

Engaging the Five Senses to Learn About Our World

The outside world shapes children's development through experiences that they have, which include using their five senses—hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch. Drawing a child's attention to the five senses and discussing them increases understanding of and communication about the world around us.

Explain to the child how the five senses help us figure out what's going on around us and help us decide whether to enjoy or not enjoy an experience: our eyes help us see, our ears let us hear, our hands help us feel, our noses let us smell, and our tongues help us taste things.

Talk with your child about how his/her five senses strengthen everyday experiences that we have, as things naturally come up in everyday conversation (smelling the flowers on a beautiful spring day, hearing trains, eating a yummy tasting cookie, smelling bus exhaust, the way the cold snowflakes feel in our hands, etc.).

- Hearing

Children use their ears to take in information about things around them. Like other skills that children learn, listening takes practice. Developing good listening habits helps children get important information from family members, teachers, friends, and coaches, among others.

- Sight

When children play games that involve sight, they're practicing early literacy skills! Sight games help children recognize words, patterns, objects...and help them develop their memory!

- Smell

Over time, children will recognize certain smells as comforting, yummy, scary, exciting, etc. Experiment with the scents and smells that the child recognizes and those that are more unfamiliar.

- Taste

Children develop taste preferences based on what they are fed when they're in the early years of their lives. Helping children think about which tastes they do and do not prefer, however, will encourage them to try new foods and/or new combinations of foods.

- Touch

Children learn about their bodies and how to communicate with others through touch. Most of the feeling that we do happens through our feet and our hands. Taking part in activities where children feel with their feet and hands help them to learn how to write, button their shirts, tie their shoes, among others.

Excerpts taken from: <http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/tips-howtos/engaging-five-senses-learn-30959.html>



Understanding Sensory Processing Issues

If you're familiar with the term "sensory overload," you have an idea what sensory processing issues are. Sometimes called sensory processing disorder or SPD, these issues happen because the brain has trouble organizing information from the senses.

Children with sensory processing issues can be oversensitive to sights, sounds, textures, flavors, smells and other sensory input. This can make a trip to a toy store or trying a new dish at a restaurant an overwhelming experience for them. Other children with sensory processing issues are undersensitive to information they receive through the senses. This can lead to other problems.

Sensory processing issues can impact a child's social skills. It can also cause difficulties in the classroom. Learning more about sensory processing issues and possible treatments is a good first step in getting help for your child.

What are sensory processing issues?

A child's brain receives a steady stream of sensory information—from the smell of cookies baking to the feeling of shoes rubbing against her feet. Most kids can "tune out" or "filter" that information as needed. They can deal with unexpected sensations, such as a loud crash on the playground.

But children with sensory processing issues may be oversensitive or undersensitive to the world around them. When the brain receives information, it gives meaning to even the smallest bits of information. Keeping all that information organized and responding appropriately is challenging for them.

All kids can be finicky or difficult at times. But children with sensory processing issues can be so emotionally sensitive that doing simple daily tasks is a constant challenge. Certain fabrics or tags in clothing might irritate them. On the other end of the spectrum, they might have a high tolerance to pain and not realize when they're in a dangerous situation.

What are the common symptoms of sensory processing issues?

Symptoms of sensory processing issues can range from mild to severe. Here are some common symptoms:

Hypersensitivity: Hypersensitive (or oversensitive) children may have an extreme response to loud noises or notice sounds that others don't. They may dislike being touched, even by adults they know. They may be fearful in crowds, reluctant to play on playground equipment or worried about their safety (being bumped into or falling)—even when there's no real danger.

Hyposensitivity: Hyposensitive (or undersensitive) children lack sensitivity to their surroundings. They might have a high tolerance for or indifference to pain. They may be "sensory seeking," meaning they have a constant need to touch people or things—even when it's not appropriate.

They may also have trouble with personal space or be clumsy and uncoordinated. They might be constantly on the move and take risks on the playground, accidentally harming other children.

Some kids with sensory processing issues show signs of both hypersensitivity *and* hyposensitivity. They may react in one or both of the following ways:

- **Extreme response to a change in environment:** Kids may be fine in familiar settings but have a meltdown in a crowded, noisy store. These meltdowns can be scary for parents and kids, since children who are oversensitive might have trouble stopping once they get started.
- **Fleeing from stimulation:** Children who are undersensitive might run away from something that's too stimulating. Or they might run toward something that will calm them down. For example, they might zip across the playground toward a familiar teacher without paying attention to the other kids they're jostling.

