

## Sensory Processing

The aim of this resource pack is to assist with the identification of possible difficulties and support the implementation of strategies.

### Implementing the strategies

All of the senses interlink so it is important to ensure that you consider all of the senses before using one particular strategy. For example, a child who doesn't like to have their nappy changed may find it both difficult to feel safe when lying down and also dislike the feel of a cold mat beneath them.

There are also other health and safety factors to remember. Please check what physical handling policy your early years setting has and gain parental permission/setting permission before undertaking any form of massage on a child.

### What is Sensory Processing?

Sensory processing refers to how we use the information provided by all of the sensations from within our body and from our environment. All of the information is integrated to give us an understanding of who we are, where we are and what is happening around us. When our senses are integrated correctly we are able to respond appropriately to the sensation.

Children with sensory processing challenges may struggle to understand what is happening inside and outside their bodies. They may struggle to communicate how they feel, they may be disorganised in a world they can't make sense of and need to learn strategies to enable them to cope and function. Imagine the impact on your attention when the pictures on the wall repeatedly grab your attention or the sound of an everyday object causes you to feel threatened and unsafe. Imagine if you are in a state of constant 'high alert', due to fear of someone brushing past you, as this form of touch is perceived to feel painful.

There are seven senses explained in this resource pack: Tactile, Taste, Smell, Vision, Auditory, Proprioception and Vestibular.

### **Within this resource pack we have separated the senses and provided**

- A description of the sensory system.
- Examples of behaviours that may suggest a child experiences this differently?
- Ways to help – suggestions on strategies and play activities that may help.

# Sense of touch

## (The Tactile system)

Our sense of touch (tactile sense) comes from receptors in our skin, all over our bodies and within our mouth.

There are two tactile pathways, a protective pathway and a discriminative pathway.

The protective system responds to light or unexpected touch and helps to alert us to potential danger.

The discriminative pathway helps us to interpret what we are touching and where on our body we are in contact.

Information is sent to the brain about the type of touch we are experiencing e.g. pressure of touch, texture, pain, location and temperature. This assists us to make an appropriate response.

## Ways to help - Touch processing

### What you may observe

### Possible solutions to try

Child avoids touching or exploring toys with their hands and may dislike messy play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Do not force the child to join in. Offer any new tactile experiences in small amounts at first e.g. place their hand over yours rather than putting their hand in yours until they gain confidence</b></li></ul>
Withdraws from cuddles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Experiment with a variety of different touches, for example try a firmer hug rather than light touch or vice versa.</b></li><li>• <b>Use objects instead of 'skin to skin' contact e.g. during play roll a ball over their hand/body</b></li></ul>
Easily ticklish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Tickling sends confusing messages to the nervous system involving discomfort and pleasure. This should be avoided if you are concerned a child is over-responsive</b></li></ul>
Finds nappy changing distressing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ensure the changing mat is not cold and place a towel underneath the child when changing them. Where possible change in quieter and less stimulating environments</b></li><li>• <b>Determine if they prefer a firm or light touch and use single quick movements</b></li><li>• <b>During changing time, include a motivating activity such as a familiar song or toy</b></li></ul>
Becomes disorganised, over emotional and/or out of control when brushed past or touched lightly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Allow space around the child within an early years setting</b></li><li>• <b>Encourage frequent movement and heavy work activities, particularly prior to circle time or tactile games</b></li><li>• <b>Ensure those supporting your child understand that they find imposed touch difficult to manage</b></li><li>• <b>Position the child at the end of a line of children</b></li></ul>
Has a fear of going out in the rain/wind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Encourage distraction and coping strategies such as singing or talking through the process "Hat on, coat on, car heater on..."</b></li><li>• <b>Provide child with ears muffs, a hat they may tolerate or umbrella</b></li><li>• <b>Headphones with favourite music may also help</b></li></ul>
Finds some clothes uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Try to detect what the issue is....are the labels rubbing? If so remove them</b></li><li>• <b>Stick to familiar, acceptable clothing and gradually introduce new garments for short periods</b></li><li>• <b>Some children feel more secure when they have tighter fitting under garments on, such as a Lycra body suit or compression clothing</b></li></ul>

