Parent and Educator's Point of View	45
CHAPTER 9: Sensory Processing Concerns and Red Flags	48
Is it Just a Phase? A Parent's Perspective	49
3 Signs Your Child's Behaviors Are Not Just a Phase	50
Red Flags: Recognizing Sensory Problems in Children: A Therapist's Perspective	52
Sensory Processing Red Flag Behaviors: A Therapist's Perspective	54
Moving Beyond "Just a Phase" and Getting Help: A Parent's Perspective	58

CONTENTS

PART 2: SENSORY ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

Auditory Activities	62	Vestibular Activities	122
Sound Lab	64	Swing Activities	124
DIY Rainstick	66	Animal Walks	126
Drumming Activities	68	Sensory Motor Scavenger Hunt	128
Blindfold Navigation	70	Row, Row, Row, Your Boat	130
Make Your Own Rainstorm	72	DIY Balance Board	132
Olfactory Activities	74	Visual Activities	134
Scented Science Experiment	76	Mirror, Mirror	136
DIY Diffuser Necklaces	78	Alphabet Sensory Bin	138
Smell and Feel	80	Doodle Guessing Game	140
DIY Scratch 'n' Sniff Stickers	82	Sensory Bottles	142
Calming and Alerting Sugar Scrubs	84	I Spy With a Twist	144
Oral Sensory Activities	86		
Fruity Yogurt Smoothies	88		
Feather Blowing	90		
Ice Boat Races	92		
Taste Test	94		
Mouthercises	96		
Proprioceptive Activities	98		
Bubble Wrap Stomp Art	100		
Tire Run Relay	102		
Couch Cushion Games	104		
Partner Yoga for Kids	106		
Homework/Classwork Warm Up	108		
Tactile Activities	110		
Simple Sensory Bins	112		
Sensory Bags	114		
Simple Sensory Dough Station	116		
Underwater Pearls	118		
Touch and Feel Book	120		

PART 3: SENSORY RESOURCES

Top Sensory Websites	148
Recommended Books	149
Online Support Groups for Parents of Children with Sensory Needs	149
Alerting and Calming Oral Sensory Activities	150
Alerting and Calming Olfactory Activities	151
Sensory Bottles: Quick Reference Guide	152
Sensory Bins: Quick Reference Guide	153
Sensory Dough: Quick Reference Guide	154
Sensory Processing Overview	155
Heavy Work Chores for Home or School	157
Sensory Motor Scavenger Hunt	158
Sensory Processing Red Flag Behaviors Checklist	159
Auditory Sensory Cheat Sheet	161
Olfactory Sensory Cheat Sheet	162
Oral Sensory Cheat Sheet	163
Proprioceptive Sensory Cheat Sheet	164
Tactile Sensory Cheat Sheet	165
Vestibular Sensory Cheat Sheet	166
Visual Sensory Cheat Sheet	167
Index by Behavior	168
Index	176
About the Authors	177

How to Use This Book

It could be that you picked up this book because you have a child who becomes overstimulated and can't seem to control himself in a noisy, active setting like a birthday party. Maybe you have a child in your classroom who has a tantrum any time she gets glue, paint, or marker on her hands. Does your child have a hard time keeping things out of his mouth, chewing on everything from his shirt to his pencil to his fingernails? This book will help you determine the real reason behind some of these behaviors.

Whether you are a parent, educator, caregiver, or therapist, you will learn about each sensory system and how it contributes to healthy child development. In addition, you will find several helpful suggestions, tips, and activities you can try at home or in the classroom.

Supporting healthy sensory processing is an important part of promoting overall health in every child. Therefore, the information in this book pertains to all children regardless of whether they have Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) diagnoses.

For more information and resources about sensory processing, visit Lemon Lime Adventures at lemonlimeadventures.com and The Inspired Treehouse at theinspiredtreehouse.com.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Sensory Processing 101 gives you an easy-to-read overview of the body's sensory systems and how these systems work together as well as practical suggestions for how you can best support sensory development in children.

