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Sensory processing difficulties information for parents

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Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS's approach to supporting all children's sensory needs at a universal/available for all levels

Supporting children with sensory processing needs

What is sensory processing?

Our brain receives information from all our senses, which we use to interact with the world around us. This may be through our thoughts, feelings, behaviour. We all process sensory information which, for most people, develops as we grow and mature.

How does sensory processing affect people?

Examples of behaviours you might notice if your child is oversensitive or under sensitive to sensory input:

Sensory system	If your child is under responsive, you might see:	If your child is over responsive, you might see:
Sight	Need lots of visual stimulation, e.g., like bright environments, watching lights and reflective surfaces.	Dislikes bright light – might want to wear a cap or have their hood up, become overwhelmed by too many lights and colours.
Smell	Seems unaware of strong smells, may seek out strong smells e.g., smearing.	Notice smells that other people don't which causes stress and interferes with ability to focus, bothered by typical household scents, perfume, aftershave etc.
Hearing	Talking loudly, enjoying loud noise, not picking up on usual auditory cues, e.g., they don't realise if you say their name.	Avoid loud noise, cover ears, anxious before loud noises occur, distracted by background noises.
Taste	Eats/mouths non food items, craves strong tasting foods e.g., spicy, salty.	Dislikes strong tastes, likes consistent temperature of foods, gags on certain tastes, struggle to try new food, fussy or picky eater.
Touch	May appear heavy handy, enjoys messy play and a variety of textures, touches things constantly, walking on their toes.	Seeks hugs/touch only on their terms, can appear to overreact to another's touch, bothered by certain types of clothing or clothing labels, walking on their toes.
Proprioception - (knowing where your body is in in the space without looking at it)	Frequent bumps, trips and falls, may appear poorly coordinated, leans on furniture or other people, overreliance on vision for movement (e.g. looks at feet when going down stairs).	

Vestibular -(helps with balance and spatial orientation)	Has difficulty sitting still and seeks movement, runs rather than walks, enjoys spinning and being upside down.	Struggles with motion, e.g. in the car, escalators, becomes dizzy easily, struggles in busy places watching a lot of movement.
Interoception - (interpreting sensations that come from inside your body)	May not notice when hurt or unwell, may not recognise feelings of hunger or fullness, poor awareness of needing to go to the toilet, may not recognise if feeling too hot or too cold.	May frequently report being in pain or is very sensitive to pain, may have a strong hunger impulse and struggle to wait for food if hungry, may struggle to cope when too hot or cold.

Problems in processing a response to information from all our senses may result in being too sensitive to some stimuli and not sensitive enough to others.

It is often helpful for a person's sensory processing needs to be accepted and understood by themselves and others.

How can we support children with sensory processing needs?

In Lancashire and South Cumbria, we are developing a system wide graduated approach based on best practices. Most children's needs can be met through universal support. Parents and professionals having supportive information.

Some children may require targeted support. This level of support may include workshops for parents/carers and professionals.

A small number of children may require specialist support, which may involve an assessment.

How can I find out more about sensory processing?

As we all process sensory information, it's important to understand how it can impact on us all.

We recommend you begin by watching the first video. This video will give you ideas of how to support your child. The second video gives more information around the language and terminology used.

[Understanding our senses video](#)

[Language and terminology around sensory processing video](#)

The Lancashire and South Cumbria approach and aspirations

If you would like more information about the Lancashire and South Cumbria approach and aspirations for meeting children's sensory needs, you may find their website helpful.

[Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board Sensory Processing Needs](#)

More online resources

[NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Joining in with Sensory Differences](#)

This website has videos explaining sensory processing and the 8 senses. They also have ideas of things that you and your child can do to help if they are having difficulties.

[The Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust Sensory Service](#)

This website has a number of videos explaining about sensory processing as well as videos which support a range of day to day activities:

- Dressing
- Eating and mealtimes
- Toileting
- Showering and bathing
- Hair washing
- Teeth brushing
- Nail cutting
- Sleep
- Going out and about

[The Falkirk Council children with disabilities team](#)

Booklet written by Lesley Beath, paediatric occupational therapist. This booklet helps parents and carers to look at their own sensory preferences and sensitivities.

[The National Autistic Society \(NAS\)](#)

Lots of resources to support children with sensory needs.

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