



UNDERSTANDING SENSORY PROCESSING CHALLENGES

a guide for parents

When your child has sensory processing difficulties, the everyday world can feel like a lot. Bright lights, loud noises, and uncomfortable clothing might not bother others, but for your child, they can be overwhelming. Let's go through some practical ways to help make their life a bit more manageable.

1 Noise-Canceling Headphones



The world can be pretty loud.

Noise-canceling headphones can help create a quieter space for your child, whether they're at home or school. These can be a real game-changer when they need to focus or calm down. **Make sure to have a 504 plan active in school to allow them in the classroom.**

Keep a pair in your bag for outings, birthday parties or other events.

2 Create a Safe Space



Everyone needs a break sometimes, and for kids with sensory challenges, a safe, quiet space is crucial. Involve your child in setting up this space—maybe they want to add their favorite blanket or a soft light. **It's their sanctuary, not a timeout zone.** Never use it as a punishment. Always offer it and allow them to make the decision to move into that space.

3 Hygiene Alternatives



Showers can feel like an assault if your child doesn't like water on their face. Sponge baths, wipes, or letting them skip washing their face in the shower are good alternatives. For brushing teeth, softer toothbrushes can be a game-changer (toddler ones!). It's about finding what works without adding stress.

Let them try different soaps or wipes to find what feels best. Sometimes, unscented products can be less overwhelming.

4 Exploring Clothing Options



Some fabrics can feel like sandpaper on your child's skin. **Let them choose what they wear, even if it doesn't match your aesthetic.** When textures feel off, it can lead to meltdowns, so flexibility is key. Even a tag on clothing can make a huge difference.

Imagine wearing an itchy sweater all day—now, imagine that sweater is every piece of clothing that doesn't feel right. Giving them control here can reduce so much stress.



UNDERSTANDING SENSORY PROCESSING CHALLENGES

a guide for parents

5 Trying New Foods



New foods can be a sensory overload. The texture, smell, and taste might not sit well. **Instead of forcing them to eat it, invite them to help cook.** It gives them a chance to explore the food without the pressure of eating it right away.

If they're not into mashed potatoes, try letting them help make them. Feeling the potatoes' texture during prep can make them less intimidating when it's time to eat. Sometimes even growing the food can make a big difference.

6 Sensory Products to Consider



There's a world of sensory tools that can help your child feel more at ease. Weighted blankets can mimic the feeling of a hug, reducing stress. Other options include chew necklaces, stress balls, and fidget toys. It's about finding what works best for them. Do you notice them chewing on things frequently? Burying themselves under blankets or stuffed animals? Observe to see what they crave.

Start with one or two items like a weighted blanket or a simple fidget toy. You don't need a whole arsenal of tools—just a few that really help.

7 Visual Schedules and Routines



Children with sensory challenges often thrive on routine. A visual schedule can help them know what to expect, reducing anxiety about transitions. Use pictures, icons, or simple words to outline daily activities. Consistency is key.

Real-Life Example: It's like having a GPS for the day. Knowing what's coming next can make the world feel less chaotic.

8 Slow Transitions

SLOW DOWN

Sudden changes can be overwhelming. **Give your child a heads-up when it's time to switch activities.** A timer or verbal reminders can help them prepare. Slow, calm transitions make things smoother.

Use a countdown method, like a 5-minute warning, to signal that change is coming. Set an alarm and tell them when it goes off, it's time to go. If they don't do well with being told what to do, an alarm feels less threatening than you telling them what to do.



UNDERSTANDING SENSORY PROCESSING CHALLENGES

a guide for parents

9 Adjust Lighting



Bright or flickering lights can be harsh. Try dimmer switches, soft lamps, or natural light when possible. **Fluorescent lighting can be particularly challenging, so opt for gentler lighting** if your child is sensitive.

Think of harsh lighting as a loud noise—just as you'd want to lower the volume, softening the light can make the environment more bearable.

10 Incorporate Movement Breaks



Many kids with sensory issues need regular movement to help regulate their bodies. Whether it's jumping on a trampoline, swinging, or running around outside, structured movement breaks can help them focus better on quieter activities.

It's like hitting a reset button. A quick movement break can recharge their system and help them refocus.

TIPS FOR HANDLING SENSORY MELTDOWNS

a guide for parents

Sensory meltdowns can be intense and overwhelming for both the child and the parent. They aren't tantrums or acts of defiance; they're a response to sensory overload when the brain is overwhelmed by too much information. Here are some strategies that can help you and your child navigate these moments:

1 Stay Calm and Reassuring

Your calmness can help your child feel safer during a meltdown. They're picking up on your cues, so try to remain composed. Speak in a soft, steady voice, and use simple, reassuring phrases like, "You're safe" or "I'm here with you." If they seem agitated when you talk, just stay silent and sit next to them without moving or touching them.