- **Parents and caregivers:** This book will help you understand the role sensory processing plays in your child's development. If your child exhibits behaviors that may be related to sensory needs such as biting, constantly making noise, or seeking out movement, the resources and activities in this book will help you address those behaviors.
- **Teachers:** This book explains how the sensory systems contribute to every student's ability to learn and function in the classroom. The resources in this book will help you better understand and support the students who can't seem to sit still, can't stop making noise, or can't pay attention and follow directions. You will also learn to identify certain behaviors as red flags for possible sensory processing concerns.
- **Therapists:** Use this book to select activities to use during therapy sessions or to recommend activities that families can try at home so you can meet the specific sensory needs of your clients. This book also contains several reproducible resources for you to share with parents, caregivers, and teachers. Finally, this book will give you a closer look at sensory processing from a parent and teacher's point of view, which will help you better understand how your interventions impact families and teachers.

Disclaimer: The activities in this book are intended for sensory play and exploration. These activities are not a replacement for therapy to address Sensory Processing Disorder in children. However, some activities may be appropriate for children who have sensory needs with the supervision and recommendation of an occupational therapist. All activities should be facilitated and supervised by an adult. Some of the activities in this book may not be appropriate for children who have allergies or sensitivities to certain sensory materials or foods used for sensory play.

HOW TO USE EACH SECTION

This book contains three books in one:

- **Sensory Processing Explained** – This section provides a breakdown of each sensory system from a therapist’s point of view and from the perspective of a parent and educator. If you have an interest in a specific sensory system, you can focus on that system’s section. Alternatively, you can read all the sections to gain a better understanding of how the systems work together. This part of the book is similar to a conversation in that it provides a well-rounded view of sensory processing: what it looks like when all the senses are functioning properly and what it looks like when one or more of the systems have a problem. In this section, you will also find common red flags for sensory processing problems and advice for when and how to get help.
- **Sensory Activities for Kids** – In this section, you will find our favorite sensory activities for kids. You can include these activities in everyday play with kids at home or at school to support the development of children’s sensory systems. This section also includes tips for how to modify the activities based on children’s sensory preferences. Some activities are quick and simple, while others require planning ahead to use at a play date, in the classroom, or in a therapy group.
- **Sensory Resources** – This section contains helpful websites related to sensory processing, suggestions for support groups for parents and caregivers of children who have sensory needs, cheat sheets with quick overviews of each sensory system, and other useful printable resources. You are welcome to print or copy the reproducible pages in this section and share them with others. For example, a parent could print them and provide them to a teacher or caregiver who is working with their child for the first time. A therapist might copy pages to share with teachers or parents to inform them about a child’s sensory needs. The checklist of red flag behaviors was designed by a pediatric occupational therapist. Parents can use this checklist to document concerns about their child’s behaviors for a pediatrician or therapist. Therapists can use the checklist as a quick screening to indicate sensory processing concerns during classroom, home, or clinic observations. This is your go-to section for finding information to share with others or to find quick, easy-to-read overviews about sensory processing.

Finally, this book also includes an index organized according to common behaviors that may be associated with sensory concerns. Use the index to locate information and activities that correspond to the specific behaviors you observe in a child.

A Note From the Authors

FROM DAYNA AT LEMON LIME ADVENTURES

Sensory processing disorder can be a confusing and overwhelming diagnosis for a parent or educator to handle. I still have to pause for a moment when I'm asked to describe my son's struggles. I have landed on the phrase, "He struggles with sensory integration." But I'm never sure if it adequately describes my son's issues.

What I do know is that my son's struggles opened the door for me to spread awareness, find resources, and build a community to support others who are in the same boat.

I am not a therapist or a doctor.

I am a mom raising a child who has sensory needs.

I am an educator who taught in the early childhood field for 12 years.

I am simply just like you.

I will attempt to explain sensory processing from my perspective. I will not attempt to use medical terms, explain what I don't understand myself, or pretend to be an expert. My goal is to give you hope, share what I have learned, and hopefully help you understand your child more deeply.

FROM THE TEAM AT THE INSPIRED TREEHOUSE

In our pediatric therapy practice, we see many kids who struggle with sensory processing issues that impact their ability to function independently and successfully at school, at home, and in their communities.

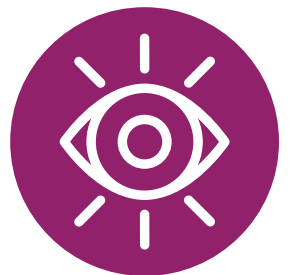
However, we see many more children who are otherwise typically functioning, but they exhibit behavior problems, attention problems, and motor delays. Some of these issues may be due to a lack of exposure to active play experiences that were a common part of childhood years ago.

