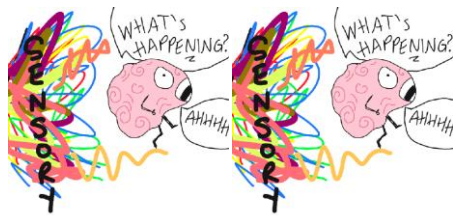




## How our bodies/brains process information contributes to BIG emotions....



### Sensory Processing – how does this affect my child, adolescent or even me?

#### What is **Sensory processing**?

It's the way our body and brain receives, organises and understands sensory input (information from within the body and the physical environment) and turns them into responses. How we receive sensory input through sights, sounds, touch, tastes, smell and movement is a complex process.

Sensory processing signals that don't get organised into appropriate responses can hinder a child's daily routines. As a result, their activities are disrupted

Problems/difficulties with sensory processing can impact on learning, social relationships, behavioural responses, self-esteem and daily skills. Children with sensory processing disorders may demonstrate difficulties processing information through any of their sensory systems.

#### OTs can help with sensory processing by developing skills in:

**Self regulation:** the mediation process between impulse and action to meet needs and to maintain a sense of control in the environment.

#### Key Points:

- Anxiety, anger and big emotions can be due to Sensory processing difficulties
- It affects skills of children and young people
- Sensory processing is complex and needs support to identify and manage
- If you are concerned, OTs are trained to assess and manage these difficulties

**Sensory Modulation:** one of the essential elements to how we organise our sensory information. Sensory modulation is part of the human condition and is an ongoing process that we often pay little attention to. We use different strategies to self-organise and participate in meaningful life activities. For example, the activities we use to wake up and prepare for the day typically differ from those we use to prepare for going to sleep at night. For a child or young person at school, it is critical that they can modulate their sensory input in their environment to stay alert and awake when learning.

#### Does your child or young person have these difficulties?

**Overly sensitive to touch, movement, sights, smells, tastes and sounds.**

This may be manifested in behaviours such as irritability or withdrawal when touched, avoidance of certain textures of



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clothes or food, distractibility, fearful reactions to ordinary movements (swinging, spinning). Young people can have large emotional responses (such as anxiety and anger).

### **Under-responsive to sensory stimulation**

An under-responsive child may seek out sensory experiences, such as whirling or crashing into people and objects. Some children change between extremes of over- and under – responsiveness. Some young people can be very impulsive when they are over stimulated.

### **Activity level that is unusually high or low**

A child or young person may be constantly on the move, may be slow to warm-up or may fatigue easily.

### **Coordination problems**

This can be seen in gross and fine motor activities. Some children may have unusually poor balance, while others have great difficulty learning to do a new task that requires motor coordination.

### **Delays in speech, language, motor skills, or academic achievement**

This may be evident in a pre-schooler along with other signs of poor sensory processing. In a school-aged child, there may be problems in some academic areas despite normal intelligence.

### **Poor organisation of behaviour**

A child may be impulsive or distractible and show a lack of planning in approach to tasks. Some children have difficulty adjusting to new situations. Others may react with frustration, aggression, or withdrawal when they encounter failure.

### **Poor self-concept**

A child or young person with sensory processing difficulties may notice that they don't feel quite right. A bright child may know that some tasks are more difficult than others but may not know why. This child can often present as bored, lazy or unmotivated. When a problem is difficult to understand, parents and children may blame themselves. Family tension, poor self-concept and a general feeling of hopelessness may prevail.

### **What should I do if I am worried about this?**

We have many ways to support children, young people, adults and families to understand your sensory processing including identifying your neurological threshold for responding to sensory input and what to do to make interaction in situation that are either under or over stimulating more manageable.

OT's can help with practical strategies to assist children and young people experiencing sensory processing difficulties and lessen the impact on mental well being and behaviours. If you would like further information, please contact Dr Carina Capra at [carina@thoughtfulhealth.com.au](mailto:carina@thoughtfulhealth.com.au)

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