

Understanding Sensory Processing

A neuroaffirming guide for families and adults

What Is Sensory Processing?

Sensory processing is how our nervous system takes in, organises, and responds to information from our senses, sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, movement (vestibular), and body position (proprioception), plus our internal sense of the body (interoception).

Everybody processes sensory information differently, and this is a normal part of human variation, not something inherently wrong or in need of correction.

Common Patterns

Some people notice and respond strongly to sensory input (sometimes called sensory sensitivity or 'seeking' input to feel regulated), others need more input before they notice it, and many people experience a mix depending on the sense, the day, and the environment. These patterns can affect comfort, focus, emotional regulation, and participation in daily life.

A Neuroaffirming Reframe

Rather than viewing sensory differences as behaviours to eliminate or tolerances to build through exposure, a neuroaffirming approach asks: what does this person's nervous system need to feel safe and regulated, and how can their environment and routines support that?

Everyday, Practical Supports

- Adjusting lighting, noise, seating, or clothing where possible.
- Building in movement breaks or quiet time proactively, not just after distress shows up.
- Offering genuine choices about participation rather than requiring 'tolerance'.
- Noticing and respecting early signs of sensory overload.

When to Seek OT Input

If sensory differences are significantly impacting daily participation, sleep, eating, learning, or family life, an occupational therapist can help identify patterns and practical, individualised strategies.

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