TIPS FOR HANDLING SENSORY MELTDOWNS

a guide for parents

2 Remove Triggers if Possible

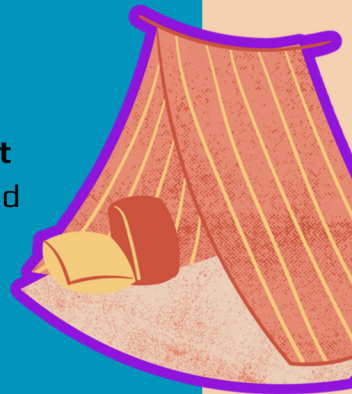


If you can identify what's causing the meltdown, try to remove or reduce it. Whether it's loud noises, bright lights, or a crowded space, reducing the trigger can help your child start to calm down.

If you're in a noisy store, gently guide them to a quieter area or outside if possible. Sometimes just changing the environment can help.

3 Create a Safe Space

Having a designated safe space at home where your child can retreat during a meltdown can be really helpful. This space should be calm and comforting—think soft pillows, a favorite blanket, or noise-canceling headphones. If you're not at home, try to find a quiet spot where they can feel secure.



4 Use Deep Pressure



Deep pressure can be calming for some kids during a meltdown. This can be a hug if they're open to it, or using a weighted blanket if you're at home. Always be sure to ask or look for cues that they're receptive to this kind of input—never force it.

A firm but gentle hand on their shoulders or back can sometimes help them feel more grounded. Just be sure they're okay with physical touch during these moments.



TIPS FOR HANDLING SENSORY MELTDOWNS

a guide for parents

5 Keep It Simple

During a meltdown, your child might have trouble processing complex instructions or conversations. Keep your language simple and direct. Instead of giving them a lot of options or trying to talk them through it, use short phrases. It may be even better to model things like taking deep breaths instead of instructing them to. If you start taking deep breaths, they may follow.



6 Use Sensory Tools

If you have sensory tools available, like noise-canceling headphones, fidget toys, or a weighted lap pad, offer them to your child. Sometimes these tools can provide the input they need to help them start calming down. Leave them by their side in reach, but don't directly hand it to them. They may throw it if they are in "fight or flight" mode.

7 Have a Mantra

These meltdowns can be frustrating and triggering for you as the parent. It can feel like "again?!" or "right now?!" or "WHY?!" Try to not make a face, show frustration or raise your voice. Have a mantra in your head such as:

- "They are not doing this to me; they are expressing their feelings."
- "This is not a reflection of my parenting; it's their moment to feel."
- "They are not doing this to me; they are navigating their emotions."
- "This is about their experience, not a personal attack."
- "They are not doing this to me; I am here to support them."
- "Their feelings are big right now; they are not trying to upset me."
- "I will hold space for their feelings without taking it personally."
- "I am here to help them navigate this, not to fix it all."
- "I am a safe space for their feelings"




They are not in control. Their nervous system is making them out of control. This is not their choice.



TIPS FOR HANDLING SENSORY MELTDOWNS

a guide for parents

8 Validate Their Feelings



Even if it doesn't make sense to you, your child is experiencing something very real. Let them know you understand they're upset, even if you don't fully understand why. A simple "I know this is hard for you" can go a long way in making them feel heard and supported. When you talk to them, get on their level. Never stand above them.

You can say, "I see that you're really upset right now, and that's okay. I'm here for you."


9 Practice Breathing Exercises

If your child is able to follow your lead, guide them through simple breathing exercises. Deep breaths can help to reduce anxiety and bring some calm to their system. You can do this together, modeling slow, deep breaths to encourage them to join in.

For littles, make it a game—pretend you're blowing up a big balloon or blowing out candles on a birthday cake.



10 Give Them Time



Sometimes the best thing you can do is give your child space and time to come down from the meltdown. Rushing them or trying to "fix" the situation right away can make it worse. Allow them to process what's happening at their own pace.

Remember, this is a process. It's okay if it takes some time for them to settle. Your patience will show them that they're not alone in dealing with this.



AFTER THE MELTDOWN

a guide for parents

Once your child has calmed down, **it's important not to immediately dive into what happened.** Give them some space, and when they're ready, you can talk about it in simple terms. Ask them how they're feeling and what might help next time.

Use this as an opportunity to learn together. Maybe doing **sensory-friendly activities** could help reduce the frequency and intensity of sensory meltdowns.

SENSORY-FRIENDLY

a guide for parents

ACTIVITIES

Finding activities that are enjoyable and soothing for kids with sensory processing challenges can be incredibly rewarding. Sensory-friendly activities can help them explore their senses in a controlled way, provide much-needed sensory input, or simply offer a calming escape. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1 Nature Walks



Spending time in nature can be very grounding. A quiet walk in the park, forest, or by the beach allows children to engage with sensory input in a gentle, natural way. They can feel different textures (like leaves or sand), listen to calming sounds (like birds or water), and take in soothing visuals.

