

## Tips for Understanding Children's Sensory Needs

**The Auditory System:** The auditory sense can best be described by how we receive and process the information from the sensory organs inside our ears. When we hear a sound, it travels to our brains to be analyzed so we can generate a response" (Abraham, 2015, p.155). Examples of any person's auditory sense being stimulated could include hearing a door creaking, a loud whooshing sound of a fan, a flushing toilet, footsteps, even the sound of someone giving you verbal directions" (Abraham, 2015, p.155).

### Auditory Seeking Behaviors



- Puts musical instruments or noisy toys right next to ears
- Makes loud noises in quiet settings
- Seems to enjoy loud noises
- Craves common noises such as air conditioner, a fan, or water running
- Seems to be calmed by noises or certain music
- Prefers loud music
- Seems to always use an "outside voice"

Image retrieved from <https://www.nifamily.com/noisy-toys/>.

### Auditory Avoiding Behaviors



- Cries, screams or becomes angry at sudden noises
- Has strong emotions or seems to become dysregulated upon hearing loud sounds
- Covers ears or hides in social situations
- Avoids everyday noises such as, toilets flushing or water flowing
- Seems bothered by high-pitched noises created by whistles, violins, and/or chalk

Image retrieved from <https://www.freepik.com/free-photos-vectors/kid-ear-pain/5>.

## Quick & Simple Auditory Activities



- Rhymes and songs, musical instruments
- Earplugs or noise canceling headphones
- Calming music, Quiet room or space to retreat
- Matching sound games or activities that connect movement with sounds

Image retrieved from <https://usa.banzworld.com>.

## Overview of Oral Sensory & Olfactory Processing Systems

**The Oral Sensory & Olfactory System (Sense of Smell and Taste):** The olfactory sense can best be described by how positively or negatively we receive the odors around us in our brains. Our olfactory systems can implement sensory discrimination between many different odors, and help us recognize when odors are dangerous, strong, welcoming, or disgusting. Similarly, the oral sensory system is characteristic of our sense of taste and need to engage in self-soothing experiences through the use of our mouth. (Abraham, 2015, p.159).

### Oral Sensory & Olfactory Seeking Behaviors



- Child seems to be constantly biting, chewing on, or mouthing toys, clothing, fingers.
- Child bites others
- Child constantly makes mouth noises such as clicking, buzzing, and/or humming
- Child has tendency to overstuff their mouth with food at mealtimes

- Child craves certain foods and prefers spicy or hot foods
- Child demonstrates constant movements of the lips, tongue such as moving tongue, tapping teeth, and/or rubbing lips.
- Seeks out specific smells regardless of safety whether they be food smells or non-food.
- Frequently smells non-food objects

Image Retrieved from <https://www.whattoexpect.com/toddler/behavior/biting.aspx>.

### Oral Sensory & Olfactory Avoiding Behaviors



- Child is an extremely picky eater
- Avoids certain textures of foods ( such as, mushy)
- Child demonstrates extreme resistance to oral sensory experiences such as, brushing their teeth
- Child drools often
- Child refuses to use utensils to eat
- Child easily chokes or gags while brushing their teeth or eating. Child has difficulty drinking from a cup or straw

-Child displays extreme aversions to specific smells whether they be food or non-food

Image retrieved from <https://www.mottchildren.org/posts/your-child/picky-eaters>.

## Quick & Simple Oral Sensory & Olfactory Activities



- Blow bubbles, whistles, and other instruments
- Play taste testing or guess the smell games
- Try one new food before dinner
- Make an edible necklace
- Drink from water bottle with a bite valve
- Eat applesauce through a straw
- Use alternative chewy toys
- Include scented fidget toys into your classroom or child's toy rotation
- Scented rice sensory activity
- Sweet and sour food sorting activity
- Scented playdough activity (gingerbread playdough is great for holiday themed activity)
- Scented finger painting activity

Image retrieved from <https://artfulparent.com/fruit-necklace-fun-snack-for-kids/>.

## Overview of the Proprioceptive System

**The Proprioceptive System (Sense of Our Own Body Position):** This sensory processing system can best be described by the way our muscles and joints send signals to our brains to give information about our bodies' positioning and movement. This sense allows us to control the amount of force we use to direct our bodily movements. (Abraham, 2015, p.159).

### Proprioceptive Seeking Behaviors



- Child colours or writes with heavy amounts of pressure
- Child pushes others
- Child plays aggressively with their peers
- Child falls or crashes on the floor constantly
- Child uses heavy force to complete daily tasks
- Child cannot control the force of their movements
- Child stomps or walks loudly
- Child runs into walls, objects or people
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## Proprioceptive Avoiding Behaviors



- Child colours or writes with not enough pressure
- Child appears tired or sluggish by slumping or leaning on furniture
- Child prefers to sit still
- Child avoids active activities, such as running, climbing
- Avoids touch from others
- Seeks familiar activities
- Demonstrates difficulty using stairs

Image retrieved from <https://www.evidencebasedmentoring.org/the-association-between-sleep-duration-and-childhood-flourishing-in-school-age-children/>.

