



Generally, people are familiar with only five senses: vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. However, there are also two less commonly discussed senses. These are proprioception, or an awareness of one's own body parts, and the vestibular sense, which involves balance, movement, and coordination (1). Children with sensory processing issues may have abnormal responses to any of these senses.

Although the term “sensory processing issues” is often exclusively associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), many people do not realize that both sensory processing issues and other symptoms that characterize ASD can be caused by [hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy \(HIE\)](#). Because HIE often leads to [cerebral palsy \(CP\)](#), it is also common for children with CP to have sensory processing issues.



### Types and signs of sensory processing issues

There are two main types of sensory processing issues: hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity.

Children who are hypersensitive become easily overwhelmed by sensory stimulation and may (1):



- Be bothered by loud noises, bright lights, scratchy or form-fitting clothing, or physical contact (especially unexpected touch)
- Have a tendency to become distracted by things others barely notice
- Struggle to understand the position of their bodies in relation to other objects or people
- Move clumsily and bump into things
- Fail to understand the amount of force they're applying (e.g. when trying to erase something, they may unintentionally rip the paper)

Hypersensitivity often leads to sensory avoiding, or avoiding sensory input because it overwhelms them (2).

Children who are hyposensitive tend to crave more stimulation, and may (1):

- Frequently touch objects and other people (they may not understand personal space)
- Be unable to sit still, and enjoy jumping, spinning, and crashing into things
- Enjoy squeezing sensations like strong hugs
- Have a very high pain tolerance
- Have trouble predicting their own strength

Hyposensitivity often leads to sensory seeking, or seeking out sensory stimulation (2).

It is important to note that hyper- and hyposensitivity are not mutually exclusive; many children with sensory processing issues experience both.

### Management of sensory processing issues

Many children with sensory processing issues participate in [occupational therapy](#), which often includes [sensory integration therapy](#) (2). This type of therapy attempts to introduce repetitive sensory stimulation to help the brain learn to respond to it in a more organized way. Another approach is sensory dieting, when the occupational therapist creates a carefully planned schedule of sensory activities to help the child meet their sensory needs. These treatments



can help children avoid becoming overwhelmed by sensory stimulation, and better cope with distressing situations. It may also help children focus and improve certain daily skills.

Sensory processing issues alone are technically not covered by the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), which is a federal law that mandates children with disabilities receive [special education](#) services at school. However, sensory processing issues are often associated with other disabilities that *do* qualify; if your child shows signs of sensory processing issues, it may be wise to request a school evaluation. Children who qualify for special education may receive occupational therapy as part of their [individualized education programs \(IEPs\)](#). They may also be eligible for free occupational therapy with a Section 504 plan: the eligibility requirements for this are not as restrictive. In addition to occupational therapy, children with IEPs or Section 504 plans may receive certain accommodations and modifications at school to help maximize their learning potential.

### Conclusion

Sensory processing issues can pose a number of challenges to affected children and their families. Management may be especially difficult when sensory problems co-occur with other conditions or disorders. However, with the right resources, children with sensory processing issues can thrive.

### Related Reading

- [New Research Links Birth Complications \(Including HIE\) to Increased Autism Risk of Up to 44%](#)
- [Occupational Therapy](#)
- [Sensory Integration Therapy](#)
- [Tips for Helping Children with Sensory Processing Issues Get Dressed](#)

### Sources

Sensory Processing FAQ. (n.d.). Retrieved June 24, 2019, from



<https://childmind.org/article/sensory-processing-faq/>

Team, U. (n.d.). Understanding Sensory Processing Issues. Retrieved June 24, 2019, from <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/sensory-processing-issues/understanding-sensory-processing-issues>