We do not want any child to be left behind simply because they have not had these developmental experiences. That's why our mission at The Inspired Treehouse is to provide easy-to-read information about child development and to design simple activities that promote a wide range of developmental skills in children.

We wrote this book from the perspective of pediatric therapists. But we are moms too, so everything we write is near and dear to our hearts as we watch our own children learn and grow.



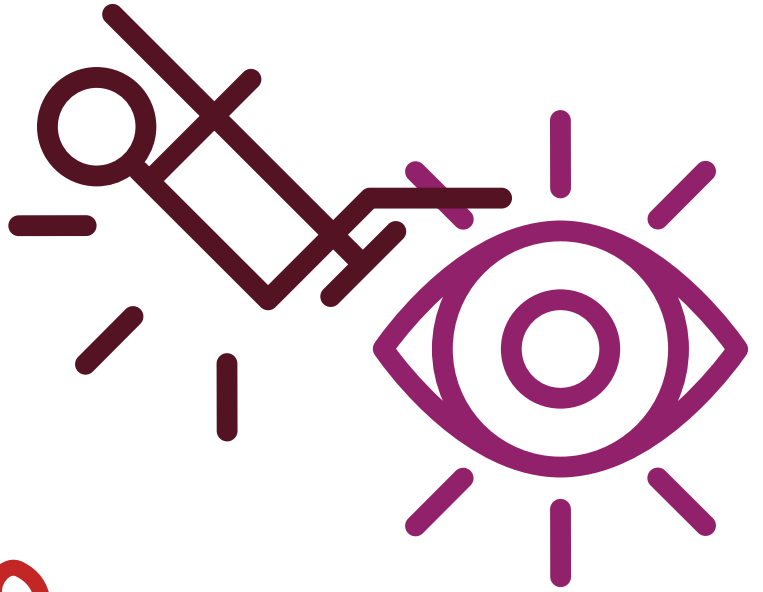
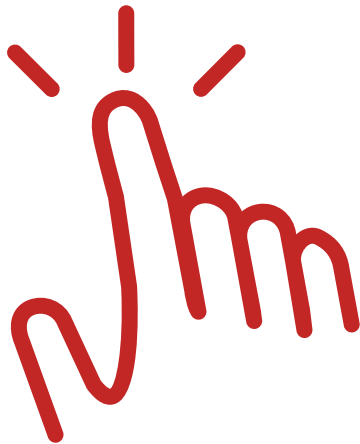
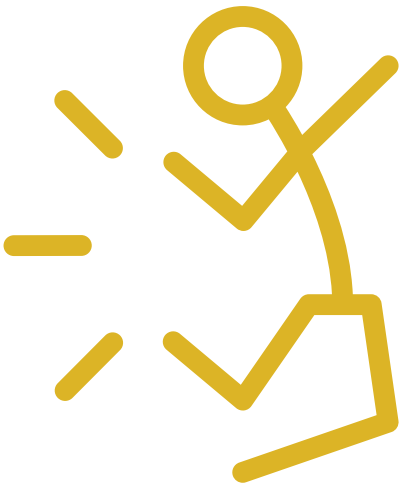
SENSORY PROCESSING EXPLAINED



CHAPTER 1



Sensory Processing and Sensory Processing Disorder - An Overview



What Is Sensory Processing?

A Therapist's Perspective

Getting messy is a wonderful play experience for young children, and we recommend it. But sensory integration is more complicated than just getting your hands dirty.

Here's a quick glimpse into what sensory processing means.

A child's sensory systems pick up information from the child's surroundings and send that information to the nervous system, which processes the information and generates a response or reaction to what is happening around him.

The sensory systems include:

- The auditory system – the sense of hearing
- The olfactory system – the sense of smell
- The oral sensory system – the sense of taste
- The vestibular system – how we sense where our bodies in space
- The proprioceptive system – our sense of the way our bodies move
- The tactile system – the sense of touch
- The visual systems – the sense of sight
- The interoceptive system, which is responsible for the general sense of our body's physical condition, such as hunger, thirst, and internal discomfort.

Sensory experiences are so powerful they can “rewire” the brain.

