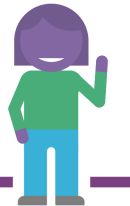


SENSORY MELTDOWN

Children inherently want to please, they do not want to misbehave or get in trouble.

A Day in the Life of a Child With Sensory Processing Issues

Meet Olivia, a first grader with sensory processing issues. She's a bright kid, but her sensory issues are often misunderstood by teachers and family members. To see how sensory processing issues can affect grade-schoolers both in and out of school, take a look at a typical day in Olivia's life.



Click on link below to read
*a Day in the Life with a
sensory child*

<https://u.org/2JSKhoW>

Sensory Meltdowns:

a fight or flight response to sensory overload. It can often be mistaken for a tantrum or behavior problem.

Children with sensory processing challenges can be compared to this cup example. Our sensory kids' cups are typically occupied by some level of sensory challenge throughout the day. They experience uncomfortable or challenging sensorimotor experiences that they often have learned to cope with on a daily basis. These sensory experiences become "residue" left in their cup as they aren't making them disappear daily. When they merely cope with the sensations they aren't making them disappear, they are pushing them aside for the time being so that they can meet the other demands of daily situations. So now we can see that our sensory kids can start with a



<http://bit.ly/2JUOwcj>

Self-Regulation:

allows children to manage their emotions, behavior, and body movements when they are faced with a situation that's tough to handle. It also allows children to do this while still staying focused and paying attention (<https://u.org/2JTwnf0>).

When a child has sensory difficulties they might have a hard time processing information that comes through one or more of their senses (5 traditional senses, plus interoception, proprioception, and vestibular). The problem lies in the body's nervous system: it has trouble regulating itself. When sensory overload happens, our sensory kids might have trouble self-regulating and may need more adult support to regain regulation.

Adapting to an environment and constantly changing needs and demands on the nervous system requires complex processing in the brain. It is important to recognize that children who have a difficult time with self-regulation might have a meltdown, and we as adults need try and identify certain signals before jumping to the conclusion that the response is behaviorally driven.

somewhat full cup compared to a child that does not have difficulties with processing sensory information. If support is not given, our sensory kid's cup can fill up quicker once daily social, academic, emotional, and physical demands are placed on them. Their cup becomes full and a sensory meltdown can be triggered (<http://bit.ly/2JUOwcj>).

Common Causes of Sensory Meltdowns: (<http://bit.ly/2lhZWtF>)

- sensory overload
- inability to maintain self-regulation
- inability to cope with new or challenging situations
- inability to communicate wants or needs
- difficulty with transitions
- change in routine

Responding to Sensory Meltdowns Effectively: (<http://bit.ly/2lhZWtF>)

- use a calm voice/stay in control - *remember that your child is having a neurological response, you cannot help your child if you are not calm yourself*
- use short phrases and a quiet voice
- talk as little as possible - *the brain is having a fight or flight response and the part of the brain that processes language is essentially shut down*
- remove child from the over stimulated environment - *find a quiet place for child to calm down*
- use deep breathing exercises - *in through the nose out through the mouth (do with your child)*
- provide a sensory retreat - *firm squeezes to arms/legs, soft music, weighted blanket, etc.*
- label emotions - *I can see that you are frustrated. I bet it made you mad that someone took your turn. etc.*



“Fight or Flight”:

is the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) that is intended for safety and the ability to react to a perceived dangerous situation.

Children with sensory difficulties can see their environment as dangerous based on how they process sensory information. When having a sensory meltdown the nervous system switches to a “fight or flight” response. The brain can no longer take in demands as their “cup is full”. Common behaviors that may manifest itself in this response:

- hitting, kicking, spitting, biting
- running or escaping from situation
- hiding under something
- covering ears or eyes
- shutting down; not speaking or responding
- avoiding eye contact

At this point the brain cannot respond with reasoning as it is in “fight or flight” mode (<http://bit.ly/2lhprLy>).

For more information and helpful strategies contact your Occupational Therapist.