

What Is Sensory Processing? Video Script

Welcome to the GGC Occupational Therapy service training on sensory processing. In this video you will learn what occupational therapy is, what sensory processing is and how it helps us make sense of the world around us and what sensory differences are. Watch the other videos for more information on the different senses and strategies.

I'd like to talk a bit about Occupational Therapy.

Occupations are all the things we want, need or have to do that have meaning to us. We all take part in a variety of occupations every day. As an adult this might include going to work, cooking, doing housework or taking part in a hobby. Children and young people also take part in lots of occupations every day. These include getting dressed, writing and the most important one- play! Occupational Therapists work with people who may need support or advice if they are not able to do their occupations. We look at the person, the environment and the occupation. We work together with the person to look at why they are having difficulty taking part. This might be due to things like illness or disability.



The way we get information from our senses and what our brains do with it is called sensory processing. In this video we talk about sensory processing differences. Sometimes the way we process information stops us from doing something we want or need to do or is harmful or dangerous. This is described as a sensory difficulty. You might also hear or read about Sensory Processing Disorder. Sensory Processing Disorder is not recognised as a diagnosis on its own in the UK. You might read about it in books or on websites based in other countries.

It can be helpful to think about your brain as being like a computer:

We all get information from the environment around us and from our bodies. This is like when we type information into a computer.

Your brain sorts the information and decides what it needs to pay attention to and what it can ignore. This is like the processor in the computer.

You then do something in response to the information. For example you might close your eyes because it's too bright. This is like when the computer responds to a command like print.



We are all different, so it makes sense that our brains would process information differently. This means that we ALL have different sensory likes and dislikes e.g. some people love the taste of coffee others hate it. Some people love fairground rides but it makes other people feel sick. Take a minute to think about your own sensory likes and dislikes. Are they the same as the people you live or work with? It is important to remember that something that you might find annoying or you can't see the point of might be a sensory preference for someone else. For example, some people need lots of movement to help their bodies feel comfortable or relaxed or ready to learn. It might look like they're not listening and you might want them to

'sit still' but moving might be helping them take in the information better. You might like to listen to music loudly when you get home but someone in your family might need peace and quiet. Your child might spin, flap their hands or fidget with objects. If this helps them to take part in an activity then these are effective strategies. We would not look to stop the person from doing them. It means that you both have different sensory preferences. Neither of you need to change the way you process sensory information. You need to work together to find a way to meet both needs.

Some children might cover their ears or go out of the room if you put the Hoover on. Although the child is processing the information differently, they've come up with an effective strategy to manage it. It doesn't stop them taking part in activities. Their sensory processing difference doesn't cause them a problem. We ask people closest to the child to be 'sensory detectives'. This could be parents, family or people who work with the child. What have you noticed they like/dislike? What helps them relax? What does it stop them doing? You are the best person to let people know the little signs that your child might be feeling overwhelmed. We can change the environment and understand how the child or young person meets their sensory needs. This makes it easier for them to take part in everyday activities.



Our sensory system works throughout the day to keep our system balanced. We need different amounts of input to feel comfortable or ready to learn. We use our different sensory likes and dislikes to help keep our system balanced. This allows us to feel 'just right' for taking part in the activity we are doing. We call this sensory self regulation. This means we can calm down and unwind at bedtime to sleep or be alert if we are exercising or working. If we get too much or too little input we need to do something (like move or eat something) to regain the balance. Some people don't need a lot of input before their systems have had too much. These people have what we call a low threshold. Other people need lots of input before they feel they have had enough. These people have a high threshold. Thresholds change throughout the day. They are affected by other factors like illness, feeling tired or stressed. This is why you might like listening to music in the car one day but if you're tired or have a headache you might need silence.



You know your child best and will already know lots about their likes and dislikes. Remember, understanding how your child processes sensory information is important. Changes to the environment can help your child or young person to take part in activities. Have a look at our other short videos on the sensory systems and strategies for more information.