These experiences can help children understand their environments more clearly, making them feel safe. Or the experiences can be overwhelming, causing children to become defensive and withdrawn.

In addition, no two children will ever respond to a sensory experience in exactly the same way. For example, if you offer putty to two children, one child may squeeze it tightly and let it run through her fingers, enjoying how it feels cool and mushy. The other child may drop it immediately, irritated by the same sensation.

This is sensory processing: the way the body receives, analyzes, and responds to the signals it receives from its environment. Thoughtful, guided exposure to playful sensory experiences is the best way to promote healthy development of the sensory systems. This ensures that little bodies learn to process, integrate, and generate appropriate responses to the sensory information in their environments.

**Sensory experiences
are so powerful they can
“rewire” the brain.**



Sometimes children experience difficulty with processing or tolerating one or more types of sensory input. Several possible medical reasons can cause this difficulty, but one of the most common is Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). For children with SPD, their bodies do not organize and integrate sensory information properly, which makes it difficult for those children to generate appropriate responses to their environments. This can result in a wide range of confusing and sometimes negative behaviors. When children demonstrate significant sensory processing concerns, exposure to everyday sensory play experiences may not be enough to manage their behaviors and to treat the underlying cause of these behaviors. These children may require assessment and intervention designed by an occupational therapist or other medical professional.



Sensory Processing Disorder

A Parent and Educator's Point of View

Sensory Processing Disorder can be a confusing term. No two children are alike, and no two cases are the same. Doctors and researchers are still figuring out the details of the sensory systems, which makes the issue difficult to understand. As a parent and an educator, I have heard a wide range of terminology referring to sensory processing:

Sensory, Sensory Integration, Sensory Needs, Sensory Overload, Sensory Seeking

To add to the confusion, you might find another word attached to one of the terms listed above:

Disorder, Dysfunction

One of the most important things I learned is that sensory needs run across a spectrum similar to the colors of a rainbow. Children can be over-stimulated by the world around them, or they can be unresponsive to their surroundings, which causes them to seek additional input, usually in a socially unacceptable manner. Children can be a little of both, fall somewhere in the middle, be exclusively on one end of the spectrum, or exhibit problems in only one area. That is what makes “sensory processing” so complicated and confusing.

As a parent, I see my fun, smart child turn into someone I don't know or understand in the blink of an eye. I hear him cry because his socks “don't like his feet.” I endure yelling, screaming, and tantrums because something doesn't go as planned. I often compare my son to a house of cards: meticulous and intriguing but also delicate and complex.

As an educator in the classroom, I watched as a child with sensory needs ran himself into walls. I witnessed parents at their wit's end because of their child's need to put everything in his mouth. I taught lessons with children bouncing on balls to stay focused. I comforted many children as they cowered under a desk because the noise of the classroom was too much for them to handle.

As a parent, I was frustrated and didn't know where to start. As an educator, I was confused because I was never trained in this area of child development. So I asked the questions, “What is wrong here? How can I help? What can I do?”

Over the last five years, I read, asked questions, found some answers, and most importantly, found support. The last section of this book contains some of the support groups, books, and websites we found useful in our quest to learn more about sensory processing. Our hope is that you will find answers to your questions, ideas for activities, and a support system to help you as you learn to meet your child's sensory needs.

5 Common Sensory Processing Myths: Busted

If you look around the web, you'll find thousands of articles, blog posts, and opinions about sensory processing. Some are amazing resources for parents, teachers, and therapists. However, you can also find a lot of misleading information – not to mention the information that is downright false. Let's debunk some of the most common myths and misconceptions you might hear about sensory processing.

MYTH 1: SENSORY MEANS GETTING YOUR HANDS MESSY.

TRUTH: Kids experience the world using their entire bodies. When you're planning sensory play experiences, remember to get the whole body involved. Don't get stuck on activities that appeal only to the hands.

Expose your child to play experiences that engage all senses: hearing, sight, taste, smell, movement, and touch. For example, bowling with a light plastic bowling ball is a different sensory experience than bowling with a heavy weighted exercise ball. Instead of just asking your child to carry a ball with his hands, ask if he can carry it between his knees or elbows. This type of play will allow your child to explore how his body moves in space and how it works against resistance. Draw attention to sensory experiences during everyday life and play. For example, can your child hear her rice cereal pop when you pour the milk? Can she see baking soda fizz when you add vinegar?

