

Understanding Sensory Processing Disorder

What is sensory processing disorder (SPD)? SPD is a neurological disorder affecting 1 in 6 people. People with SPD misinterpret everyday sensory information, such as touch, sound and movement. They may feel bombarded by information, they may seek out intense sensory experiences, or they may be unaware of sensations that others feel. They may also have sensory-motor symptoms such as weak muscles, clumsiness, or delayed motor skills.

Sensory Meltdown Prevention Trick: From A to H (Amygdala to Hippocampus).

The amygdala is the brain structure involved in emotional responses. The hippocampus is a small region of the brain that is primarily associated with memory and spatial navigation. The amygdala and the hippocampus act synergistically and are activated following an emotional event. When a child is having an emotional reaction to sensory stimuli, the amygdala is activated. You can trick the amygdala to switch gears to the hippocampus by giving a child something cognitive that gets their attention fast, such as something silly and nonsensical. This can temporarily minimize the emotional reaction and stave off a sensory meltdown.

What classroom strategies can be implemented for a child with SPD?

- Implementing sensory strategies with a focus on heavy work activities that can be used for all students in the classroom.
 - Heavy work activities involve performing tasks that provide extra input to muscles and joints. This can promote attention and decrease defensiveness to classroom stimuli.
 - Heavy work classroom activity examples:
 - Carrying books, stretch breaks, taking down chairs, sports during PE and recess, using a hole puncher or stapler, tying a resistance band across foot rest of chair
- Incorporate a sensory plan into the classroom by providing various sensory tools and strategies
 - Activities and tools that are calming or modulating to the nervous system improve alertness, promote smoother classroom transitions, and regulate moods and energy.
 - Sensory examples:
 - Chewing gum, listening to calming music, squeezing a stress ball, taking movement breaks, blowing bubbles, sitting on an exercise ball, using a wiggle cushion, and playing in a sensory bin such as rice, pinto beans, etc.