



SUPER SENSES



Our senses are such a beautiful and important example of how we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Not only do they play a huge role in how we develop and grow, they help us learn, they enable us to engage with the world around us and they help us to keep our cool!

Whether we are conscious of it or not, as adults, we often use our senses to help us to regulate ourselves and ensure we stay in a 'just right' state. Have you ever gone for a walk when you are feeling sleepy, to get some cooling fresh air and help wake yourself up? It works because cool air is alerting. But sometimes sensory information that is alerting can feel too much and can move us from a state of feeling 'just right' or 'regulated' to a feeling of overwhelm - think noisy rooms or finger nails down a chalk board!

The incredible thing about our senses though is that, as well as alerting us, our sensory systems can also calm us - so while a noisy room might cause you distress, soft music might help you to feel calm and relaxed.

Understanding the incredible effect that sensory information can have on all of us is important for anyone seeking to create safe spaces and bring safe approaches, but it's particularly important for those who are journeying with children - whose developing brains are still learning some of those regulating strategies that, as adults, we might naturally rely on. That knowledge and understanding is even more crucial when we consider that it is estimated that 15% of children struggle with sensory processing. Sensory processing is basically, the body's ability to receive sensory information in the nervous system, process it and respond appropriately.

Every second our brain receives an incredible amount of information - far more than we could consciously handle and we filter out a huge amount of it - if we didn't we would feel continually overwhelmed. But for some people with sensory processing difficulty, that filtering process can be really challenging - they will hear the whir of the fridge that others might switch off from. They will notice the flickering light or the buzz of the fly in the window and that bombardment of information can lead to complete overwhelm.

Others get too little information - it's like it comes in drip drip - and that can cause real frustration and lead to sensory seeking behaviours like fidgeting as they seek to fill in the gaps and engage their senses. There are many contributing factors that can cause challenges with sensory processing, including autism, ADHD and trauma.

When we feel overwhelmed, we are not always good at formulating our thoughts and using our words - this is particularly true of children whose 'thinking brain' is still developing. For this reason, children will often let us know that they are not OK through their behaviour. Our job, as adults, is to tune in! Being aware of the important role that the senses play in regulating and dysregulating - in alerting, engaging and soothing - can help us journey well with struggling children and enable them to feel safe.

In this resource we'll begin to explore 7 key sensory systems and consider some examples of how they can bring distress but also how they can engage us and calm us - and we'll signpost to some useful resource ideas. We'll look at senses that are perhaps most well known to us- sight, hearing, smell and touch and taste - as well as exploring a couple that may be less on our radar but that have a big part to play in enabling us to feel safe and 'just right'.

And if you'd like to find out more and explore this further - why not book a 'Wonderful Me! Soothing the Senses' training day for your team?!

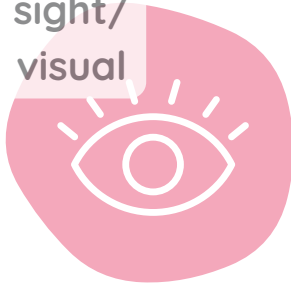
www.wonderfulme.org.uk



SUPER SENSES



sight/
visual



Overwhelming

Flickering lights, bright lights, busy wall displays

Engaging

Clear visuals such as Visual Timetables

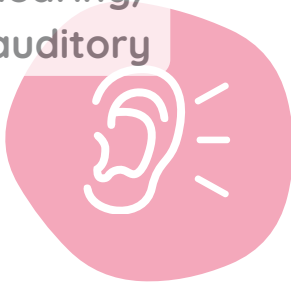
Calming

warm, soft lights - slow and rhythmic moving objects

Resource Ideas

Fairly lights, Bubble Tubes, Visual Timetables

hearing/
auditory



Overwhelming

loud, sudden bangs, whirring appliances, buzzing lights

Engaging

Up beat music

Calming

Soft music, White noise

Resource Ideas

Binaural beats (search YouTube)

smell/
olfactory



Overwhelming

Strong smells - Is your venue near a kitchen?

Engaging

Peppermint, citrus and rosemary fragrances

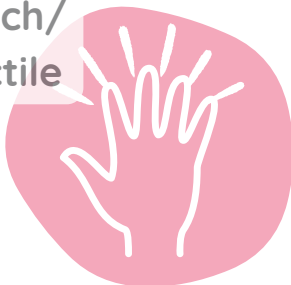
Calming

Lavender

Resource Ideas

Essential oil diffusers, scented playdough

touch/
tactile



Overwhelming

Uncomfortable clothing, scratchy labels, soft touch

Engaging

Messy play, different textures to choose, cold objects

Calming

Warm objects, deep pressure

Resource Ideas

Ice cubes, hot water bottles, weighted lap toys, sand, water beads, play dough

taste/
gustatory



We are going to widen our thinking here to the mouth area - one of the most powerful tools we use to help regulate ourselves.

Overwhelming

Strong flavours

Soothing

Things to crunch - breadsticks, apple slices, ice pops

Things to chew - chewy sweets, chewing gum, chew fidgets

Things to suck - lollypop, boiled sweets, thick milkshakes

Things to blow - pingpong ball and a straw



SUPER SENSES



vestibular balance



Put simply, our vestibular sense is to do with balance and movement. Children with low or high sensitivity to vestibular input may struggle with poor coordination and spatial awareness. Sensory avoidant behaviours might include being fearful of activities such as climbing frames and swings, while sensory seeking might be seen in a constant need for movement such as lots of spinning, jumping or rocking.

Support

While spinning can be an indicator that a child is seeking vestibular input, rocking and up and down motion are more soothing movements to help regulate a child. Try star jumps, gentle rocking on a swing, jumping on a mini trampoline or bouncing on a gym ball.

Resources

wobble cushion, gym ball, trampette

proprioception pressure/where our limbs are in space



Our sense of proprioception helps us in our awareness of our bodies and body position in movement. It's how we are able to do actions such as touch our nose without looking and it helps us to do activities such as walk up steps. It also helps us to know how hard we need to press or pull when we pick something up or touch something. Children with low or high sensitivity to proprioceptive input may struggle with their coordination and motor skills and may appear clumsy or crash into others as they run around. Rough and tumble behaviour may be a sign that a child needs proprioceptive input.

Support

Deep pressure can be very soothing for those who are seeking proprioceptive input - try hand squeezes, weighted blankets or lap toys or wall or chair push ups. Pushing, pulling or carrying actions often involve deep pressure - asking a child to help you move tables or carry books can be a great way of enabling them to gain some helpful proprioceptive input.

Resources

playdough, weighted blanket / weighted lap toy