

## Does my child need OT?

### Sensory processing

Our bodies and brains are constantly receiving sensory messages. Sight, sound, touch, taste and smell are our five external senses, giving us information about the world around us. We also have three internal senses. Our proprioceptive and vestibular senses give us awareness of our movement, speed, pressure on our joints and muscles and the position of our bodies. Lastly, our interoceptive sense detects what is happening in our organs such as hunger and bladder fullness. Sometimes, sensory signals are not received clearly, and it is hard to respond in a typical manner. This can be described as having a 'traffic jam in the brain'.

Every person is unique, and we all have sensory preferences. It is when these preferences or patterns interfere with our ability to participate and learn, when there seems to be a 'traffic jam in the brain', that we need to consider addressing them.

Sensory processing challenges can look different for each person, but there are some common patterns we can identify. Below are some red flags that might indicate sensory processing challenges.

- Avoids or over-responds to sensations, for example:
  - touch (e.g. messy play, seems unaware of pain, upset by daily routine tasks such as dressing, bathing, washing hair, cutting nails)
  - noise (e.g. covers ear in response to loud noises, notices soft background noises more than others, avoids low frequency sounds such as blender, vacuum cleaner, lawn mower)
  - smell (e.g. seems to over-react to everyday household smells or be fussy about soaps, washing powder)
  - food (e.g. limited diet, does not eat certain food textures or temperatures, gags on food)
  - movement (e.g. avoids climbing or moving surfaces especially when areas are busy with other children, tends to hesitate or be cautious in movement)
- May not register pain or temperature accurately (e.g. under-respond to pain; not register heat well and may not consider taking off their jumper unless prompted)
- Seems clumsy or uncoordinated (e.g. taking longer than expected to learn motor skills, bumping into others, falling over more than peers, grasping items too firmly or too loosely)
- Seems to seek and crave certain sensory input (e.g. 'on the go', difficulty sitting still, fidgets, makes noises for no apparent reason, seeks deep pressure touch or certain smells)
- Overly rough when playing or takes excessive risks in play
- Sleep difficulties
- Limited attention / concentration – easily distracted
- Resistive to new activities / changes in routine
- Difficulty with emotional regulation (gets overwhelmed easily or has unexpected tantrums or meltdowns)

In the following sections (gross motor, fine motor, activities of daily living, play and social learning), a number of milestones and approximate ages are listed. If you notice your child is having difficulty reaching these milestones, further assessment by an OT may be beneficial.

## Gross motor skills

Gross motor skills use our large muscles to enable us to walk, run, hop, jump, catch a ball and play sport. These skills require a foundation of core stability, muscle strength, coordination, motor planning and balance and effective sensory processing from our body position and movement senses.

Some milestones are:

- Holds head steady and erect (6 months)?
- Explores environment e.g. climbing on/off chairs, going up/down steps (1-2 year olds)?
- Enjoys rough and tumble play (2-3-year olds)?
- Copies actions in songs (2 years)?
- Kicks and throws a ball (3 years)?
- Balance on 1 leg, begins to hop (3 years)?
- Puts hands out to protect themselves when they fall over?
- Successfully negotiates around obstacles at kinder, home or school?
- Uses playground equipment such as climbing or going on uneven surfaces – similar to their peers?

## Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills use the small muscles of the hands to perform precise movements such as using cutlery, doing up buttons, drawing, cutting and handwriting. These skills require a foundation of core stability, shoulder girdle stability, precise movement of the eyes, coordination, hand strength and dexterity.

Some milestones are:

### 2-year-olds

- Holds crayon with fist grasp – see image to right
- Scribbles in circular motion
- Imitates (watches you first) drawing a vertical line
- Picks up small objects with tip of thumb and index finger (“neat” pincer grasp)
- Uses spoon well



### 2 ½ year olds

- Holds crayon close to tip with fist grasp - see image to right
- Imitates horizontal & vertical lines, and circle
- Strings 1cm beads



### 3-year-olds

- Holds pencil with digital pronate grasp - see image to right
- Copies horizontal & vertical lines, and circle
- Cuts with scissors across strip of paper



## Fine motor skills continued.

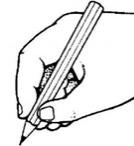
### 4-year-old

- Holds pencil with static tripod grasp - see image to right
- Draws person with 6-8 parts
- Manages large buttons
- Cuts around a corner



### 5-year-old

- Holds pencil in tripod grasp - see image to right
- Copies cross (X), square, triangle
- Draws recognisable house
- Cuts approximately around a shape
- Able to touch thumb to each of the fingers



### 6-year-old

- Cuts accurately around a shape
- Learning letter formations

## Activities of daily living

Activities of daily living make up the routines of your child's day including eating, dressing, toileting, grooming and sleeping. The development of these skills can vary depending on what exposure and practice your child has had. Some general milestones are:

### 0-1 year olds

- Mouthing toys
- Transitioning to textured food
- Happy to be held and moved e.g. be placed on back for nappy change

### 1-2 year olds

- Feeds self with spoon – improving by 2 years old
- Using straw cup or sippy cup
- Takes off shoes and socks
- Assists by positioning body for dressing e.g. holds out arms

### 2-3 year olds

- Drinks from open cup
- Undertakes early dressing skills such e.g. undressing
- Uses a fork

### 3-4 year olds

- Undertakes most dressing tasks
- Wees in toilet without help

### 5-6 year-olds

- Attempts to use knife to spread
- Washes hands and face independently
- Cares for self after poo
- Beginning to learn how to tie laces

## Play and social learning

Play is naturally how children enjoy themselves and learn about their world. Social learning is a term used to describe the thinking behind understanding the social world we live in, enabling us to play and learn with others. Some milestones are:

### 0-1 year olds

- Visually tracking movement (toys and people)
- Exploring and manipulating objects with hands
- Interested in cause and effect toys
- Enjoys touch and movement where their feet leave the ground e.g. held and bounced
- Imitates sounds, gestures and emotions

### 1-2 year olds

- Interested in engaging with moving toys (balls, cars/trucks, pull toys)
- Moves and explores environment e.g. climbing on/off chairs, going up/down steps etc
- Pretend play begins e.g. feed dolly, put to bed

### 2-3 year olds

- Plays beside peers (parallel play)
- Taking / snatching toys from others is expected at this age
- Child can use objects for different functions in their play e.g. a box for a table or car
- Learning to share and take turns (3 years +)

### 4 year-olds

- Plays with peers, negotiates during play (cooperative play)
- Sharing and taking turns with other children
- Learning about thoughts and feelings – mine and others
- Learning to follow a group plan (e.g at kindergarten)

If you would like further information, or to discuss your child's development in any of the above areas, contact Sarni on 0419 119 569 or [sarni@cornerstoneotforkids.com.au](mailto:sarni@cornerstoneotforkids.com.au).