



Helpful Ways to Include a Child with Sensory Processing Difficulties into your Recreation Programs

Guiding Principles

Attitude - basic belief that all children have gifts & talents regardless of disability

Body of Knowledge - can continue to be built on over time & through experience

Believe - belief that your participants will be able to learn recreation activities

Creativity - trial & error, always try to think outside the box

Goals - knowledge of parent goals and work towards them

Safety - ensure your participant is safe at all times

Support - problem solve together when inclusion is difficult, and seek additional help if needed

Sensory Processing Difficulties:

Sensory processing is described as a child's ability to take in information with their senses and use that information to understand and interact with the world around them.

When we look at sensory processing, we consider seven senses: visual, touch, smell, taste, sound, sense of body (proprioception), and sense of movement (vestibular).

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is a condition that exists when sensory signals do not get organized into appropriate responses. It is like a neurological "traffic jam" that prevents certain parts of the brain from receiving the information needed to interpret sensory information correctly. A person with SPD can experience difficulties processing and acting upon information received through the senses, which creates challenges in performing countless everyday tasks.

You might see:

- Differences with information processing (how information is taken in and deciphered)
- Difficulty with social skills (body language, personal space, facial expressions, turn taking, sharing, reciprocity in relationships, humour, etc.)
- Sensory sensitivities or deficits (loud noises, crowds, bright lights, etc.). Child is overwhelmed with too much multi-sensory input
- Attention difficulties - What may appear to be inattention/or in compliance may in fact be a child not registering sensory input as quickly as others
- Uneven skill sets (strengths and challenges)
- Motor clumsiness
- Behaviour problems





- Exhibit touch aversion or aversion to various forms of tactile input, i.e. they may not be able to tolerate being barefoot on sand or grass, certain clothing textures, the wind blowing on their bare skin, etc.

Instructors should:

- ✓ Tap into interests, i.e. TV characters, songs, animals/pets, etc.
- ✓ Simplify your communication to be short, clear and concise, i.e. “1, 2, 3, Up”, “Sally. Stop. Good!” and use “First/ Then” language. Make child aware of what is coming, and what is expected of them
- ✓ Do what you say you are going to do and **follow through** the best you can
- ✓ Be aware of sensory environment, i.e. noise in the pool such as other swimmers screaming
- ✓ Support transitions and routines, i.e. refer to visual schedule, give warnings – count downs
- ✓ Reinforce appropriate behaviours, i.e. high fives, PRAISE!!
- ✓ Find motivators, i.e. stickers, timers, lap counters, token systems
- ✓ Assign responsibility to encourage feelings of value and importance
- ✓ Try to eliminate **unnecessary** visual, auditory, and tactile distractions when possible
- ✓ Try to provide more intensity to sensory experiences for children who have a high threshold for sensory input, i.e. speak louder; sing instructions, combine verbal and visual cues
- ✓ Try to provide a balance of calming and alerting activities
 - Movement activities tend to be more exciting
 - Heavy work or deep pressure activities tend to be more calming
 - Provide “breaks” with less stimulating activities so that children can self-regulate prior to getting overexcited/overwhelmed

Ways to Make Your Recreation Program More Successful

Structure

- ✓ **Meeting Spot** - try to have the same spot where you greet your participants each week
- ✓ **Teaching Place** - try to teach your participants in the same place each week
- ✓ **Ending lesson** - have an identifiable ending activity by verbalizing and signing that the lesson is all done and that it is time to go find their parent, grandparent or guardian
- ✓ **Name place marker** - if your participant wanders, have an identifiable place for them to stand or sit
- ✓ **Consistent, predictable routines** - ideally you follow the same structure in your program, begin and end at the same time and perform the skills or activities in the same order each time you meet. Prepare participants if there is going to be a change in the routine and avoid giving exact times





Instruction

- ✓ **Plan every transition** - by counting down, giving a job/responsibility, reviewing instructions/expectations, i.e. "first/then"
- ✓ **Instructional Techniques** - give clear, short, concise instructions, giving time to respond, slow down
- ✓ **Demonstrate** - demonstrate as much as possible, i.e. "do this" or "watch me"
- ✓ **Visuals** - use pictures to teach skills and rules, i.e. "stop", "listen", "more", "all done", etc.
- ✓ **Rules** - use rules not reason, i.e. have a poster with program rules (hands to your self, etc.)
- ✓ **Physically assist participant** - only if needed, i.e. help your participant swing a bat with hand over hand support
- ✓ **Labelling skills** - when giving instructions make sure participants know what you want them to do, i.e. demonstrating kicking a ball in a game and label the skill as kicking
- ✓ **Sign Language** - know basic signs, such as "all done", "more", "stop", "listen", "toilet" and "wait"
- ✓ **State "Name" and give concise and positively worded instructions** - i.e., "Sally, sit up, thank you"
- ✓ Always have some **back pocket games/activities/songs to engage your participant** - i.e. If Your Happy and You Know it, Wheels on the Bus, Hokey Pokey, Cha-Cha-Slide, I Spy, etc.
- ✓ **Provide opportunities for choice** - whenever possible, i.e. "Do you want the red ball or green ball?"
- ✓ **Provide opportunities to help** - i.e. ask for help to collect the balls and put them in the bucket
- ✓ **Distraction** - is always a great option, i.e. tap into participants interests, point out similarities, and state what activity is next

Behaviour

- ✓ **Remind and redirect before you reprimand** - i.e. use "if/then" language
- ✓ **Use rules, not reason** - i.e. use "if/then" or "first/then" language
- ✓ **Replace undesirable behaviour with desirable** - try not to just say no or stop to your participant, teach them what you want them to do, i.e. if a child is spitting during swimming lessons replace the spitting with bubble blowing
- ✓ **Catch the good stuff** - always praise and give positive feedback for good behaviour in order to encourage further desired behaviour





Participants Preparation

- ✓ **Recreation Social Story** - Provide parents with, or ask them to create a recreation social story to read at home with their child to prepare them for the program. Instructions on how to create a recreation social story as well as examples can be found on the KidsAbility website: www.kidsability.ca
- ✓ **All About Me** - ask parents to create an All About Me handout that can be shared with program leaders prior to the start of the program. Instructions on how to create an All About Me handout as well as examples can be found on the KidsAbility website: www.kidsability.ca

**Don't forget, an engaged child
doesn't have time to get in trouble.
A supervised child does!**

Remember you are not in this alone. If you are having difficulty including a participant with Sensory Processing Difficulties in your recreation program and need more ideas, contact KidsAbility and ask for a Recreation Therapist.

**For more information, training or consults please call
KidsAbility and ask for a Recreation Therapist
519-886-8886 or 1-888-372-2259**

