

Sensory Processing for Children with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)



Sensory Modulation Disorder (SMD)

- Difficulty regulating responses to input
- Difficulty getting and keeping an appropriate arousal level for different environments and tasks
- Difficulty adapting to challenges in daily life

Sensory Over Responsivity (*Sensory avoiding, sensory defensiveness*)

Sensory Over-Responsivity Behaviors:

- Easily overwhelmed by input
- Can become aggressive, irritable, fussy, and moody
- Tactile defensiveness (to touch)

Treatment Principles

- Raise tolerance for input; get and stay regulated
- Activities are slow/low intensity
- Maintain a calm-alert state

Sensory Craving (*Appears to need additional sensory input*)

Sensory Craving Behaviors:

- Constantly wants control of every situation
- Interrupts, cannot wait
- Angry/explosive response to redirection
- Tends to engage in dangerous behaviors
- Often intense, demanding, hard to calm
- Constantly on the move
- Likes to rough-house
- Constantly touches objects
- Intrudes on personal space

Treatment Principles

- Not under-aroused, they don't need more input
- Provide lots of structure to movement-based activities, make them purposeful and functional

Sensory Under-Responsivity (*Less sensitive to sensory input*)

Sensory Under-Responsivity Behaviors:

- Doesn't cry when hurt
- May not notice when touched
- Prefers sedentary (inactive) activities

Treatment Principles

- Increase arousal in organized way
- Integrate/include high intensity activities into the day

Most substance exposed children are Sensory Craving!

Sensory seeking used to be the term that lead people to believe that the individual needed more input. We are learning that they do **not** need more. **If they get more, they will only want more.**

Sensory Under-Responsive

Fill the cup



Sensory Over-Responsive

Empty the cup



Sensory Craver

Cup has a hole in it!



Strategies to Aid Children in Managing Sensory Craving Behaviors

Organized Movement Activities:

- **Heavy work with interruptions.**
Ex: Hop to get a puzzle piece and return to puzzle; help move chairs
- **Incorporate resistance movement**
Ex: Push-pull activities, body compression/pressure

Strategies for Success:

- **Set limits**
- **Give opportunities for following rules and simple one-step directions.** Allows for success with every day activities.
- **Praise for calming activities.** Kids are often redirected from unsafe behaviors and reminded constantly, so it is important to praise things they do well.

References and Resources

1. STAR Institute for Sensory Processing Disorder. <https://sensory-health.org/>
2. Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder by Lucy Jane Miller (Book)
3. Interoception: The Eighth Sensory System by Kelly Mahler (Book)
4. *Sensory Development for Children with NAS*, lecture by Felicia Bernhard, OT. 09/07/2021