

Ventura County Early Start Program  
SENSORY ISSUES AND NEEDS OF YOUNG CHILDREN (0-5)  
**A Guide for Families**

Children's brains are designed to receive and use information from the environment and their own bodies so they can function in daily life. This is called "sensory processing", which may include information from sound, sight, taste, touch and/or smell. Children who have difficulty processing and using sensory input may experience challenges in one or more of the following areas:

◆ attention  
◆ learning

◆ behavior  
◆ motor skills

◆ communication  
◆ socialization

**This guide is designed to give you information so you can be informed about sensory terms, processes and options for your child.**

## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS



### 1) BASIC SENSORY TERMS

**Auditory-** The sense of hearing or ability to respond to sound.

**Gustatory-** The sense of taste.

**Olfactory-** The sense of smell.

**Proprioceptive-** The sense of movement and position of body parts. Gives your child body awareness as a result of physical actions that stimulate the senses in the muscles, joints and skin. (Examples of "proprioceptive seeking" actions include hand flapping, hopping, toe-walking, rolling, bumping, rough play, etc.)

**Tactile-** Related to the sense of touch, pressure, temperature, vibration and the ability to discriminate touch sensations. (Examples of "tactile seeking" actions include playing in dirt, with food, rubbing different materials on skin, etc.)

**Vestibular-** The sense of balance, head and body position in space, and movement. (Examples of "vestibular seeking" actions include spinning, swinging, rocking, etc.)

**Visual-** The sense of seeing.



Your child may have the **ability** to see, hear, taste, etc., but may have difficulty **making sense** of the information.

### 2) TERMS FOR CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS

**Motor Planning Difficulties-** The tendency to have difficulty with the process of figuring out, organizing, and carrying out a series of actions necessary to complete an unfamiliar activity. **Difficulty with motor planning is also known as "dyspraxia".** (Examples include clumsiness while learning a new task; avoiding new or unfamiliar physical games or activities.)

**Regulatory Disorder of Sensory Processing-** A medical diagnosis. "Difficulties in regulating emotion/behavior in response to sensory stimulation, leading to impairment in development and functioning." (Examples: In infancy- Prolonged crying or difficulty sleeping; In toddlerhood- Frequent tantrums and difficulty in transitioning.)

**Sensory Defensiveness (Sensory Over-Responsivity)-** The tendency to react negatively and emotionally to stimulation from one or more sensory systems that most people consider to be non-offensive, including touch, sound, movement/gravity, smell, taste. The most common are tactile and auditory. (Examples: Tactile- Dislike of being held; difficulty tolerating certain textures [in the mouth, in the hands, on the skin]; refusal to walk barefoot on grass or sand. Auditory- Covering ears or crying in response to common environmental sounds [vacuum, telephone, garbage disposal]. Vestibular- Unreasonable fear of heights [avoiding body movement or swinging]).

**Sensory Seeking (Sensory Under-Responsivity)-** The tendency to seek out constant, intense or prolonged stimulation, frequent touching/fidgeting with objects. (Examples: Taking part in unsafe activities [climbing too high]; High activity level as child runs, swings and jumps; Decreased awareness of touch or pain.)



The professional community may use the following terms interchangeably to refer to sensory problems: “sensory processing disorder,” “sensory integration dysfunction,” and “sensory modulation disorder.”

### 3) TERMS FOR INTERVENTIONS

**Occupational Therapy-** The profession that addresses the skills for the job of living that will result in independent and satisfying lives. For young children, these skills may include play, feeding, bathing, diapering, dressing and interacting/bonding with others.

**Sensory Diet-** A structured program of sensory based (and motor) activities, done over the course of the day, that helps your child attain the appropriate level of alertness. (Examples: Using squish balls, engaging in physical activities, using heavy push toys, etc.)

**Sensory Motor Activities-** Age-appropriate activities which help your child develop motor skills. (Examples: Obstacle course, playground activities, swimming.)

**Sensory Stimulation Program-** A program that provides direct sensory stimulation to help your child have appropriate behavioral responses. (Examples: Infant massage, rocking, swinging, etc.)

**Sensory Strategies-** Techniques involving sensory stimulation or changes to the environment used in the home or classroom which help calm or increase alertness of your child so s/he is able to attend and learn. (Examples: Dim lights or slow swinging to calm; Textured toys or bouncing on your lap to alert; Sensory-rich environment.)

**Sensory Integration Intervention-** Treatment provided by an Occupational Therapist or other qualified professional with specialized training in a specific approach developed by Dr. A. Jean Ayres.

