

Below is a list of indicators that your student may have sensory processing difficulties. This list is intended as a guide only. It is not comprehensive – there are numerous possible indicators. If you suspect that your student has sensory processing difficulties, it is important to facilitate a referral to an occupational therapist for assessment.

Sight (visual system)

OVER-SENSITIVE	UNDER-SENSITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have a “startle” response to flashes of light (such as the flickers of a fluorescent light turning on). • May cover eyes or squint. • May want to wear a hat outdoors even when it is not sunny. • May have difficulty focusing in a visually “busy” environment . • May have trouble locating objects in a cluttered area . • May have a shorter attention span or become frustrated more easily in rooms with fluorescent lighting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May “lose their place” when reading or copying from the board. • May be fascinated by and attracted to brightly coloured objects. • May have difficulty spacing their words when writing, or laying out their work . • May misjudge distances and bump into people/objects/doorways. • May enjoy bright or flashing lights – may enjoy turning lights on and off repeatedly. • May seek visual input by moving their head back and forth, or moving/flicking objects in front of their eyes.

Taste (gustatory system)

OVER-SENSITIVE	UNDER-SENSITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have a limited range of food that they will eat. • May avoid brushing their teeth. • May gag easily or vomit often. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May prefer strongly flavoured food (extremely sweet, salty or bitter flavours). • May lick objects or put them in the mouth. • May stuff large amounts of food into their mouth.

Smell (olfactory system)

OVER-SENSITIVE	UNDER-SENSITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May comment on subtle smells in the room (such as cleaning products used the evening before). • May become irritated or find it hard to focus in rooms where cleaning products, perfume or deodorant have been used. • May avoid areas such as kitchens, toilets, chlorinated pools. • May avoid people who “smell” (people who wear perfume, or use a fragrant laundry detergent). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not notice/dislike strong smells (such as burning toast, wet paint, intense body odour). • May enjoy food that has a strong smell (such as certain kinds of fish).

Hearing (auditory system)

OVER-SENSITIVE	UNDER-SENSITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May avoid loud environments such as crowded corridors.• May “jump” or appear to be startled by sudden sounds.• May put their hands over their ears, or wear earphones in class.• May make lots of noise (this is an attempt to “drown out” other noises in the environment).• May tell other students to be quiet.• May have difficulty focusing on learning tasks, distracted by noises in the environment.• Student may find ways to leave the room during noisier periods (such as group-work times). Avoidance can include asking for a toilet-break, choosing a behaviour that will cause them to be sent out of the room or simply walking/running away from class.• May point out things that others cannot hear (for example, the school bus has arrived).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not respond when their name is called.• May appear to ignore instructions.• May ask for instructions to be repeated several times.• May make lots of noise, or have a loud speaking voice.• May enjoy noisy, crowded environments.

Touch (tactile system)

OVER-SENSITIVE	UNDER-SENSITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May “over-react” and be very upset by minor bumps or unexpected touch.• May use fingertips to hold objects.• May avoid activities that will get their hands dirty.• May avoid wearing new clothing or shoes.• May avoid crowded spaces or standing in close proximity to others, for fear of being jostled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May seem oblivious to hot/cold temperature (for example, wearing only a t-shirt and yet not feeling cold in the middle of winter, running around in the sun on extremely hot days)• May have less reaction to pain and injury. Student may injure themselves without appearing affected by pain.• May not notice food or dirt on their face.• May not notice when clothing is messy, twisted or unbuttoned.• May seek to touch objects which will give a strong sensation (for example, objects with very rough or spiky textures).• May enjoy messy activities such as painting or clay modelling.• May seek to touch everything and everyone around them, without awareness of other's need for personal space.

Movement, motion and balance (vestibular system)

OVER-SENSITIVE	UNDER-SENSITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May dislike/avoid playground equipment such as suspension bridges, swings or slides.• May have trouble walking on uneven surfaces.• May avoid any activity where the feet leave the ground or the head is not upright. This may cause refusal to participate in physical education activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May rock on their chair, or sway and move around in their seat. <i>There can be many reasons that students may "wriggle", this is only one possible reason.</i>• Can appear clumsy or uncoordinated.• May have difficulty keeping their body still in class.• May seek sensation through activities such as jumping off high walls, being upside down. <i>There can be many reasons for "risky" behaviour. Please see the behaviour section for more details.</i>

Body awareness (proprioception system)

OVER-SENSITIVE	UNDER-SENSITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have difficulty with picking up and moving small objects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May lack muscle tone. May have trouble staying upright in a chair for long periods due to lack of strength.• May be "floppy" and lean against furniture and people. Fatigues easily.• May bump into objects or people.• May stumble and fall over.• May seek "rough" play or sport, may enjoy crashing into others or wrestling with others. <i>There can be many reasons for "risky" behaviour. Please see the behaviour section for more details.</i>• May grind teeth.• May be unaware of their own body's sensations (for example, hunger or a need for the toilet).