**Other recommendations and activities to try:**

- Avoid 'light touch' activities e.g. patting on the head or tickling particularly unexpectedly.
- Avoid touch from behind
- Use firm rather than light touch, deep pressure - massage rather than tickling.
- Combine tactile activities with opportunities to experience changes in body position (proprioception) – See advice sheet below
- Encourage the use of hand held fidget toys. These are toys or objects easily played with in the hand. They are quite often squeezable objects. They are often particularly effective in circle time and carpet time. Try attaching or tying a small object to a child's mat for circle time or to be kept in a pocket
- Deep pressure squeezing along their hands and arms.
- Avoid dressing the child in certain textures of clothing that cause irritation i.e. wool. If they cannot tolerate labels cut them out. If they prefer soft clothing wash new clothes multiple times with fabric softener.
- Whilst trying tactile activities always use a calm, quiet and encouraging voice in a calm environment
- Empathise – what is tolerable for one person is unpleasant for another.

**Be very gentle when introducing challenging activities** - keep activities short and follow them with a favourite activity.

**Don't be tempted to progress too quickly** - Celebrate small achievements which may take a long time to accomplish, let the child work at their own pace.

**Grade, grade, grade** - Start with very small amounts of tactile materials to avoid overwhelming the child. Start with dry textures, progress to wet and then sticky. Stop immediately if the child starts to gag.

**Respect their limits and work within their tolerance** - They need to trust you and build their confidence with these challenging activities. Let them clean their hands if they ask and encourage them to then carry on.

**Bear in mind the environment** - try and build a quiet, calm environment so their sensory systems are not being bombarded by noise or activity. Consider lighting, noise, smell, textures and space.

## Sense of movement (The Vestibular system)

The vestibular system provides us with information regarding head position and movement against gravity.

Our movement receptors are located in our inner ear and send information about our head position and how we are moving. If the brain does not process the movement sensation accurately then we may be described as over responsive or under-responsive to movement sensation and this will affect our behaviour. The vestibular sense is possibly the most fundamental of all our senses it gives us physical and emotional security when moving in space. This sense also enables us to stabilise our visual field. Information from the vestibular system links with the area of the brain that is responsible for attention and arousal levels (sleep/wake cycles). Consider how you handle a baby; to wake them up and get them excited you may bounce them on your knee, to calm or assist with sleep you may rock them back and forth.

If the brain is over responsive, it can become easily overwhelmed by a movement experience causing fear, anxiety and avoidance i.e. becomes distressed or anxious when head is tilted forwards or backwards during nappy changing or lying down in the bath. If under-responsive they may seek out more movement experiences to satisfy the need i.e. frequent moving in their seat or rocking.

If difficulties exist with **over sensitivity** you may see the following behaviours:

- Fearful of playground equipment
- Dislikes swings and slides
- Gets car sick easily
- Anxious if not in control of movement
- is like of head-tilt or head movements, particularly backwards in space.

If difficulties exist with **under sensitivity** you may see the following behaviours:

- Seeks out swings
- Likes roundabouts, slides
- Hangs upside down on bars
- No sense of danger when climbing
- Constantly on the go
- Trips over own feet

# Sense of body position

## (Proprioception)

Working closely with the vestibular sense is the sense of proprioception which provides us with an awareness of body position in space without looking at it.

Information provided from our muscles, joints and ligaments provides us with an awareness of where our body parts are in relation to each other. This information is given when our body is squashed, stretched or pulled apart during movement.

When this system is working effectively it assists us to know where our body parts are in relation to each other and in relation to the immediate space around us. It also lets us know how to move our body and how much force we need to use to carry out a task.

When proprioception is processed well, an individual's body position is automatically adjusted and this helps with every aspect of our day e.g. negotiating our way around objects in a room or preventing us from falling out of a chair. Proprioception also allows objects such as pencils, buttons, spoons and combs to be used by the hand; to pick up a drink of water without spilling it or squeezing too hard or too softly.

