

# SENSORY ACTIVITIES GUIDE



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# SENSORY ACTIVITIES THAT WOULD HELP YOU CALM YOUR CHILD

Top recommendation "any heavy work activity"



**1** Tortilla time.



**2** Deep pressure.



**3** Rocking.



# SENSORY ACTIVITIES THAT WOULD HELP YOU WAKE UP/ALERT YOUR CHILD TO INCREASE ATTENTION

Top recommendation "any stop and go activity"



**1** Bouncing on a therapy ball.



**2** Jumping games.



**3** Make the room bigger/pushing on walls.

## What is sensory integration?

The term “sensory integration” refers to the processing, integration, and organization of sensory information from the body and the environment.

Simply put, this means how we experience, interpret and react to (or ignore) information coming from our senses. Sensory integration is important in all the things that we need to do on a daily basis, such as getting dressed, eating, moving around, socializing, learning and working. Sensory information is received from our senses, which include:

- Sight (vision)
- Hearing (auditory system)
- Touch (tactile system)
- Taste (gustatory system)
- Smell (olfactory system)
- Proprioception (senses of body awareness and position)
- Vestibular (awareness of movement, balance, and coordination)
- Interoception (our internal sensory system that tells us what is happening inside our body, for example, hunger, needing the toilet, fatigue, emotions, etc)

For most of us, the development of sensory integration occurs when we are young as part of our normal development and in the things we do such as rolling, crawling, walking and in play; for others, sensory integration is less well developed. Our understanding of sensory integration was initially developed in the late 60s and 70s by Dr. A Jean Ayres, an occupational therapist and psychologist with an understanding of neuroscience working in the USA. Ayres defined sensory integration as:

“The neurological process that organizes sensation from one’s own body and from the environment and makes it possible to use the body effectively with the environment.” (1972)

## What is the difference between sensory integration and sensory processing?

The terms “sensory integration” and “sensory processing” both refer to the processes in the brain that allow us to take the signals from our senses, make sense of those signals and respond appropriately.

The concept of sensory integration was first developed and described by Dr. A Jean Ayres in the 1970s. In 2006, Dr. Lucy Miller published a model of “sensory processing disorder” based on Ayres’ Sensory Integration.

Therapists and authors tend to use a particular term depending on where they trained.

## What do sensory integration and sensory processing difficulties look like?

What happens if the signals coming from our senses are too weak? Or too strong? Or if our brain over or under reacts to the signals? Or if the brain can’t make sense of those signals? The individual will experience sensory integration difficulties and this may be evident in their behaviour. Some individuals may experience the sensory inputs as overwhelming and upsetting, leading to ‘sensory overload’. Individuals may be over sensitive to sensory input, under sensitive, or both.

It’s common for all of us to occasionally feel under or over sensitive to sensory inputs; for example, music or bright lights may feel too much if you have a headache; you can feel uncoordinated or find it hard to focus if you are tired. But these feelings are temporary and wouldn’t normally affect your day-to-day functioning in the long-term. Sensory integration or sensory processing difficulties are long-term and have a big impact on everyday life and learning. But with professional advice and, if appropriate, therapy, much can be done to support improvements in a person’s daily functioning.

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION 2 OUT OF 2

Some individuals may have difficulty processing input from one particular sense (eg, visual processing), whereas other individuals may experience difficulty integrating inputs from more than one sensory system. Note that sensory integration difficulties are different from sensory impairments such as hearing loss, although sometimes the two result in similar behaviours. For example, an individual with perfect hearing can find it difficult to follow conversations if they have difficulties processing the incoming auditory signals.

## Sensory modulation problems

Problems with sensory modulation occur when our brain either over responds to, or under responds to sensory information. For example, if someone over responds to touch they may be very aware of the label in the back of their clothes. If someone is under-responsive to touch they may not notice someone tapping them on the shoulder.

It has been found that people can be over responsive or under responsive in all the different senses, they can be over responsive in one sense and under responsive in another. For some people they can be over responsive and under responsive within the same sense. Responsiveness can be dependent on a situation, for example a stressful situation can make us more and sometimes less aware of sensation.

## Sensory discrimination and perceptual problems

This is when the brain has difficulties with making sense of the sensory information it receives. If these problems are with touch sensory information, an individual can seem clumsy or use too much or too little force when doing things. A person with visual perceptual problems may have difficulties with finding objects in cluttered environments or finding a word on a page.

