



## Tip Sheets

### Including Children with Sensory Processing Disorder

#### **The Importance of Environment**

Children with SPD can be oversensitive or under responsive to stimuli, or there can be a variable response to sensory stimuli dependent upon the environment and how a child is feeling on a particular day or at a particular time.

- Key indicators of SPD are exhibited in developmental delays, emotional outbursts, avoiding situations or stimuli; or in a very high or very low energy level.
- Common coexisting conditions can be present or SPD can be accompanied by any number of other learning or health-related conditions.
- A practitioner's sensory preferences affect the design of the early childhood environment and can greatly affect the adult's stress or comfort level.
- Environmental strategies for inclusion of children with SPD must be carefully considered to ensure optimal comfort and performance within the early childhood setting. All children will thrive and enjoy a comfortable learning environment that is rich in sensory stimulation and movement.

Being aware of individual sensory needs is very similar to being aware of other individual needs within a group of children. Early childhood practitioners consider issues such as temperament, developmental ability, and the special circumstances including illness or family strife.

Being sensitive and responsive to each child teaches all children that they are valued and that the world is a good place.

Considering sensory preferences and teaming with families and medical or educational specialists will enhance a practitioner's capability to create the most comfortable environment to enhance learning and comfort for children with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD).

#### **Creating a Comfortable Environment**

- Have a consistent schedule and routine each day.
- Use a picture schedule that is a visual map of what comes next.
- Go over the schedule with the children by pointing to each picture.
- Use a large red dot or arrow on the schedule to highlight the current activity.
- Explain a change of classroom routine or staff as soon as possible.
- Warn children about loud noises if possible like a fire drill or vacuum.
- Encourage children to cover ears or offer head sets in order to muffle loud sounds.



- Offer appropriate seating in chairs that allow children to sit with feet touching the floor, keeping knees and hips at a 90-degree angle for eating and fine motor activities. Table height should be at elbow level.
- Offer the children seating options for floor time such as cushions, carpet squares, and cube chairs.
- Provide small squish balls, stress balls, or other soft squeezable items when a child will be expected to sit and be focused for group or story. These can also be used for a child to hold as they are making a transition from one activity to another or from one place to another. It helps decrease the need to touch friends or other objects that may cause difficulty.
- Create small quiet spaces for children to retreat to for calming and quiet activities.
- Place a masking tape border on the floor around the drinking fountain. This will be a visual reminder for each child. Explain that they are not to enter the boxed area unless it is their turn.
- Provide movement activities through climbing toys, mats, marching or pretend. Encourage the children to try to push the wall and see if they can move it, move furniture around the room, shovel sand or snow, sit in rocking chairs, swing, Sit 'n Spin® or swivel chairs or mats.
- Provide touch experiences by providing a variety of textures in books, toys, sensory boxes, tables or bins.
- Consider oral activities by encouraging chewy snacks, crunchy snacks, Thera-tubing or teething toys when appropriate.

A predictable and structured environment can enhance the performance for a child who has Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) and may consequently improve the quality of the environment. Flexibility is also key to successful inclusion of children with SPD. There are times throughout the day when all children may need extra support and assistance.

**For more information on sensory processing disorder and supporting sensory preferences, visit [www.inclusivechildcare.org](http://www.inclusivechildcare.org).**

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