

ARCOS

The Association for Rehabilitation of
Communication and Oral Skills

SENSORY PROCESSING

What is sensory processing?

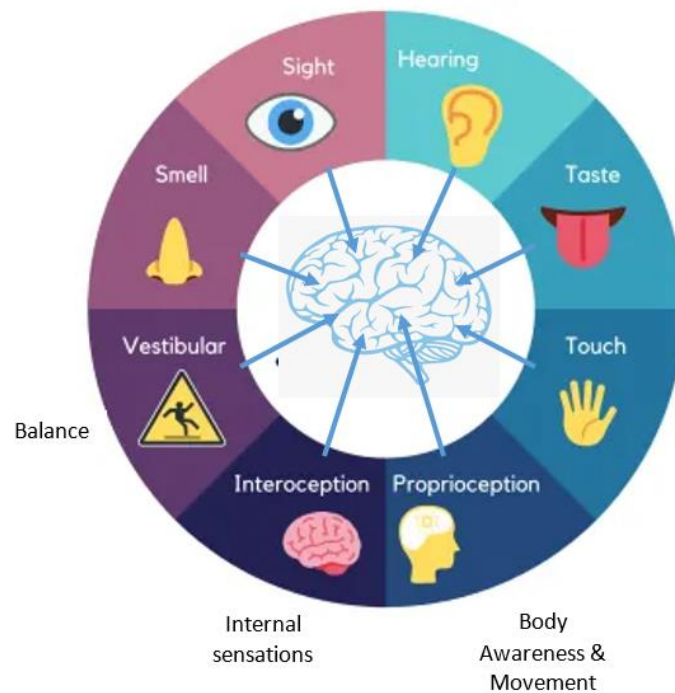
Every second of every day we make decisions about how we feel and what we do. We base these decisions on our understanding of what is happening around us and how we are feeling, both emotionally and physically.

We get this information from our senses, what we can see, hear, feel, smell, and taste, alongside feedback we get from our bodies about movement, balance, emotions, and other physical sensations, such as hunger and thirst.

Our senses continually send all this information to our brains where the information is organised and interpreted to then be used to inform our decisions about what we do and how we act. This neurological process is **sensory processing**.

Our senses

We are all familiar with our sense of taste, smell, touch, hearing, and sight. We tend to be less familiar with our sense of body position, balance, and internal bodily sensations. In actual fact we have eight recognised sensory systems:



At any one time our brain is receiving information from all eight of our sensory systems. It then interprets and sorts this information and develops an action plan based on our understanding of this information. Thankfully we don't have to consciously think about this process, it takes place automatically. However, sometimes it does not always work effectively.

Sensory processing assessments

If one or more of our sensory systems does not work efficiently, it becomes more difficult to make sense of the world we live in.

When our ability to process sensory information works well, we are able to respond appropriately to the world around and within us. We will avoid stepping in the puddle, answer the phone when we hear it ringing (or not!), put a jumper on when we are cold, and get ourselves a drink when we are thirsty.

For some people sensory processing does not happen smoothly and efficiently, and for these individuals they do not always respond appropriately to everyday sensations. They may be unable to coordinate their bodies in time to avoid the puddle, unable to tolerate the sound of the phone ringing (or even be unaware that a phone is ringing), not register the sensation of feeling cold, or need frequent reminders to drink regularly as they have no awareness when they feel thirsty.

If you are an individual who struggles with day to day activities but can't quite put your finger on why, you may benefit from an assessment of your sensory processing skills. If you have a child who is not quite reaching developmental milestones as you would expect, or has an unusual reaction to everyday stimuli, they may benefit from a sensory processing assessment.

Differences in the way that sensations are processed commonly occur alongside neurodivergent diagnoses, e.g. Autistic Spectrum Conditions, Dyspraxia, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Anyone who has an unusual response to everyday sensations may benefit from a sensory processing assessment to better understand themselves and their behaviour.