#### SCREENING



**Screening** is an informal process used to identify behaviors or characteristics that may be **red flags** for sensory processing difficulties. It is recommended that sensory issues be considered for all children being assessed for services. Screening may include observations, interviews and other means of assessment.

#### REFERRAL FOR ASSESSMENT



If you or any of the professionals that work with your child have concerns about any of the following sensory **red flags** your Early Start Service Coordinator or Special Education Case Manager should be contacted. If appropriate, this person will make a referral for assessment.

## RED FLAGS



Some examples of common **red flags** are:

- ◆ Requires extensive help to fall asleep
- ◆ Goes quickly from whimper to intense cry (may be referred to as “labile”)
- ◆ Resists cuddling, pulls away or arches
- ◆ Craves swinging or moving upside down
- ◆ Over-reaction to light touch
- ◆ Easily startles or is distressed by normal household sounds
- ◆ Unusually quiet or passive
- ◆ Difficulty with transitions
- ◆ Difficulty tolerating lumpy or sticky textures of food



The **red flags** may change depending on the age of the child.

## ASSESSMENT



Assessment involves the use of formal and informal tools that require specialized training for the professional using them. Assessment for sensory needs will be done by a qualified professional, which in most cases is a licensed occupational therapist.

## SERVICES



The following are services which **may** be provided to help with your child’s behavioral, attentional, learning, and/or or social difficulties resulting from problems with sensory processing.

- ◆ Consultation and training for you and/or the teacher in making changes to the sensory environment
- ◆ Training for you and/or the teacher in sensory regulatory interventions
- ◆ Behavioral and social interventions provided by an Early Interventionist or teacher
- ◆ Occupational therapy consultation to Early Interventionist, teacher and/or you
- ◆ Occupational Therapy treatment for your child (*individual or small group*)

## PROGRAM PLANS



For children 0-3 years old in the Early Start Program, services to address sensory needs would be included on the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), which addresses your child’s functioning across all environments accessed by the family. For special education eligible children over three years old, services would be specified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP focuses on the child’s functioning **in school** only, therefore, difficulties with sensory processing will be addressed only as they impact the child’s ability to learn and function in school.

## OTHER AGENCIES AND SERVICES



Some children may qualify for other agency services that address sensory issues and needs in environments other than school. Public agencies may include Regional Center and California Children Services (CCS). Services provided by the Regional Center will be specified in an Individual Program Plan (IPP). Some families may access private insurance to cover these services.

## RESOURCES



The following references are all available at [www.vcselpa.org](http://www.vcselpa.org) or parents may call for a free copy (unless a cost is noted) (805) 437-1560.

- ◆ A Parent Guide to Special Education (English/Spanish)
- ◆ Community Resources for Families of Young Children (English/Spanish)
- ◆ Community Park and Recreation Programs (English only)
- ◆ CAC Community Resource Directory [School aged Children] (English/Spanish)
- ◆ Educational Occupational Therapy Service Guidelines [Includes “Teacher’s Tool Chest”] (English only)
- ◆ What's Next After Early Start? (English/Spanish)

The following references are all available for checkout at **Rainbow Connection Family Resource Center** 2401 E. Gonzales Road, Suite 100, Oxnard, (805) 485-9643.

- ◆ “An Introduction to Sensory Integration”
- ◆ “The Child with Special Needs”
- ◆ “The Out of Sync Child” & “The Out of Sync Child Has Fun”

## AGENCIES



**California Children Services-** Therapy and medical supports to eligible children 0-22 years old

2240 E. Gonzales Rd., Ste. 260, Oxnard, CA 93036, (805) 981-5222, [www.dhs.ca.gov/pcfh/cms/ccs](http://www.dhs.ca.gov/pcfh/cms/ccs)

**First Five Ventura County-** Community supports for families of children 0-5

2580 East Main Street, Suite 203, Ventura, CA 93003, (805) 648-9990, <http://first5ventura.org>

**Rainbow Connection Family Resource Center-** Supports to families of children with disabilities

2401 E. Gonzales Road, Suite 100, Oxnard, CA 93036, (805) 485-9643, <http://rainbowconnectionrc.weebly.com/>

**Tri-Counties Regional Center-** Supports to people with developmental disabilities, all ages

2401 E. Gonzales Road, Suite 100, Oxnard, CA 93036, (805) 485-3177, [www.tri-counties.org](http://www.tri-counties.org)

**Ventura County SELPA-** Supports to children and families of children with special needs, 0-22 years old

5100 Adolfo Road, Camarillo, CA 93012, (805) 437-1560, [www.vcselpa.org](http://www.vcselpa.org)

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