

Behavioral Manifestations of Sensory Processing Problems

Tactile

Defensiveness/Hyper-responsiveness

- Avoidance of use of hands; especially palms coming into contact with the surface (i.e. carpet)
- Decreased grasp strength
- Momentary grasp of toys and then quick release
- Approach-avoidance movements of hands
- Lack of accommodation or hand shaping around toy
- Strong avoidance response in hands
- Lack of exploration of the environment with the hands and feet
- Irritation to weight bearing on feet when shoes or socks are off
- Toe walking
- Lack of hand to mouth play; increased irritability with finger feeding
- Excessively ticklish; irritated when touched (may even become frightened or irritated when approached)
- Increased irritability during bathing, dressing or changing routines
- Use of middle finger for pincer (when stability not an issue)
- Strong dislike of shoes and socks or prefers to always wear shoes and cries when you remove shoes and socks
- Orally defensive to certain textures, temperatures of food

Hypo-responsive/Registration/Shut down

- Unaware of cuts or bruises or pain
- Head banging, self-biting
- Repetitive behaviors
- Puts everything in mouth

Vestibular

- Fearful of movement in space
- Avoids changing head position in relation to gravity
- Avoids leaving contact with ground
- Becomes easily motion sickness
- Spins for long periods without dizziness
- Lacks fear or judgment about consequences of moving in space (gravitational disregard)
- May seek movement experiences

Taste & Smell

- Sensitive to environmental smells, house odors, restaurant odors
- Eats only one type of food, usually bland
- Acts as though all foods taste the same
- Loves spicy, hot food
- Sour foods such as lemon or pickle
- Likes noxious smells such as smoke, bus fumes, or gasoline

Visual

- Excessive blinking
- Gaze aversion
- Fleeting gaze, hyper-vigilance
- Cannot tolerate sunlight or bright lights
- Lack of focus
- Dull eyes, lack of eye sparkle
- Lack of conscious awareness of objects in the environment

Auditory

- Cries at loud noise, i.e. vacuum, smoke detector, school bell, fire alarm
- Distracted by sound
- Constant noise making by child, incessant talking
- Distracted by white noise, i.e. lights, refrigerator, fans
- Lack of orienting to sound
- Delayed response to sounds

Other Related Behaviors

- Intense-easily frustrated
- Hyper-reactive
- Distractibility
- Sleeping difficulties, no regular pattern
- Strong need for routine
- Fright, Flight, Fight behaviors
- Motoric, increased extension (avoidance), decreased flexion (approach)
- Arrhythmic breathing
- High pitched voice

*A child may be hyper-reactive to some stimuli while being hypo-responsive to others, as well as vary his-her reaction to the same stimuli day to day, hour to hour.