Common signs that a sensory processing assessment would be helpful

- Over reaction or difficulty tolerating noise, touch or visual sensations
- Under reaction or failure to respond to noise, touch or visual sensations
- Increased awareness of and difficulty tolerating background noises such as fluorescent lighting, fridge's whirring, clocks ticking
- Difficulty coping with self-care activities such as dressing, washing, brushing hair or teeth
- Always on the go, difficulty sitting still, seeks unusual amounts of movement throughout the day
- Avoids movement based activities, feels dizzy or unsafe when feet leave the ground
- Appears withdrawn, day dreaming, difficulty to motivate and 'get going'
- Difficulty with motor skills. Delay reaching developmental milestones, appears clumsy and accident prone
- Poor handwriting, difficulty with buttons and zips
- Use too much force when interacting with people or objects. This can result in frequently breaking items due to using too much force, or dropping item because of not using enough force to hold securely
- Difficulty settling to sleep, disrupted sleep patterns

- Extreme emotional response, can have difficulty calming after being upset
- Difficulty adjusting to change e.g. change in environment, routine or person

If you are in any doubt, please get in touch to discuss your needs. All enquiries are entitled to a free, no obligation chat with one of our therapists.

What happens in a sensory assessment?

Our occupational therapist has a wide range of experience working with individuals of all ages who have a sensory processing difficulty, and their families and carers. We take a detailed history of an individual's developmental history and current lifestyle, make informal observations of individuals in their typical environments, and ask them to complete a self-reporting questionnaire.

This information is then used to build an understanding of how each of the eight sensory systems are functioning.

Sometimes only one appointment is necessary (lasting around 1-2 hours) to gather this information. This is largely dependent on individual needs and the extent of the difficulties they are experiencing on a daily basis. This will be discussed and agreed at the point of referral.

Therapy packages

SENSORY PROCESSING	
<p>Standard sensory processing assessment</p> <p>Included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face appointment of 1-2 hours • Summary report including recommendations • Telephone follow up to discuss findings 	£495
<p>Comprehensive sensory processing assessment <i>(recommended where there are significant daily challenges inhibiting education or work performance, or for the purposes of an Education and Health Care Plan)</i></p> <p>Included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face appointment to gather information (1-2 hours) • Observation of individual in education or work environment (1-2 hours) • Comprehensive report including recommendations • Face to face follow up to discuss recommendations (1-2 hours) • Liaison with education and employment agencies (as needed) 	£950
EDUCATION TRAINING	
<p>Introduction to sensory processing in the classroom (2 hours) <i>For education providers seeking to understand how sensory processing impacts on learning within the classroom.</i></p> <p>The training will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is sensory processing? • How does sensory processing influence the development of motor skills, including handwriting? • How does sensory processing impact on attention and concentration? 	£395 (plus travel costs)
<p>Addressing sensory processing within the classroom (2 hours) <i>For education providers that have completed the Introduction to Sensory Processing course</i></p> <p>The training will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic strategies to support sensory regulation within the classroom. • Environmental considerations to support sensory processing. • Common profiles of children with sensory processing difficulties. 	£395 (plus travel costs)
<p><i>Note: both the above courses can be purchased together for the discounted price of £750 (plus travel costs)</i></p>	

Kate Badger

Kate is an OT and dyspraxia assessment specialist at ARCOS.

Since qualifying with an honours degree in Occupational Therapy in 1998, Kate spent many years working in the NHS gaining experience in a variety of clinical areas, including acute orthopaedics and medicine, admission prevention and facilitated discharge, elderly care, community learning disabilities, paediatrics, autism assessment service, and learning disability intensive support service.

She has also worked for an independent charity offering mentoring and support into mainstream schools to deal with the sensory needs and specialist learning needs of children in mainstream education. More recently Kate provided support for children and young adults with trauma histories, specialist learning needs, and learning disabilities at a specialist college.

Kate has a special interest in working with children, young people, and adults who experience sensory processing difficulties. Differences in sensory processing are often features of neurodiverse diagnoses, such as Autistic spectrum conditions, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and dyspraxia.

Get in touch

If you're interested in finding out more about sensory processing and the support ARCOS can provide, get in touch and a trained therapist will discuss your requirements.

Call us on 01684 576795

Email us at admin@arcos.org.uk

ARCOS | Never say never