

Does Your Child Have A Sensory Problem?

Jennifer and her mom have a hard time every morning, because it is a chore to get her to eat a good breakfast. The texture of many foods bothers this little girl. The seams in Jennifer's socks bug her, and the tags in her clothes drive her crazy. Each time her mom brushes her hair, Jennifer cries, because it hurts her head. By the time Jennifer goes to school, Mom feels like crying herself. Jennifer is overly sensitive to things that touch her. She has a sensory integration problem.

Joey's teacher complains, because he runs into other kids and crashes into things. He doodles on his arms, talks too loudly and is constantly rocking in his seat. Joey is under-stimulated by his senses. Joey, too, has a sensory integration problem. He is doing what he can to give his body information by going overboard with movement, touch and sound.

Sensory integration means that the brain obtains and uses information from the senses (touch, taste, smell, sound, sight) and muscle movements. Sensory information allows a child to respond appropriately. For example, the brain figures out from the sense of sight how high one must step to climb stairs. It then signals the correct muscles and joints to move the body gracefully up the stairs.

Sensory integration disorder means that the brain receives too much or too little information from one or more of the senses or from the muscles; misunderstands what the senses are telling it; and/or cannot plan and follow through with the appropriate signals for an activity. The result is that a child responds in an unusual manner such as refusing to eat crunchy foods.

When a child has a sensory integration dysfunction, the **brain cannot effectively**

- **Regulate sensory information** which results in: **(1)** oversensitivity to touch or movement (feeling bombarded by stimulation, which leads to avoidance of some experiences), **(2)** under-responsiveness to touch or movement (not feeling sensations well, which leads to seeking intense sensory experiences).
- **Interpret or understand incoming sensory information, organize it, and take a desired action.** These problems can show up as such things as clumsiness, disorganization, inattention, procrastination and frustration.

Auditory training with modified music can benefit children with a sensory integration disorder. Modified music frequencies stimulate the **auditory system** in the ears to analyze sound more accurately, tune out background noise and regulate the ears' sensitivity to sound. The **vestibular system** in the ears improves in its control of muscle movement and coordination, which includes eye tracking, and its ability to regulate sensitivity to touch. The **brain** is stimulated by the altered music to understand and integrate (combine) the messages from the senses of sight, sound, touch and movement and to use these messages to take action.

Parents and teachers observe improvements in children's attention, speech, reading, writing, math, ability to communicate, motor coordination, eye contact, memory, mood, maturity, and friendships as a result of music-based auditory training.

If your child has sensory problems, look into auditory training with modified music. There are programs, which can be done in a professional office or in one's home. Tests and questionnaires along with an interview will allow a trained clinician to determine whether this type of program may benefit your child.

Diane Daniels, MA, EdS, Director of Center of Listening & Learning, has 24 years experience as a teacher, school counselor and school psychologist. She offers auditory training programs at her center in Gainesville, FL, and for home use. For a free consultation, call 352-379-1981.