The goal is to form a healthy integration among all sensory systems so children can listen, attend, develop strong coordinated bodies, stay curious, initiate interactions, and remain calm and focused in their environments.

MYTH 2: SENSORY ACTIVITIES ARE EASY. YOU JUST SET THEM UP, AND THE KIDS WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO.

TRUTH: It is important for children to explore their environments independently to promote creativity and independent thinking. However, guided sensory play has benefits, too. Ask yourself if you want the activity to have a specific purpose, such as to learn a motor skill, to learn to tolerate the feel of a texture, or to engage and attend for a certain length of time. Or is the purpose of the activity simply to have fun?

When children encounter a sensory experience, it can be a wonderful opportunity to expose and build their sensory systems through different avenues of play. Model and demonstrate ways to play and interact with the materials you present to the child. One way to do this is through pretend play. Structure the activity so it has a purpose, such as building something, finding an object, moving materials from one place to another, and so on. Siblings and friends make great models, too. Presenting unfamiliar activities in a group setting can bolster feelings of security and confidence and allows for greater interaction and expansion of play.

MYTH 3: ALL SENSORY ACTIVITIES ARE BENEFICIAL FOR ALL KIDS.

TRUTH: All children are wired differently and will respond in their own unique way to the sensory experiences presented to them. Observe your child during everyday routines, and design sensory activities that meet his or her needs.

For example:

- *Does she like to touch everything?* Build sensory bins into the play routine.
- *Is he extremely sensitive to certain noises?* Gradually introduce a variety of non-threatening new sounds through toys and listening games.
- *Does she get excitable and have trouble calming down?* Think about adding some calming sensory input – such as deep pressure, low lighting, or soft sounds. Sensory integration is all about the individual child and what he or she needs in the moment.

See the *Sensory Activities* and *Sensory Resources* sections of this book for more ideas for sensory play.

MYTH 4: IF A CHILD IS CAUTIOUS ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN A SENSORY EXPERIENCE, MAKE HIM JUMP IN AND GIVE IT A GO. HE'LL LIKE IT ONCE HE TRIES IT.

TRUTH: When a child is cautious about sensory play, he or she usually has a good reason.

Allow children to approach activities on their own without forcing it upon them. Let them watch first. Then, gradually adapt the activity to meet their needs. Slowly move from passive observation toward more active interaction with the sensory activity. For example, if a child is reluctant to touch playdough, suggest he use utensils to cut and flatten it before touching it with his hands.

Think of ways to make the activity less intense if the child is reluctant or more intense when the child is ready for a richer sensory experience.

- *Do you have a child who cannot tolerate finger paint?* Use a paintbrush first.
- *Still too much?* Suggest he hold your hand while you paint the picture, or let him observe you interacting with the paints.

- *What about a child who is super excited when he sees the finger paints?* Take it to another level. For example, let him paint with his feet. Or add a texture, such as sand, to the finger paints.

Model sensory activities for your child. Let her see someone she loves and trusts engaging and having fun with sensory play. Let her watch and keep the experience open for her to join in when she is ready. Keep in mind that the end goal of sensory activities is for children to have a strong, stable, and healthy sense of themselves in their environment.

MYTH 5: MORE SENSORY INPUT IS ALWAYS BETTER.

TRUTH: Exposure to a variety of sensory experiences does support healthy development in children, but you can overdo it. Remember to keep it simple. Try not to overwhelm children by doing too much at once. Introduce sensory play gradually, one sensation at a time, and watch your child's responses and behavior. If he is enjoying himself, build on that and expose him to more.

For example, fill a plastic tub with rice and allow your child to run her hands through the rice, exploring the texture and feel.

- *Does she enjoy it?* Does it keep her attention? Next time, add a visual component by tossing in some objects for your child to find.
- *What about incorporating a song or a rhyme that asks her to find a specific object for auditory input?* As one example, sing Old MacDonald. The child can then find the animals you hid in the rice as you mention each one in the song.

Subtle, gradual exposure is the key to successful sensory play.

We hope you enjoyed this sample of Sensory Processing 101! If so, there are almost 200 more pages of resources, tips, and activities just waiting for you!

[Click here if you would like more information](#)

