



AUTISM

- Pieces of the Puzzle

SENSORY OVERLOAD

Description of:

Reaction to sensory stimulation is often the first thing noticed in children with autism. It appears that their nervous system does not know how to filter or interpret sensory information as it is coming in to them. Children with autism overreact (hypersensitive) or underreact (hyposensitive) to sensory input. Children with hypersensitivity tend to avoid the sensory input, and children with hyposensitivity will often seek out or create the sensory input.

It might be the tags in their clothes, clothes that fit too tightly around their waist, food that has a different texture, noises, or movement seem that bother or affect them. Sometimes children with autism are so in tune or alert to sensory input that they are the children that notice the tiniest piece of fuzz on the carpet, or hear a noise before anyone else recognizes it, or even notice when someone changes their brand of perfume.

What Areas Might This Affect:

- Tolerating a variety of sensory input
- Sleeping patterns and routines
- Participating in community events
- Developing peer relationships
- Adjusting to different environments

What You Can Do To Build Or Encourage The Skill:

- Expose them to sensory input methodically.
- Seek out the advice or guidance from an occupational therapist.
- Always talk about sensory experiences before they happen.
- Pair a comforting sensory experience with one that might be more difficult for them. For example, if they are children that seek out music to calm them, use music while introducing them to textures in their food.
- For younger or less verbal children, set up sensory input to a switch to give them more control.
- For older or more verbal children, have them come up with an amount of time that they will be exposed to the sensory input. Chart the time spent on the activity so they have a concrete way of tracking this.

Recommended Resources:

- Autism Society of America (www.autism-society.org)
- Autism Research Institute (www.autism.com)
- The Source (www.maapservices.org)
- TheraSimplicity (www.therasimplicity.com)