

Engaging the 8 senses

All activities should consider the following:

- The child's sense of safety and your relationship with them
- The child's developmental age and stage
- The child's known history and triggers
- The child's likes and dislikes
- The child's individual needs
- Use of a titrated approach...



Sense	What is it?	Signs of trauma/sensory processing problems	Healing strategies
Visual	Sight	Difficulty with depth perception, visual motor coordination – hand eye coordination Poor visual memory, clumsiness Feeling overwhelmed by too much visual stimulation. Seeking out visual stimulation Sensitive to bright lights	When overwhelmed - limiting visual stimulation – minimal images on walls, low lighting, use of calming colours When sensory seeking - opportunities to engage with picture books, vivid colours and images, movies. Pointing out objects, colours, visual games – I spy for example.
Auditory	Sound	Distracted or fearful of sounds, background environments, distressed by loud or sudden noises, may not like certain voices, Loves excessively loud music, little or no babbling as an infant,	Earplugs or headphones, music, sound therapy. Consider the acoustics in the environment – carpeted floors, soft furnishings and curtains can reduce noise.
Olfactory	Smell	Reacts negatively to, or dislikes smells which do not usually bother, or get noticed, by other people, tells other people (or talks about) how bad or funny they smell, refuses to eat certain foods because of their smell, does not notice odours that others usually complain about	When overwhelmed - reducing smells that are overwhelming – strong perfumes, deodorisers etc. When sensory seeking - Opportunities to smell natural scents - lemons, other foods, eucalyptus leaves for example. Being aware of triggering smells and avoiding those. Helping child to identify calming smells that can be used when child is unsettled.

		fails to notice or ignores unpleasant odours, makes excessive use of smelling when introduced to objects, people, or places	
Gustatory	Taste	Limited food interests Gags often when eating Putting too much food in their mouth Chews incessantly on clothing, pens on the items, drooling, risk of choking Difficulty with sucking, chewing or swallowing	Opportunities for tasting sweet, sour, salty, bitter flavours and different textures. Chewy tubes, supervising child with eating – particularly if the child over fills their mouth or has trouble swallowing. Occupational therapy
Tactile	Touch	Sensitivity to fabrics, tags on clothing, resistance to bathing or messy activities Fear or avoidance of particular tactile objects	Use of play dough, funny glue, feathers, leaves and tree bark, pebbles, play games where you find buried objects, sand and water table, massage, finger painting, cooking.
Vestibular	Part of the inner ear that provides you with a sense of balance and spatial awareness	Imbalance, clumsiness, banging into objects, poor personal space. Avoids playground equipment, fear of heights, doesn't like being tipped upside down. Rocks body, always running or jumping, thrill seeking.	Repeated and consistent boundary setting Occupational therapy Play gym
Proprioceptive	Tells us about movement and body position. 'Receptors' are located within our muscles, joints, ligaments, tendons, and connective tissues that tell us where we are positioned in space.	Clumsiness, difficulty performing movement expected at developmental age. Difficulty conceptualizing and doing what each part of his body needs to do in order to move a certain way or complete a task. Difficulty with holding posture which gives a sense of safety and security Seeks out jumping, bumping, and crashing activities, stomps feet when walking, kicks his/her feet on floor or chair while sitting at desk/table, bites or sucks on fingers and/or frequently cracks his/her knuckles, loves to be tightly wrapped in many or weighted blankets, especially	Tensing, relaxing exercises Pushing, pulling exercises Squeeze balls, weighted blankets Body socks Occupational therapy Play gym Ball games

		at bedtime, prefers clothes (and belts, hoods, shoelaces) to be as tight as possible	
Interoceptive	Helps you understand and feel what's going on inside your body. Body awareness - For example, if we feel thirsty, we get a drink; if we feel full, we stop eating, if we feel anxious – we seek comfort. If we feel that our internal balance is off, we are motivated to act and seek immediate relief from the discomfort caused by the imbalance.	Trouble knowing when they feel hungry, full, hot, cold or thirsty for example. Overeating to the point of vomiting, wearing inappropriate clothing for the weather, poor social skills – understanding go self and others.	Body mapping, mindfulness,

Sources:

Sensory Processing Disorder: www.sensoryprocessingdisorder.com

M Benny: Autism Awareness Centre: <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/>