The proprioceptive system also has another role – it helps us to stay calm so that we can attend and focus.

## Ways to help - Movement and body position senses

### What you may observe

### Possible solutions to try

Seeks rocking motion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Move legs to pieces of music or during rhymes.</li><li>• Engage child in lap play e.g. row the boat, going to the seaside, roley polley song etc.</li><li>• Use of a large child sized ball (gym ball) encourage child to lay body over it and push back and forth with feet on the floor to encourage rocking motion. Again use of a song can help to keep them engaged</li></ul>
Is travel sick in car/trolley/buggy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Place a hard surface under child's feet in car/whilst sitting/use foot plates in a buggy to encourage the feeling of stability</li><li>• Ensure child is sitting in their seat firmly and isn't feeling insecure due to wearing loose car seat/straps in buggy.</li><li>• Avoid big unexpected movements.</li></ul>
Child does not like being held in the air, moved outside of their control or seems fearful of playground equipment, head tilted back e.g. during hair washing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage participation in the type of movement the child does enjoy and tolerates</li><li>• Never force a child to participate in an activity</li><li>• If they are not keen to jump they may jump holding your hand</li><li>• Combine movement activities with opportunities to engage in heavy work and this that develop body awareness</li><li>• Use praise and consider reward charts for help given</li></ul>
Has difficulty sitting still or may be observed to constantly fidget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Split the child's day into small sections allowing for frequent</li><li>• movement breaks.</li></ul>

Falls from chairs more than you would expect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the feet are supported in sitting</li> </ul>
May have poor body awareness and frequently bump into objects or trip over more than you would expect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See body awareness hand-out</li> <li>• Encourage frequent heavy work activities</li> <li>• Encourage deep pressure massage and body squeezes</li> <li>• Provide more practise with certain movement related skills such as rolling, crawling, jumping, swinging, animal walks</li> </ul>
Child appears to take excessive risks e.g. show no fear when jumping from a big height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage safer games that involve jumping or bouncing and movement against gravity such as use of trampoline, star jumps, space hoppers etc.</li> </ul>
Child is always 'on the go' more than their peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think of active activities that involve increased effort such as pushing and pulling i.e. moving furniture, pushing a full shopping trolley</li> <li>• Think of activities that involve a lot of moving and using effort e.g. of activities include: helping with jobs around the house, carrying objects, pushing heavy doors, gardening, pushing wheelie toys, swimming, trampolining, using playground equipment, running, cycling on a trike or bike, kneading dough or modelling with clay and tug of war.</li> <li>• Provide frequent opportunities for movement and changes in body position, particularly prior to a focused task</li> </ul>
Spins self around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play games where rotation is part of the activity e.g. ring a roses, pin the tail on the donkey, rolling on the floor.</li> <li>• Read books with actions that involve swirling around</li> <li>• Limit spinning to 5 rotations each way and encourage linear movement (forward and backwards) as a replacement.</li> </ul>
Climbs in excess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divert the child to more appropriate large play equipment or floor based movement opportunities when they show a desire to climb.</li> </ul>
Seeks to put or squash themselves into small spaces or pushes against corners of the room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play games with or allow the child to access large cardboard boxes – hiding in, squeezing into, ripping apart, jumping on and pushing with toys in.</li> </ul>

Other recommendations and activities to try:

- **Play dough** - playing with firm play dough, clay or plasticine. Squeeze, pull, stretch, roll and cut it. Pinch the dough with individual fingers and thumb. Make peas and squash them.
- **Obstacle course** - set up an obstacle course that involves climbing over, under, through and round, etc. Use cushions, cardboard boxes, duvets, chairs, skittles, etc. Encourage the child to describe what they are doing using spatial language e.g. through, over etc.
- **Pushing and pulling games** - Tug-of-war or Row, Row the Boat.
- **Animal Walks** - pull yourself along on your tummy like a seal, wriggle along like a worm, walk like a crab, walk like a bear on hands and feet with your bottom raised.
- **Physical play** – Swings in a blanket, play on swings, ropes, monkey bars and bouncing on a space ball or trampoline. Swimming, rough and tumble, climbing, gymnastics.

