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Individuals with sensory processing disorders, or sensory integration dysfunction, often have a combination of responses to sensory input. Depending on the type of input, some are sensory seekers, some are sensory avoiders, some have difficulty with motor output, and some have difficulty with discriminating input.

Sensory avoiders are typically over-responsive to sensory input. They try to avoid input and are often viewed as sensitive individuals. Sensory avoiders often have difficulty with activities of daily living as they avoid uncomfortable input. They may:

- Attempt to cover their eyes or ears
- Dislike lights or sounds
- Avoid clothing that is uncomfortable
- Avoid messy play
- Have difficulty with being wet or avoid bathing and washing hands
- Become fussy with grooming activities
- Avoid playground equipment
- Respond to touch as if it is painful
- Be a picky eater

Strategies for sensory avoiders in the classroom

Sensory avoiders need less input in order to reduce anxiety. They will retreat from new sensations and resist changes. They may display more ritualistic behaviors. To improve their sensory processing, they need to feel safe and secure. Slowly expanding their range of sensory input through exposure is helpful. Always consult with your OT and remember to consider a child’s individual needs when choosing activities with the goal of organizing behavior for improved learning.

Opportunities to participate in the sensory bins mentioned last week is a good option, but should not be forced if this overwhelms a sensory avoider. Creating opportunities for retreat, such as a calm space, is helpful. Other classroom strategies that may help sensory avoiders:
- Reduce overhead lighting
- Allow hats and sunglasses, as needed
- Reduce clutter in the classroom
- Reduce complexity of worksheets
- Avoid perfumes and candle warmers in the classroom
- Schedule quiet breaks in the classroom and reduce noise
- Create barriers for desk work (cardboard carrel)
- Consider sensory friendly clothing
- Preferential seating: side of room, away from distractions
- Allow use of tools when using messy materials (i.e. brush versus finger)
- Encourage parents to send extra clothes, in case clothes get wet or dirty
- Introduce textures and messy play slowly (dry ingredients first)
- Consider feeding therapy, if food aversion is impacting nutrition
- Consider sensory-friendly events, such as movies
- Prepare in advance for haircuts and grooming activities and choose sensory-friendly salons and dentists
- Use weighted blankets and pads for calming