## Quick & Simple Proprioceptive Activities



- Trampolines
- Wall pushups
- Yoga stretches
- Playdough
- Gardening
- Bear hugs (if child consents hugging child tightly with arms wrapped around child)
- Animal walks (Try listening to “Walking Through the Jungle”, it’s a fun and interactive movement song)
- Carrying or lifting toy boxes on to shelves

Image retrieved from: <https://www.childrensbedshop.co.uk/blog/how-to-teach-your-children-to-keep-a-tidy-room/>.

## Overview of Tactile Sensory Processing System

**The Tactile System (Sense of Touch):** This sensory processing system can best be described by how we interpret the information we receive from the receptors in our skin. When we experience holding an object our nervous system receives this information and helps us differentiate pressure, temperature, texture, traction, and other tactile qualities of the object. (Abraham, 2015, p.156).

## Tactile Seeking Behaviors



- Child needs to touch everything and everyone, such as needing hugs constantly, fidgeting with objects, seeking out textures and touch experiences
- Child always prefers messy play activities
- Child demonstrates a high tolerance for pain

- Child craves vibrations
- Child plays aggressively with peers, such as, hitting, pushing, and pinching
- Child constantly mouths objects and prefers tight clothing

Image retrieved from [https://www.freepik.com/premium-photo/colorful-hands-fingers-kid-finger-painting-art-work-concept-back-school\\_24948594.htm](https://www.freepik.com/premium-photo/colorful-hands-fingers-kid-finger-painting-art-work-concept-back-school_24948594.htm).

### Tactile Avoiding Behaviors



- Child avoids messy play activities, certain textures and clothing
- Child demonstrates distress with specific clothing such as tight pants, seams in socks, and new textures
- Child is extremely ticklish
- Child dislikes having their hands and/or face washed
- Child walks only on toes
- Child does not like hairbrushing, washing or drying
- Child acts fearful of large crowds

-Child acts anxious or over excited over light touch

Image Retrieved from <https://integrativepediatric.wordpress.com/2010/07/22/toe-walking-interventions/>.

### Quick & Simple Tactile-Based Activities



- Provide children who demonstrate tactile seeking behaviors with tight squeezes, deep pressure massages, hand squeezes
- Incorporate the use of a squish box by being surrounded by pillows
- Weighted activities such as, vests, blankets, bean bag toss activity
- Sensory activities incorporating dried beans, rice, flour, ect

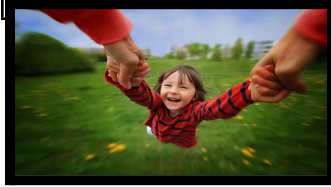
- Sensory dough activities incorporating cloud dough, playdough, moon sand
- Finger painting activities
- Establish and maintain a cozy corner with access to quiet activities and soft textures

Image Retrieved from <https://www.kindercare.com/content-hub/articles/2020/may/home-sensory-spaces-kids>.

## Overview of the Visual Sensory Processing System

**The Visual System (Sense of Vision):** This sensory processing system can best be described by how we receive and process sensory information through our eyes. For example, determining the shade of colour we want to wear as our shirt for the day, and tracking the teacher as they walk around the classroom, both use the visual cortex in our brain. This area of our brain perceives details like “colour, three-dimensional depth perception, and the location of an object in space” (Abraham, 2015, p.156).

### Visual Seeking Behaviors



- Child holds materials up close to their eyes often
- Child may stare at objects in motion often
- Child demonstrates challenges in regulating attention on stationary objects
- Child seeks visual stimulation such as spinning, rocking back and forth, creating patterns, exploring fans and fences

- Child seems unaware of new people in an environment
- Child moves or shakes their head during written or fine motor activities
- Child stares at bright lights, flickers, or direct sunlight often for longer periods of time

Image Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/curious-kids-when-i-stop-spinning-why-do-i-feel-dizzy-and-the-world-looks-like-its-tilting-154559>.

### Visual Avoiding Behaviors



Avoiding eye contact

- Child avoids bright lights, covers eyes frequently, observed to be squinting often
- Child withdraws from participating in group movement activities
- Child acts scared towards moving objects
- Child seems unaware of contrasting tones/colours
- Child frequently rubs eyes, and avoids direct eye contact
- Clumsy due to being unaware of objects while walking

Image Retrieved from [https://www.wellchildlens.com/video\\_room/early\\_warning\\_signs\\_results/see-the-signs/early%20warning%20signs/lack%20of%20eye%20contact](https://www.wellchildlens.com/video_room/early_warning_signs_results/see-the-signs/early%20warning%20signs/lack%20of%20eye%20contact).

## Quick & Simple Visual Activities



- Incorporate the use of visual schedules
- Establish and maintain sensory retreats or cozy corners, use warmer, less bright lighting
- Light table activities, sensory bottles
- Activities involving drawing, painting, gluing
- Alphabet I Spy game

## Quick & Simple Visual Activities (continued)

- Activities involving drawing, painting, gluing
- Alphabet I Spy game
- Eye breaks
- Marble maze toy and/or labyrinths
- Colour matching games
- Bean bag toss activity
- Guesstimation jars

Image Retrieved from <https://lifeovercs.com/free-printable-visual-schedule-for-kids/>.