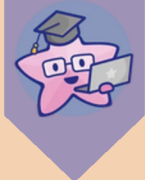
Turn it into a sensory scavenger hunt where they find specific items like a smooth rock, a feather, or a pinecone. This adds a playful element while also encouraging sensory exploration.

2 Sensory Bins



Sensory bins are a fantastic way to explore different textures and stimulate tactile senses. You can fill a bin with items like rice, beans, sand, water beads, or kinetic sand. Add small toys, scoops, and containers for them to dig, pour, and explore.

Create themed sensory bins, like a "beach day" with sand and seashells or a "farm" with dried corn kernels and small animal figures. Themed bins can make the activity more engaging.



SENSORY FRIENDLY

a guide for parents

ACTIVITIES

3 Water Play



Water play can be incredibly calming and provides various sensory experiences. Use a shallow bin with water and let your child explore with cups, sponges, or small toys. For a different twist, you can add bubbles, food coloring, or ice cubes. Sometimes taking a long shower, bath or swim might help them regulate.

If your child doesn't like getting wet, try using a squirt bottle or a sponge to "paint" with water on the sidewalk. This gives them control over their level of engagement with water.

4 Cooking and Baking



Cooking and baking can be a rich sensory experience. It involves touching different textures, smelling ingredients, and hearing the sounds of mixing and cooking. Let them help with tasks like stirring, kneading dough, or rolling out cookies.

Choose recipes that involve different sensory experiences, like making bread (kneading dough) or homemade ice cream (shaking a bag). The reward is getting to eat what they made, which can be a great motivator.

5 Art and Craft Projects

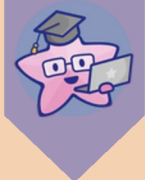


Art projects allow for sensory exploration in a creative way. Use materials like finger paints, clay, or shaving cream to create different textures. Drawing with chalk on the sidewalk or painting with watercolors can also be fun activities.

6 Sensory-Friendly Yoga



Yoga can be a great way for kids to connect with their bodies and practice self-regulation. Many yoga poses offer deep pressure and stretching, which can be calming and grounding. You can find yoga videos designed specifically for children, which often include fun animal poses and stories on youtube that they can follow along with.



SENSORY FRIENDLY

a guide for parents

ACTIVITIES

7 Calm Down Jars



Creating a calm down jar can be both an activity and a tool for self-soothing. Fill a jar with water, glitter glue, and some extra glitter. When shaken, the glitter swirls around and slowly settles, providing a mesmerizing visual effect that can help with relaxation and focus. This is always a favorite for kids of all ages.

9 Music and Movement



Playing music and encouraging movement can be a fun and sensory-rich activity. You can use musical instruments like drums, tambourines, or shakers to explore different sounds and rhythms. Movement activities like dancing, hopping, or jumping can provide the proprioceptive input that some children need to feel balanced. Try a "freeze dance" game where they dance to music and freeze when it stops. This adds a playful challenge and helps with self-regulation.

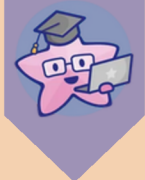
And having a dance party is a great way to connect with your kids. Let them choose a fun playlist and the volume, and dance with them.

8 Gardening



Gardening offers a variety of sensory experiences, from feeling the texture of soil to smelling flowers and herbs. It can be a slow-paced, grounding activity that allows for gentle exploration of the senses. Plus, having your hands in the soil is scientifically shown to improve your mood.

Create a small sensory garden with plants that have different textures and smells, like lamb's ear (soft leaves) or mint (strong scent). This can become a go-to sensory spot in your yard. Kids also love watching things grow and having responsibility to take care of things. You might need a patio or to keep it indoors during Arizona summers.



SENSORY FRIENDLY

a guide for parents

ACTIVITIES

10 Building with Sensory Blocks



Use textured blocks or materials like foam, rubber, or fabric blocks for building activities. These offer tactile feedback while allowing for creative play. Building towers or structures can also be calming and focus-promoting. Magnet tiles are a huge winner in most households.

11 Blowing Bubbles



Blowing bubbles is a simple yet effective sensory activity. It involves deep breathing, which can be calming, and offers visual stimulation as they watch the bubbles float and pop. You can also experiment with bubble wands of different shapes and sizes. For some kids, just blowing bubbles from a straw into a drink can be extremely calming and help them to regulate.

Navigating sensory processing challenges can be overwhelming, but with patience, creativity, and the right tools, you can help create a more manageable and comforting world for your child. Remember, every small adjustment makes a big difference. **You are not alone on this journey—continue to explore what works best for your family and embrace the process of learning together.**

Visit our website to learn more.