

Evidence shows that sensory integration (or processing) difficulties should be considered a common aspect of FASD

MOST FREQUENT ISSUES

Over or under responding

Difficulties managing sensory information are common in those with FASD. People with FASD may show signs of being hyper-sensitive (feeling things too much) or hypo-sensitive (not feeling things enough) to sensory information. That may be touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound, but also movement (vestibular), body awareness (proprioception) or information from inside the body (interoception)

- Hyper-sensitive: People are very aware of sensory information, e.g., clothing tags scratch, bright sunlight blinds, spicy food burns, loud noises scare. They struggle to 'tune things out';
- Hypo-sensitive: People need a lot of sensory information for it to get through, e.g., not feeling hot or cold, high pain thresholds, needing to be called loudly or repeatedly.

People can be so focused on what they hear, see or feel that they can't focus on other things. Or they may shut down or act out/act badly as they try to stop the thing that is bothering them.

As the environmental stimulus increases or decreases, the person's behaviour also alters. The person can also react to stimulus differently depending on their stress levels, other demands on them and what has happened earlier.

Changing the environment can have a direct impact on how a person behaves and reacts.

STRATEGIES

Be prepared

If someone is sensitive to light or noise, keep sunglasses or headphones available.

Adapt the environment

Think about lighting - bright or dim or daylight; find the quieter times to visit shops or attractions; check that background noises aren't distracting such as radios, washing machines; if new clothes feel 'itchy' try washing them before wearing,, remove clothing tags (un-stitch them don't cut them as that can leave even sharper edges), look out for seamless socks.

Fidget to focus

When someone needs to sit and pay attention, having access to things they can move or feel can really help. Although this can look as if they are distracted, in fact, the right fidget item can help with focus.

Some examples of things that work for different people are Tangles, squish balls, textured material. For people that like biting or chewing, look for items designed for the purpose such as Chewbuddy, Chewlery or Chewigem.

QUICK TIPS

Avoiding

For little ones, try to find out what your child is reacting to so that you can help them avoid what's causing them trouble. But do think about wider impacts of avoiding. It doesn't provide the opportunity to develop strategies and can impact a broader range of activities.

Be aware of things building up

A meltdown at school or work could be triggered by high levels of challenge (noise/ touch/ taste etc) earlier in the day. Think of a cup gradually filling up with 'stress' until it overflows.

Become Sensory Detectives

Together with your loved one, explore what sensory input helps or gets in the way of doing the things they want or need to do. Encourage them to ask for things that will help decrease the effect of what is bothering them.

Get some expert help

An assessment with an occupational therapist experienced in sensory Integration and FASD may be useful in identifying specific patterns of sensory difficulties and suggesting activities and resources to help.

Check they have recognised training in Ayres Sensory Integration. ASI has standardised training, assessment and treatment criteria that are evidence-based.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Zoe Mailloux

Zoe Mailloux is a leading expert on sensory integration. Her website has some great resources <http://www.zoemailloux.com/sensory-integration-resources.html>

Information about sensory integration

Sensory Integration Global Network: <https://www.siglobalnetwork.org/parents>

Star Institute: <https://www.spdstar.org>

Sensory Processing 101 (2015), by D. Abraham, P. Braley and L. Drobnyak

Sensational Kids (2014) by Lucy Jane Miller

Living Sentionally (2009) by Winnie Dunn

Some practical sensory strategies

<https://tinyurl.com/BuckinghamshireOTHandout>

<https://tinyurl.com/GuernseyOTSensoryStrategies>

Independent occupational therapists

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (Independent OTs): <https://rcotss-ip.org.uk/>

Check they are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council: <http://www.hcpc.co.uk/public/be-sure-check-the-register/>

©2020 • This FASD in Focus was written by:

Jo Pennell, Consultant Occupational Therapist, Treetangle Therapy, <https://www.treetangleot.com>

www.NationalFASD.org.uk • info@nofas-uk.org

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