

Sensory Processing Characteristics Checklist

This checklist is not intended for use as a diagnostic tool for Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) or any other condition. It is intended to be used as an organizational tool for documenting sensory characteristics observed in an individual that can then be:

1. used to identify potential patterns of sensory characteristics (i.e., over responsive, under responsive, seeker) across the 8 senses (e.g., tactile, auditory, vestibular)
2. used when considering which proactive, universal strategies or adaptations to the environment may be helpful
3. shared with an occupational therapist to be used as part of their assessment of the individual's sensory processing

Mark any of the characteristics the individual demonstrates on a consistent basis. Use the space after each section to document any additional observations or concerns.

Remember, humans are sensory beings, and everyone will have some of these characteristics.

Visual

Over Responsive

Squints eyes frequently

Complains of headaches or eye pain frequently

Rubs eyes frequently

Prefers to be in dim light or the dark

Appears easily distracted by visual stimuli

Appears easily distracted by things moving within their visual field (e.g., people walking by)

Decreased eye contact

Dislikes visually busy places

Under Responsive

Misses visual details

Difficulty writing in the lines

Difficulty with eye-hand coordination tasks

Difficulty tracking words on a page when reading

Seeking

Prefers objects with bright colors or busy patterns

Prefers objects with moving parts

Engages with moving parts of items mainly to watch the movement

Enjoys watching things fall, drop, or move in front of their eyes

Stares at lights

Discrimination

Difficulty finding something in a field of similar items (e.g., can't find the highlighter in a pencil case full of markers)

Reversals when reading or writing

Difficulty telling the difference between colors, shapes, letters, etc.

Focuses on a small piece of what is seen rather than the "big picture"

May struggle with letter formation when writing

Difficulty identifying things that are partially covered

Auditory

Over Responsive

Complains about sounds others don't hear

Startles easily to sounds

Covers ears for sounds that do not typically bother others (e.g., hand dryers in the bathroom, someone sneezing)

Appears to be easily distracted by sounds in the environment

Frequently asks others to be quiet

Avoids loud environments (e.g., cafeteria, movie theater)

Under Responsive

- Appears not to hear their name being called (with hearing loss ruled out)
- Needs verbal directions to be repeated
- Seems oblivious to sounds in the environment

Seeking

- Hums or makes noises very often
- Makes repetitive sounds frequently (e.g., tapping pen on desk)
- Turns volume on devices up very loud
- Prefers to have background noise

Discrimination

- Can't tell what direction a sound is coming from
- Confuses sounds or words they hear with similar sounds or words (e.g., someone says 'cat' they think the person said 'cap')
- Difficulty determining which sounds to pay attention to

Tactile (Touch)

Over Responsive

- Reacts negatively to touch (e.g., startles, aggression)
- Doesn't like getting hands or face messy or walking barefoot
- Very particular about what clothes or fabrics they wear
- Eats a limited number of foods or textures
- Prefers to be away from others; avoids standing close to others
- Overreacts to minor injuries
- Complains about tags in clothing

Avoids grooming tasks

Resistant to play in tactile materials (e.g., sand, rice)

Under Responsive

High pain tolerance or does not seem to notice injuries

Appears disheveled (e.g., pants twisted, tongue of shoes down in shoe, coat twisted)

Does not appear to notice temperature (e.g., doesn't remove hand from water that is too hot)

Difficulty noticing when they are touched

Doesn't seem to notice messy hands or face

Seeking

Almost always wants to have something in their hands

Excessive love of messy play

Touches everything and/or everyone

Puts non-food items in mouth

Discrimination

Struggles to identify common objects by touch alone (e.g., can't find something in their desk unless they can see what they are touching)

Difficulty describing textures or physical characteristics of an object without looking at it

Olfactory (Smell)

Over Responsive

Reacts to smells others don't notice

Plugs nose often

Avoids places or people because of the way they smell

May gag or vomit from some smells

May have limited food preferences

Under Responsive

Doesn't notice strong odors

Doesn't notice or respond to threatening smells (e.g., smoke, chemicals)

Seeking

Explores the environment by smelling things

Likes to smell things not considered to have a strong odor

Excessively craves smelling preferred items

Likes strong odors

Gustatory (Taste)

Over Responsive

May have limited food preferences or prefer bland foods

Extremely picky eater

Difficulty with toothbrushing/using toothpaste

Under Responsive

Underactive gag reflex

Does not seem to notice extreme tastes (e.g., spicy, sour)

Seeking

Strongly prefers intensely flavored foods (e.g., spicy, salty, sour)

Puts non-food items in mouth

Likes to suck or chew on things excessively

Vestibular (Movement)

Over Responsive

Doesn't play on swings, slides, and other activities requiring movement

Dislikes feet leaving the ground

Keeps a hand on the wall, rail, or others when walking

Wraps feet around chair legs

Avoids walking on uneven surfaces

Experiences motion sickness frequently

Afraid of heights

Prefers sedentary activities (i.e., activities that can be done sitting, lounging, or lying down)

Under Responsive

May fall frequently

Often doesn't catch themselves when falling (e.g., doesn't put arms out)

Holds head sideways or at odd angles

Doesn't seem to get dizzy

Doesn't appear to be afraid or understand the danger of heights

Seeking

In constant motion

Climbs, runs, spins, crashes into things frequently

Enjoys being upside down

Repeats certain movements almost endlessly (e.g., rocking back and forth)

Proprioception (Muscles and Joints)

Over Responsive

Avoids hugs

Avoids physical activities that involve running, jumping, crashing, etc.

Prefers to sit still

Uses minimal pressure on pencil when writing

Under Responsive

Poor posture

Uses excessive pressure through pencil when writing

Appears clumsy

Bumps into objects and others frequently

Seeking

Grinds teeth

Chews on non-food items

Plays rough with peers

Likes tight fitting clothes

Jumps, climbs, and crashes into things frequently

Prefers crunchy and chewy foods

Frequently stretches

Walks on toes or is heavy-footed

Interoception

Over Responsive

Distressed by bladder or bowel sensations

Uses the bathroom more frequently than expected

Distressed by hunger or thirst sensations

Snacks or drinks more frequently than expected

Intense experience of changes in temperatures (e.g., distracted, agitated, overwhelmed)

Seems to have a low pain tolerance, intense experience of injuries and illness

Rapid changes in emotional levels

Under Responsive

Difficulty noticing when they need to use the restroom

Difficulty noticing when they are hungry or thirsty

Seems to have a high pain tolerance

Doesn't seem to notice when they are sick

Doesn't seem to notice changes in temperature

Difficulty identifying what is wrong