

## Behavior or Sensory Processing Disorder

Some parents are faced with managing a child's seemingly inexplicable behaviors that are greatly impacting the way they function within their family unit, at school, and in the community.

Some behaviors are environmental and may be influenced by parenting or discipline. Other times behavior may be emotional and related to anxiety or depression. Behavior can also be related to a diagnosis such as an ADHD or a learning disability.

However, these are not always the explanation of behavior problems in children. These behaviors may occur due to Sensory Processing Disorder or Sensory Integration Dysfunction.

### Some red flags of children with sensory processing disorders include:

- Excessive Energy And Activity Level: unable to sit still, constantly on the run, or engage in risky behaviors.
- Remarkably Low Energy And Activity Level: lethargic, uninterested in engaging in the world or activities, or be sedentary most of the day.
- Frequent Impulsiveness: unable to control impulses to jump out of his seat, control his behavior, may be aggressive, and/or frequently "blur" things out without thinking first.
- Short Attention Span And Distractibility: difficulty concentrating on one activity or task for any length of time and be distracted by every sight, sound, smell, and/or movement he sees.
- Motor Coordination Difficulties And Problems With Muscle Tone: clumsy, or like a "wet noodle", slouch or rest his head on his hands/arm during desk work, exhibit awkward movements, and/or have frequent accidents or injuries.
- Motor Planning Difficulties: difficulty with sports, handwriting, balance, using eating utensils, riding a bike, doing jumping jacks, clapping, or getting dressed.
- Frequent Switching Of Hands During "Tool" Use And Manipulation: no dominant hand for writing by age 5, may switch hands often while cutting, writing etc, or may throw a ball with both hands at different times.
- "Academic" Difficulties: mild to severe learning disabilities as he has a difficult time learning and generalizing new concepts and skills.
- Significant Resistance To The Unfamiliar: A child may experience anxiety or refuse to try new foods, meet new people, participate in new activities or sleep in a different environment.
- Difficulty Making Transitions From One Activity Or Situation To Another: A child may throw a tantrum, be uncooperative, or experience severe anxiety when stopping one activity and starting another. He may have a difficult time leaving a particular place or going to the next task of the day (ie, bath, bedtime, dinner)
- Low Frustration Tolerance: A child may become upset, yell or throw a tantrum at the slightest thing that does not go his way or that he is having difficulty learning. He will give up on tasks easily if they are difficult for him.
- Difficulties With Self-Regulation: A child may have difficulty with mood stability and maintaining an optimal level of arousal. He may be unable to calm himself down after an activity or get himself going for an activity. His arousal level may fluctuate minute to minute or day to day, which can be one of the most challenging behavior problems of all!
- Significant Social Skill Behavior Problems: A child may have a difficult time relating to other children and sharing. He may isolate, be overpowering, aggressive, or bossy to help him regulate and control his sensory environment.
- Emotional Behavior Problems: A child may have significant self-esteem issues, be overly sensitive to criticism, transitions, and stressful situations. He may have difficulty relating to others or understanding his own actions, motivation, and behaviors.
- Significantly Irritated By and Uncooperative With Activities Of Daily Living: A child may have difficulty getting dressed, going to bed, brushing his teeth, eating, participating in certain activities, or taking a shower.
- If a parent is encountering any combination of these behaviors with their child, or has tried other approaches to managing behavior, sensory processing may be a factor. Sensory Processing Dysfunction can be diagnosed and treated by an Occupational Therapist. Techniques including the Wilbarger Brushing Protocol, Therapeutic Listening®, and a sensory diet of heavy work activities can improve a child's ability to sit at a table and attend, interact more appropriately with peers, and demonstrate more appropriate behaviors and emotional responses.