## Daily activities

**At home** have the child assist with carrying heavier but manageable shopping, pulling and pushing the boxes (toy box) with items in them, wearing a back pack with something in it to add manageable weight.

**In nursery** a child can be a 'teacher's helper' by putting books away, carrying boxes/bags of toys or other equipment, or moving chairs for activities. Digging in sand or small gravel and carrying buckets of sand/gravel/water. Cooking, stirring cake mixture, rolling out pastry etc.

**Build in movement to all learning** - Young children need to move to learn. Incorporate breaks in activities so the child can get up and move, run an errand or do some brain gym activities etc.

**The child does not always need to be seated for table top tasks** - Try activities whilst lying on tummy, in high or half kneeling and standing at a table as these positions will help to improve body awareness and provide more proprioception.

**Prepare the child's sensory system prior to fine motor activity** - Provide a brief period of group aerobics e.g. jumping on the spot, circle arms, push hands together, wiggle fingers

**Present prewriting activities on a vertical surface** - Use a chalk board, easel, white board or paper taped to the wall. This promotes improved upper limb awareness.

# Sense of hearing

(Auditory)

Auditory processing refers to how the brain recognises and makes sense of sounds. Sounds consist of loudness, pitch, duration and locality of where a sound is coming from. We may need more or less noise in our environment in order to help us focus on a task. For children who have auditory processing difficulties, noise can be painful if over sensitive or they may not register sounds if under responsive.

If difficulties exist with over sensitivities you may see the following behaviours at home or in early years settings:

- Runs from household noises
- Covers ears at loud noises or unexpected alarms etc., may become very distressed.
- May hum to block out external noise
- Easily distracted by background noise

If difficulties exist with under sensitivities you may see the following behaviours in early years settings

- Holds toy to ear and has volume on high\*
- Doesn't appear to hear when called
- Likes repetitive sounds\*
- Hums in noisy environments\*
- Not alarmed by sudden noises

\*Please note that these behaviours may also be seen in children who are over sensitive to sounds as they are struggling to screen out surplus noise in order to attend to your voice or they may hum as a way to block out other unexpected sounds.

## Signs of difficulty relating to the auditory system

### What you may observe

### Possible solutions to try

Runs from household noises (hairdryer, washing machine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visually identifying the sound source, limiting the length of time and encouraging the child to be in control of operating the sound device can often ease anxiety.</li><li>• Encourage them to stay at a distance but in the same room, perhaps by using a pop-up tent as a hide out, so they can still see and feel protected at the same time.</li><li>• The use of strong proprioceptive input is effective in reducing the degree of auditory defensiveness. Encourage the child to engage in resistive/heavy work activities before the event to increase tolerance</li></ul>
Hums and covers ears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Again known as 'blocking', auditory sensory overload can mean that too many sounds and thoughts are happening at too faster speed in order for the child to process. Use a distraction free area and turn off the T.V. and start again!</li><li>• Try and identify what sounds might be influencing this behaviour</li></ul>
Holds toys to ear and has volume on high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eliminate the possibility of a hearing impairment by asking your GP for a referral to an audiologist.</li></ul>

