

Senses Explained



Sensory Input

Anything perceived using senses (like smell, sight, touch, taste, and hearing) can be called sensory input. Some people are very sensitive to sensory input and others are not.

Bonus sensory information! Did you know that there are more than these five senses to which our body is receptive? Here are a few others:

Vestibular Sense. A way someone knows if they're in motion. The vestibular system works with the visual system. This sense is also involved with motor functions that allow us to keep our balance, stabilize our head and body during movement, and maintain posture.

Proprioceptive Sense. A way to know where your body is in space. Some people require lots of pressure to find their place. An example of proprioception in action enables a person to touch their finger to the tip of their nose, even when their eyes are closed. It enables a person to climb steps without looking at each one. People with special proprioceptive needs may find these skills difficult to execute.



Sensory Seeking

People who desire/require lots of sensory input in order to function.



Sensory Avoidant

People who are very sensitive to sensory input and become overwhelmed/hyperactive when receiving too many sensory messages.

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Sensory/Stimming Tools

Equipment that can help a person avoid sensory overload and/or work through a sensation. Some examples are headphones/ear defenders, weighted blanket, crash pad, bouncy ball, fidget spinner, tactile toys (textures that feel good to touch), trampoline, stretch bands, swinging chair, body sock, chewy/chewelry, tangle toys. It might take time and practice to find the best and safest stimming tools that serve you, but the effort is worth it!



Stimming

A repetitive movement or sound to serve as an outlet to express emotions or energy. We all have sensory needs and stimming is one important way to cope with sensory input. It should never be discouraged. If stims can hurt someone, these should be replaced with safe stims. Here are some ways people stim (but there are even more than what is listed here!): bouncing, chewing, hair-twirling, hand-flapping/ hand-wringing/clapping/clicking fingers, lining up objects, nail-biting, jumping, rocking, spinning, squealing, using vocal cords (e.g. humming, echolalia, grunting).



Trigger

Sensory stimulation can be very overwhelming and trigger a strong negative response. Triggers are unique to everyone. Some examples of triggers are strong emotions, new places, sudden changes, phone calls, loud noises, traffic, caffeine, scratchy clothes, certain smells, and stress. Stimming helps people work through their experience, especially when it's triggering. If possible, sensory tools should be used to help those with extra sensory needs, in order to avoid a meltdown/burnout/shut down.