

Social emotional learning: Self-awareness, self-regulation and sensory processing challenges

Sensory processing refers to the way in which the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into appropriate responses. Various sensory processing difficulties affect the way sensory signals are organized and the way in which a person responds to information coming through his senses.

When children have difficulty with sensory processing they often engage in activities that help to control the sensory information. Some children find visual and auditory information overwhelming and respond by trying to block out the sensory input. They may cover their eyes and ears, run away or withdraw. Other children may find touch unpleasant and may react negatively to tags in clothing, sticky substances or the textures of certain foods. In contrast, some children actively seek out tactile input by repeatedly touching objects around them. Movement is another source of sensory information. Some children experience fear or anxiety when movement is imposed upon them. Others dislike moving away from the ground and refuse to engage in activities such as climbing, sliding or swinging. There are also children who cannot tolerate being still and who are in constant motion.

Many children respond emotionally to sensory input that is difficult for them to process. Ideally, over time, children become aware of these challenging situations and learn how to manage their reactions. Self-awareness is the foundation of self-management and self-regulation. Caregivers can assist children to become self-aware by helping them to identify the sensory features that contribute to their emotional reactions and by reframing their responses in terms of their sensory processing differences.

Another way to contribute to a child's self-awareness and self-management is through children's literature. Books can be a useful tool in supporting social emotional development and wellbeing. Reading books that show the experiences of children with sensory processing difficulties and ways that these children self-manage can assist children with special needs to build competencies. Many children feel validated when they see themselves reflected in literature. Children without obvious sensory processing differences enjoy these books too. They provide all children with opportunities to learn about diversity, to develop empathy, to manage interactions and expectations and to identify ways to support one another.

These tools can help children and adults to understand self-awareness, self-regulation and sensory processing challenges.

Books:

The following books cover a wide variety of sensory processing differences, the impact of these differences on participation and ways to manage these differences.



Visit your local library or bookstore and ask for age appropriate books on emotions like:

- ✓ Ellie Bean the Drama Queen: A Children's Book about Sensory Processing Disorder by Jennie Harding and Dave Padgett
- ✓ Sensitive Sam by Marla Roth-Fisch
- ✓ Picky, Picky Pete by Michele Griffin
- ✓ Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload by Jennifer Veenendall
- ✓ This is Gabriel Making Sense of School by Hartley Steiner
- ✓ Squirmy Wormy: How I Learned to Help Myself by Lynda Farrington Wilson
- ✓ Arnie and His School Tools: Simple Sensory Solutions That Build Success by Jennifer Veenendall

Sensory Tools:

- ✓ Skateboard chews and chewllery
- ✓ Tangles and thinking putty
- ✓ Move n sit and discs



Other Resources:

Videos such as Brain Highways offer additional insight into how children's brains work to integrate information and process sensory inputs. The short videos of children describing their hidden senses- proprioception and vestibular senses help children and caregivers expand their learning beyond the usual five senses. <http://www.brainhighways.com/>



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