Doesn't appear to hear you when being spoken to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once hearing impairment has been eradicated apply above strategy e.g. ensuring work/play in a distraction free area for short periods until child engages with your overtures</li> <li>• Does your child recognise he is being spoken to? Does he respond to his name? Does he know what his name is? Basic work on identity such as using photographs and labelling his/ her chair and picture books may help with this recognition</li> <li>• Adult to approach child from the front, go down to their level and ensure you have their attention before speaking. This may help the child to focus their attention</li> </ul>
Child over-reacts to loud noise, thunder, vacuum cleaner, hairdryer, fire drills or sudden noises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the response is extreme, ear defenders can be useful to reduce anxiety at noisier, busier times i.e. fireworks, busy supermarket (see equipment providers below)</li> </ul>
Easily startled by unidentifiable sounds (telephone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Again identifying where the noise is coming from and showing the child that it will stop helps the child understand that there is an end to the noise</li> <li>• Playing simple role play games with the telephone etc and allowing the child to make the phone ring can also help to take the fear out of things</li> <li>• Turning the ring tone down on the phone or moving the phone temporarily to another room and gradually bringing into the room the child plays over a period of weeks can also help to desensitise</li> </ul>
Gets frustrated by busy/noisy environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initially visit shops at quieter times. Then gently expose them to busier environments and use meaningful motivators e.g. visit to the shops to buy a Thomas comic</li> <li>• Use of earphones/hood/hat so child feels their ears are protected when child has to be exposed to longer periods of noisy activity</li> <li>• Allow child to walk on the inside of the pavement when out in busy streets rather than near roadside close to noisy vehicles</li> </ul>
Places hand over people's mouths when they sing/talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too many people singing/talking at once can cause confusion. When a child covers your mouth, stop talking and look around to see if someone else is also joining in. Remember to try to . have one adult talking to the child at once</li> <li>• Prepare the child if two people are going to sing at one time e.g. Mummy and Jo are singing today, 1, 2 people etc.</li> </ul>
Becomes anxious by loud, sudden noises (child screaming, balloon popping etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying the loud noise through visual and verbal labelling can reassure e.g. "wow it's the balloon, look!"</li> <li>• Encourage the child to play with the object that makes the noise or watch you play with it. Create fun games like blowing up the balloon and letting it go, releasing a small squeaky bit of air out, or allowing the child to stay in control by stamping or using a cocktail stick to pop the balloons</li> </ul>
Child appears less able to concentrate or focus in a noisy environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the child to carry out activities in a quiet environment at intervals throughout the day</li> <li>• Allow the child something to fidget with something, and use the proprioceptive ideas above</li> </ul>

# Sense of vision

## (Visual Processing System)

The movements of our eyes are controlled by muscles and these allow us to follow a moving object with our eyes, fix on an object, scan a page of writing and focus our eyes on one object and then move to another and re-focus quickly. Visual processing relates to the brain selecting and processing visual information. This allows us to make sense of what we see. If difficulties with visual processing exist you may see the following

- Focuses on tiny part of object not whole thing
- Difficulties noticing objects in peripheral vision
- Difficulty scanning pictures on page
- Difficulty changes focus from room to paper
- Gets excited at flashing lights on toys
- Stares at fluorescent lightings
- Stimulates self on reflective surface
- Startled by unexpected light changes e.g. clouds blocking out sun

### Signs of difficulty relating to the visual System

#### What you may observe

#### Possible solutions to try

Behaviour of child becomes more erratic in a busier more visually stimulating environment or is visually distracted by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the child to carry out activities in a less visually stimulating environment at intervals throughout the day.</li> <li>• This may mean creating a suitable environment in the home or Pre-school classroom such as a blank corner separated by dividers or a table covered in a sheet that the child can crawl under</li> </ul>
Show sensitivity to light or be irritated by bright lights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep lighting dim.</li> <li>• Encouraging them to wear a cap or sunglasses may help reduce visual stimulation.</li> <li>• Avoid sitting child by a window.</li> <li>• Fitting a blackout blind to bedroom window may help.</li> <li>• Fitting a blind to setting window may help the child to feel more in control of sunlight/clouds.</li> </ul>
Visually stimulated by reflective surfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure any laminated visuals are made using matt laminating pouches as some children can get stuck on the reflection of the card rather than focusing on the picture itself</li> <li>• Fixing pictures to hard card or board can also refrain a child from flicking the symbols instead of looking at what they are informing them about</li> <li>• Allow periods of sensory play using fibre-optic lights and mirror play ensuring time has a limit to it so child doesn't become too stimulated by them</li> </ul>
Likes to see toys spinning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporated spinning in play activities gradually expanding activities e.g. roll it down then....spin until less emphasis is on the spinning and more emphasis in on the function the toy should serve</li> </ul>
Gets excited by flashing lights on toys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limiting flashing light toys to use as motivators for short periods</li> <li>• Avoid strobe lighting, especially those that flicker</li> </ul>

# Taste and smell

(Gustatory and Olfactory sense)

Smell travels directly to the centre in our brain that controls our emotions, memory and learning. Smell is closely linked to our sense of taste. Consider how bland food tastes when we have a cold for example.

