

Where next?

Have a look at our website, www.poole.nhs.uk and search for 'handouts for parents'. There are currently handouts available on a range of motor skills and activities of daily living skills, as well as:

- Hair cuts
- Teeth brushing
- Movement
- Picky eating
- Garden play
- Oral motor ideas (chewing)

References

- NHS Choices - Physical activity guidelines for children and young people.
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-young-people.aspx>

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Sensory Integration
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Children's Therapy Services

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For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

The Health Information Centre
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Longfleet Road
Poole
Dorset
BH15 2JB
Telephone: 01202 448003

www.poole.nhs.uk

We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01202 448499, text 07758 272495 or email pals@poole.nhs.uk for advice.

If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience team confidentially: phone 01202 448003, write to the Health Information Centre (address above), or email healthinfo@poole.nhs.uk.

Children's Therapy Services Patient information

Sensory Integration



What is it?

Sensory Integration

What is sensory integration?

When we receive sensory information, our brain sorts this, makes sense of it and then if needed, acts on it. This is sensory integration.

Our seven senses are:

- Visual
- Auditory (sound)
- Taste
- Smell
- Touch
- Proprioception (muscle and joint movement)
- Vestibular (balance and head movement).

Our brains generally integrate sensory information automatically, all the time.

Typical child development

All humans have sensory preferences and dislikes. It is normal for all of us to like some things and not like others, e.g. a preference for soft clothing and a dislike of itchy woollen jumpers.

Generally, all children will go through phases of being fussy. This can usually be managed with standard parenting strategies.

Most children need a lot of movement opportunities every day to develop their sensory systems – a minimum of 3 hours for

mobile under 5s and 1 hour for 5 -18 year olds (NHS Choices). It is part of normal child development to move and want to seek these activities.

Sensory integration difficulties

If a child has a problem integrating sensory information, they can find daily tasks difficult. It may result in children having a disproportionate response to sensory information, such as screaming when they hear a noise or saying that someone touching their arm lightly was painful. However, it is important to also rule out other reasons for behaviour such as communication, attention, pain, attachment difficulties and mental health problems such as anxiety.

There is no official diagnosis that can be given to describe sensory integration difficulties. **The term ‘sensory processing disorder’ (SPD) is not a medical diagnosis that can be made so the term should not be used.**

There are a few main categories of sensory integration difficulties. These are:

- Sensory reactivity (being over or under sensitive)
- Sensory perception (not knowing about quality of sensory input, e.g. knowing you’ve been touched but not where or whether it was hard or soft).

- Sensory motor (poor awareness of body and being clumsy, poor planning of new activities, finding physical activities difficult to coordinate).

If the level of difficulty is starting to significantly impact on a child’s every day functioning, your child’s paediatrician will be able to assess whether further medical investigations are needed. If it is suspected these might be sensory difficulties, we hope that information on our website will help.

Sensory support

Currently Children’s Therapy Services have Occupational Therapists (OTs) who can support children with a diagnosis of autism and significant sensory integration difficulties. This is usually through the ‘Parenting through the Senses’ course.

For children without a diagnosis of autism, we do not currently have an OT service to provide sensory integration assessments and intervention. However, we have put together some handouts which we hope will be useful. Lots of sensory integration difficulties can be managed by home and school using these strategies.

School and nursery staff training, called ‘Learning through the Senses’ is offered twice a year by Children’s Therapy Services. There is a small charge for this course.