What skills are affected by sensory processing issues?

For kids with sensory processing issues, dealing with sensory information can be frustrating and confusing. Here's how it can affect certain skills:

- **Resistance to change and trouble focusing:** It can be a struggle for kids with sensory processing issues to adjust to new surroundings and situations. It can take them a long time to settle into activities. They might feel stressed out when asked to stop what they're doing and start something new.
- **Problems with motor skills:** Kids who are undersensitive to touch may avoid handling objects. This is a problem because playing with and manipulating objects is a crucial part of development—one that helps kids master other motor-related tasks like holding a pencil or buttoning clothes. They might appear clumsy due to poor body awareness.
- **Lack of social skills:** Oversensitive kids may feel anxious and irritable around other kids, making it hard to socialize. Undersensitive kids, on the other hand, may be too rough with others. Other kids might avoid them on the playground or exclude them from birthday parties.
- **Poor self-control:** Children who feel anxious or overstimulated may have trouble controlling their impulses. They might run off suddenly or throw a noisy new toy to the side without playing with it.

How are sensory processing issues diagnosed?

There is a way to find out if your child has sensory processing issues.

Start taking notes about the behaviors and symptoms you're seeing in your child and when they occur. You might also ask your child's teachers about behaviors and symptoms they've noticed at school.

All this information will be helpful to the specialists who will evaluate your child. When you're ready to consult with professionals, here are some good places to start:

- **Talk to your child's pediatrician.** Explain your child's symptoms, and share your notes. The doctor might recommend a comprehensive assessment. They may refer your child for screening by a specialist, either at her school or in a professional practice.
- **Consult with the specialists.** The evaluator might ask you to help fill in the blanks of your child's development by sharing information about problem behaviors. This may include when the behaviors started and when they tend to happen. If you have found ways to calm or balance your child's sensitivity issues, be sure to mention this.

What can make the journey easier?

Explore helpful tools, strategies and support. Here are some options to consider:

- **Get advice from experts.** You can also go online and find manageable tips from experts to deal with a variety of behavior concerns. Knowledge is power, so the more you know about SPD the more information you can pass on to evaluators.
- **Learn about special services.** An [IEP](#) or [504 plan](#) could provide your child with needed support.
- **Connect with other parents.** You may feel alone when dealing with your child's issues, but there are other families in similar situations. They can provide support and advice along the way.





I Hear a Pickle

(and Smell, See, Touch, and Taste It, Too!)

RACHEL ISADORA

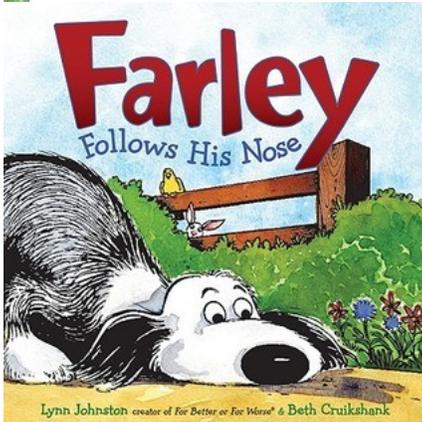


Caldecott Honor winner Rachel Isadora's sweet and simple introduction to the five senses is perfect for the youngest children.



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Good-natured and ever-hungry, Farley goes wherever his nose leads him. But as one delicious smell follows another, soon Farley is meeting new friends and exploring parts of town he's never seen before.



Sensory Activity: Dry Pasta Noodles

Items to include for this touch and sound sensory activity:

- Macaroni (or other small dry pasta)
- Bottles with lids (several sizes would be great!)
- Measuring cups and scoops

Set them out on a blanket, or even better would be a plastic shower curtain, to help contain the mess. The blanket not only makes it easier for clean up but it also sets boundaries for the kids to keep the pasta in an area (and not all over the entire house). Let them fill up bottles with different types of macaroni and compare the different sounds that each bottle makes.



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Sensory Activity: Cornmeal

Items to include for this touch sensory activity:

- Cornmeal
- Container or pan for cornmeal
- Measuring cups, scoops, measuring spoons, etc..
- Little plastic animals

Then just let kids play!