Our brains are wired so that we are able to respond appropriately to tastes and smells and this enables us to keep safe and identify possible signs of danger. It is important to note that mouthing of objects is a typical stage of development. Infants explore with their mouths and progress to exploring with the hands as their tactile sensory system develops.

There are typically two different kinds of difficulties that may occur, the first being an over sensitivity to smells and tastes and the second an under sensitivity to taste and smell. The later of the two is less common.

**Overly sensitive**, these children may show the following behaviours

- Becomes anxious at smell of cooking
- Gags on certain foods
- Able to comment on peoples aroma
- Particularly favours certain types of food

**Under sensitive**, these children may show the following behaviours

- Sniffs people
- Smells own faeces
- Smells toys before playing
- Chews or mouths everything
- Grinds teeth
- Particularly favours strong flavoured food

## Signs of difficulty relating to the visual System

### What you may observe

### Possible solutions to try

Becomes anxious by the smell of food cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare child visually when dinner is soon to be prepared.</li><li>• Play a smell game, where your child can learn to smell individual pieces of food and label them, this may help your child to remember the different smells</li></ul>
Eats non-food items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss with your GP or paediatrician to consider nutritional reasons why</li><li>• When a child attempts to bite into a non-food item, intervene and replace with a small food item. Have a small box of favourite chewy foods available.</li><li>• If child simply wants to bite on a toy but not swallow they could be directed to specialist oral motor devices such as 'chewy tubes'. This equipment can be purchased at <a href="http://www.sensorydirect.com/sense/chewys.html">http://www.sensorydirect.com/sense/chewys.html</a></li></ul>

Chews/mouths everything	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The child could simply still be at the exploratory stage of their play development and like very young children explore object through their mouths. Begin to teach the child to explore the toy through touching with their hands rather than their mouths</li> </ul>
Overfills his/her mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This may be a sign of hypo-sensitivity in the mouth, where a child simply cannot sense his mouth has food in it until it's packed full</li> <li>Limit amount of food on the spoon until they have swallowed</li> <li>Oral motor games that involve blowing sucking and chewing can improve sensory awareness of the mouth</li> </ul>
Grinds teeth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure child hasn't got any dental problems, a referral to a special dentist may be required.</li> <li>Try and identify whether there is a pattern to this occurrence, i.e. in busier environments or when tired. Offer a replacement activity that the child may find calming (suggestions below)</li> </ul>
Bites people around him/her for no apparent reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage people to approach child slowly from the front, ensuring they do not touch the child as they may be experiencing too much overload from the adult e.g. touch, lack of space as well as demand</li> <li>Allow child to wear specialist oral motor devices such as 'chewy tubes' to replace this if they feel the need to bite</li> </ul>
Eats specific food only (dry, sloppy etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gentle taste tests, where the child can be offered very small pieces of certain foods in between their favourites.</li> <li>Encourage experimental play with various food materials e.g. dry pasta, crunched up crisps etc</li> </ul>
Finds cleaning teeth uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A visit to the dentist or referral to specialist dentist may be helpful to rule out any dental problems causing discomfort.</li> <li>Playing fun imitation games such as "this is the way we clean our teeth on a Monday morning"</li> <li>Experimentation with a variety of different tooth- brushes, manual or electric. Also theme brushes may prove more interesting for the child e.g. Thomas or Bob the Builder.</li> </ul>

# Daily care activities

Sensory processing challenges may lead to difficulties being independent in daily life skills. The following strategies may help in personal tasks.

