

Welcome to Issue 2 of the SEND Newsletter

The focus for this newsletter is sensory needs.

"We use our sensory systems to understand the world around us. We process information through our senses and decide on how to respond to the things we are experiencing. Sensory systems that absorb information about the world around us are:

- **Sight** - visual patterns, certain colours or shapes, moving or spinning objects, and bright objects or light
- **Taste (gustatory)** - specific tastes (like spicy, sour, bitter, or minty) and textures (like crunchy, chewy, or mushy), chewing or sucking on non-food objects (like shirt sleeves or collars).
- **Smell (olfactory)** - specific smells. Some people like to smell everything, while others are able to detect — and object to — smells that other people don't notice.
- **Hearing (auditory)** - loud or unexpected sounds like fire alarms or blenders, singing, repetitive or specific types of noises (like finger snapping or clapping).
- **Touch (tactile)** - touch from other people, touching and fiddling with objects, tight or soft clothing, and certain textures or surfaces.
- **Proprioception** - using our muscles to understand where our body is in space eg using movement, position and balance
- **Vestibular** - the sense of how the body moves against gravity .

The last three sensory systems - touch, proprioception and vestibular - help us to feel in tune with our world and to feel grounded as a person.

Learning how to process sensory-based information as it is received can be challenging for all of us at times, but more challenging for a child with a learning disability. We have to filter out and identify the things that are important and the things to ignore. For instance, if we hear our name being called, we respond to this, even though there may be other sounds in the room that could distract us. Some children have difficulty with this filtering process."

Everyone has their own unique sensory profiles and we use this to interpret the world around us. For example, babies often experience the world through putting things in their mouths. As we get older, we experience the world through our other senses and we respond in different ways. We get better at processing the world around us and develop strategies to cope with things we find challenging.

However, for people with a Sensory Processing Need, this can be even more difficult. Some people find that they under-react to sensory input, whilst others over-react and become overwhelmed.

There are many things that we can do in school to support your child once we have identified which areas are causing concern.

These can include: movement breaks, wobble cushions, sensory circuits.

You can also address some of their needs at home too.



Whilst many of these behaviours are common, they can, for some people, become persistent and then they can impact on quality of life and in children, their ability to learn.

Have a look at the online links for further information:

<https://www.camhsnorthderbyshire.nhs.uk/learning-disabilities-sensory-processing>

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/sensory-seeking-and-sensory-avoiding-what-you-need-to-know>

<https://www.learninglinks.org.au/resources/understanding-sensory-needs/>

If you are concerned about your child, please speak to their class teacher in the first instance, as they will see them on a daily basis.

If these general strategies do not help, it is possible for school to arrange an Occupational Therapy assessment for further information. Class teachers will discuss this with the SENCo. Please remember that there is a waiting list for an assessment.

In some cases, Sensory Processing Needs may be part of another condition such as Autism Spectrum Condition. This needs to be diagnosed by a paediatrician. The school can also talk with you about this and complete a referral with you.

Information gathered from CAMHS North Derbyshire and Understood websites

Equipment commonly used in school to support sensory needs:

Wobble cushions



Peanut ball



Writing slopes



Fidget toys



Lap belts



Ear defenders



Chew aids



Weighted shoulder pads



Therabands for chairs



Weighted blankets



Mini trampolines



All of this equipment can also be used at home should you need it.

Weighted blankets are fantastic for helping children to get to sleep, although please ensure you follow guidance on how much the blanket should weigh in relation to your child's weight, and also only use for the recommended time.

Ear defenders can be particularly useful if your child is sensitive to loud noises in busy areas.

Sensory circuits are very helpful for regulating children. More information on how to set up sensory circuits in your home is below. It is important to follow the three different stages: alerting; organising; calming. However, depending on your child's need at the time, you may wish to spend longer on the calming stage and less on the alerting.

Circuits can be set up in the home or garden, or even the park. Use the equipment like trampolines, swings, roundabouts etc.

This leaflet is very helpful at explaining each stage.

<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/media/caua/cf3c/sensory-motor-circuits.pdf>

What are sensory circuits?

A sensory circuit is a short plan of physical activities that enables children to obtain the optimal level of alertness. It should last no more than 15 minutes and be divided into three sections: alerting; organising; and calming.

Alerting (5 minutes) – prepares the brain for learning by providing vestibular and proprioceptive stimulation. Activities for this section include: bouncing 10 times on a trampoline or space hopper; spinning a hoop; bunny hops; star jumps; skipping; walking on cans; rolling on a peanut or exercise ball.

Organising (5 minutes) – motor sensory processing, balance and timing. Activities for this section include: balancing on a beam or along a line on the floor; climbing bars; throwing bean bags into a target; rolling on a peanut ball to organise objects just out of reach; wobble boards; blowing bubbles; Simon Says activities.

Calming (5 minutes) – this is important to ensure your child is ready for the day ahead. Activities for this section include: having a gym or peanut ball rolled over their back (whilst laying on a mat); lying under weighted blanket; press ups against a wall.