

Sensory Processing

How Does Your Child Respond?

As we navigate the world, we all use our senses to receive input from our surroundings, let our brains process, and then tell us how to react. Generally, we respond with minimal disruption to our routine. However, processing sensory stimuli can be a challenge for some people, either because there is too much or not enough. This can be difficult for **children** since many experiences are still **new**, and they haven't yet developed coping skills and emotional **regulation** to respond appropriately. Educating ourselves on the variations of how Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) can present in our children will **help** us assist them in learning how to manage the way they respond.

Sensory processing the way messages from the senses are received by the nervous system and translated into appropriate **behavioral** and **motor** responses. This includes input from sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch, as well as the proprioceptive and vestibular **senses**. Unfortunately, the brains of **children** with SPD get the information mixed up, and, therefore, reactions are often problematic. These things can manifest in various ways depending on the age, setting, arousal level, and how well the child knows how to self-regulate.

There are two ways that children with SPD react to sensory input.

- 1) **Sensory Seekers** (hyposensitive): These children under-react to sensory input. They are always in motion and seen as "wild." They enjoy rough play, make loud noises, constantly touch objects, and have poor personal space.
- 2) **Sensory Avoiders** (hypersensitive): These children overreact to sensory input. They prefer quieter environments, are particular about clothing and how it feels, are picky eaters, and can be startled by unexpected lights or sounds.

In addition, some children can show a combination of reactions depending on their **temperament** and their situation. But no matter how they react, SPD can be difficult on children and interfere with making friends and learning. For Sensory Seekers, their behaviors can be mistaken for impulsivity or hyperactivity. For Sensory Avoiders, their behaviors can be seen as being overly picky or anxious. Therefore, misdiagnosis for another **disorder** often happens.

To give children the best chance of learning to respond more successfully to sensory input, we must begin by being aware of what processing issues may look like and how best to help each child. The **SKILLZ** Child Development Center instructors are armed with this knowledge and implement it as needed. In addition, the Parent SKILLZ information gives **parents** tips on being **attuned** to their child's sensory responses, including triggers and reactions, providing ideas for **adapting** to these things and **prompting** more appropriate reactions, and suggestions on how to be **patient** through the process. These things, combined, help work on appropriate sensory responses.

As children grow and **develop**, their reactions to sensory input or lack thereof will change. And although SPD is not an official diagnosis used by psychiatrists, it is nonetheless a real challenge. Remembering that there can be various ways SPD presents in each child and situation can be useful in helping them learn to respond appropriately and implement better **coping** skills.