Summer Sensory Strategies

Contributed by Kristi A. Jordan, OTR/L

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Sensory Overload

Summertime is a time for fun and a change in pace. For many individuals, this can be an opportunity to play, rest, and relax. For others, this can be stressful, overwhelming, and disorganizing.

There are many effective strategies to reduce stress, maintain skills, and to improve sensory processing.

Summer is a sensory-rich season

Think…wind, water, sun, sand, lotions, increased skin exposure, lots of outdoor play and movement, sticky and messy summer foods, festivals and fairs, parties and celebrations.

Here are some strategies to help monitor for signs of sensory overload and some strategies for when overload occurs.

Monitor for signs of overload

• Be aware of the environment and what an individual may find overwhelming, based on past experiences (tastes, smells, sounds, touch, movement, or a combination of sensations)
• Monitor for signs typical of “shut downs” related to sensory stimuli and recognize that some tantrums and behaviors may be due to an overwhelmed nervous system
• Be aware of irritability, over-excitability, and/or extreme silliness
• Watch for changes in or a lack of focus on activities
- Recognize fight or flight and escape behaviors, such as running away, hiding, or covering ears or eyes
- Be mindful of sudden or increased irritation by clothes, textures, and touch or sensitivity to movement, sights, or sounds. This may include verbal and non-verbal “complaints”

**Develop some individualized strategies for overload**
- Reduce sensory overload in the environment (i.e. calm, quiet, and safe places)
  - Reduce sensory overload for the individual (i.e. sunglasses, hat or visor, soft clothing, etc.)
- Prepare beforehand for sensory experiences (i.e. apply sunscreen before going to the beach and away from sand and seek opportunities for calming and organizing sensory inputs and activities)
- Practice calming/coping routines with individuals to teach self-management. Include visuals

For more strategies and ideas, check out [IRCA sensory articles online](http://www.pinterest.com/IRCAIU/) or visit us at [http://www.pinterest.com/IRCAIU/](http://www.pinterest.com/IRCAIU/).