



UNDERSTANDING SENSORY DIFFERENCES

What are the 7 Senses?

- **Touch** provides information from skin receptors about how something feels. Those with tactile processing sensitivities may become distressed when having their nails cut or when applying lotion. Those with low registration of tactile input may not immediately respond to being touched or may not notice when they have a messy face or hands.
- **Auditory** provides information about sound from the environment. Those with auditory processing differences may avoid or become distressed by the sound of a vacuum, or seek to create repetitive sounds such as ringing a doorbell.
- **Smell** receives and interprets information regarding scent (olfactory). And taste (gustatory) refers to the capability to detect the taste of substances such as food.. Those with olfactory or gustatory processing differences may seek or avoid certain foods with strong smells or crunchy textures, or they may become distressed by small changes in the taste/texture of foods.
- **Proprioceptive** provides the brain with information received through muscles and joints. This is important for developing a sense of where the body is in space and contributes to body awareness, motor planning, pressure modulation, and safety awareness. Those with proprioceptive processing differences may demonstrate seeking behaviors of chewing or pulling on objects and clothes, or have low registration resulting in broken crayons and crashing into others. Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2iOliN3fAE>
- **Vestibular** provides information about movement from receptors located in the inner ear which respond to gravity and motion when there is a change in direction or head position. This affects balance, equilibrium responses, muscle tone, eye coordination, and bilateral coordination. Persons with vestibular processing challenges may avoid swings and balance beams on the playground, or they may seek input by repeatedly spinning or rocking.
- **Visual** is the ability to analyze and interpret visual information. Persons with visual processing differences may be sensitive to bright lights or be easily distracted by others moving within a room.



Why do kids with sensory issues have sensory meltdowns?

Kids with sensory issues sometimes exhibit extreme behaviors: screaming if their faces get wet, throwing violent tantrums when you try to get them dressed, because the physical sensations involved are overwhelming to them.

They may have surprisingly wild mood swings as a reaction to a change in the environment. For instance, a first-grader might be fine in a quiet setting with a calm adult. But place her in a grocery store filled with an overload of visual and auditory stimulation and she might melt down, i.e. have a severe tantrum that seems to be of her control, and isn't likely to stop, whatever a caregiver might do, until she is exhausted.

In addition to this "shutting down" because of sensory overload, a child might also lash out, or become aggressive. Or she might flee—a fight-or-flight response. If a child dashes out across the playground or parking lot, oblivious to the danger, it may be because she is heading away from something upsetting, which may not be apparent to the rest of us, or toward an environment or sensation that will calm her system.