## Dressing

- Use comfortable clothes; consider type of fabric and length of sleeves
- If the young person cannot tolerate labels, cut them out
- If the young person cannot tolerate seams, undergarments can be worn to reduce friction
- Try washing and drying clothes in unscented products
- Dressing can be done in front of a mirror so as to provide visual cues to assist with sequencing, motor planning and body awareness
- Be aware of other visual or auditory noises in the room which may be off-putting

## Personal Hygiene

- Use non-perfumed soap
- Be aware of bathroom lighting levels and minimise any noises, e.g. run the bath prior to entering the bathroom
- Use pressure when shampooing or drying with a towel
- Before bath time, do activities that involve proprioception (see activities above)
- Make the transition from undressing and getting into the bath as quickly and smoothly as possible
- If the young person dislikes having their face or body washed, encourage them to wash themselves. Self-initiated touch produces a less defensive reaction
- If the young person is showering, use a hand held shower nozzle. Let the young person control the direction and force of the water
- Use a large towel, and quickly and firmly wrap the young person in it. Avoid exposure of the wet skin to the air as the light touch may trigger a defensive reaction
- Provide deep-touch using a towel to the head, hands and feet to decrease defensiveness. If they will tolerate it, provide a firm massage, using lotion to avoid skin irritation

## General

- Some non-sensory strategies can also help:
- Where the choice is available, allow your young person to choose a bath or a shower. A larger showerhead is often more acceptable to the young person, as it distributes the water more evenly
- Try to incorporate bathing into a play activity. e.g. use floating toys and bubbles and/or coloured floating soap
- Visual aids can be used in order to help your young person understand the activity

## Hair care

- Seat the young person firmly on your knee and squeeze the young person firmly between your knees (deep pressure)
- Count or have the young person count as you comb, wash, rinse or cut the hair
- Give definite time limits to the task e.g. let's count to 10, then we will stop cutting your hair, provide deep pressure immediately after
- Break the task into small steps and eliminate any unnecessary steps or stages. Practise each step in isolation in a stress-free environment
- Gradually combine these steps and perform the task in the natural environment. Practise without scissors, lifting up sections of hair and tugging very slightly to mimic the feel of cutting

# References

Raising a Sensory Smart Child Biel & Peske (2005) England Penguin Ltd. Williams & Shellenberger (2001), Therapy Works, Albuquerque.

Building Bridges through Sensory Integration Yack, Aquilla & Sutton (2002), Future Horizons.

Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder Lucy Jane Miller (2006), Penguin Group USA .

Tools for Tots: Sensory Strategies for Toddlers and Pre-schoolers Henry, Kane-Wineland & Swindeman (2007) Henry OT services inc.

## Self-directed resources to consider

Useful Website

<http://asensorylife.com/>

## Equipment providers

Suppliers of clothing for children that may find it difficult to tolerate certain textures:

<http://sensorysmart.co.uk/>

Suppliers of toys, clothing and a variety of equipment to support individual sensory preferences

<http://www.sensorydirect.com/>

## Books for parents

'Raising a sensory smart child' – Read more about this resource at

[http://www.sensorysmarts.com/about\\_book.html](http://www.sensorysmarts.com/about_book.html)

'Understanding your Child's Sensory signals'

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Understanding-Your-Childs-Sensory-Signals/dp/1466263539>

## Videos

A Child's View of Sensory Processing:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1G5ssZIVUw&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1G5ssZIVUw&feature=player_embedded)

Description of the Proprioceptive (body position) sense and how this can impact on behaviour and learning.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2iOliN3fAE>

Description of the vestibular (movement and balance) sense and how this can impact on motor control, attention, behaviour and learning.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEbLhUc1Pc>

## Relevant Social networks

<https://www.facebook.com/SensoryIntegrationNetwork>

## Apps to promote self-regulation and individual sensory needs

<http://otswithapps.com/2012/11/28/brainworks-app-a-sensory-diet-tool/>