

NEURODIVERSITY > SENSORY PROCESSING

Sensory Processing

Full transcript · 7 video clips · generated 22 September 2026

About this transcript. This transcript was produced automatically from the video audio. It has not been checked by a person, so names, place names, te reo Māori and medical terms may be wrong in places. The video is the record. If something here reads oddly, please check it against the video.

Watch the series: listeningtofamilies.co.nz/sensory-processing

IN THIS TRANSCRIPT

1. Sensory processing - What is sensory processing
2. Sensory processing - Sensory seeking and sensory avoidance
3. Sensory processing - Sensory issues - the impact on sleep
4. Sensory processing - Sensory issues - the impact on eating
5. Sensory processing - Children's awareness of their sensory issues
6. Sensory processing - When to push - when to accommodate
7. Sensory processing - key messages

1. Sensory processing - What is sensory processing

I'm Tamira and I'm a mum of a neurodiverse kid. I'm Kim, I have two children with autism and sensory processing difficulties. I'm Justine Aldis, I'm an occupational therapist from Socially Speaking. Keira, my name's Penny Price, I'm an occupational therapist at Montreal House, the Child Development Service. We just wanted to ask, what is sensory processing? It's the ability to focus, to sort and screen sensory information from the environment and from inside our bodies in order to perform, and then to respond to that in order to perform activities that we need to do in our day-to-day lives. Sensory processing is only an issue if our ability to process that sensory information is affecting our ability to do things that we need to do, want to do, have to do, or in interactions with other people.

And often I would say it's one of the foundations of our development, really, is being able to have that effective sensory processing and getting those messages from the environment and, as Penny said, from within ourselves in an effective and accurate way, which then means that the way we are interpreting things and then the way we're behaving in situations kind of matches, perhaps, what is happening with other people and with the group around us. But we're all sensory beings, sorry. We all have our own sensory preferences, our own sensory differences, things that we like and dislike, and that's okay, that's part of who we are, part of being human.

So an example of sensory processing, I don't know if that would be helpful, say, like, if I was going to throw a ball at you, your eyes would see the ball, you'd see how big the ball was, how fast the ball was. It's coming towards you, what you need, the angle of the throw, and then your brain would work that information out and process it and then organise your body's actions in order to catch the ball. Well, you might be sitting in a classroom and a little bit of a situation we're having here where there might be some noise outside, but your teacher is giving an instruction, and so you are having to use your brain to work out, what do I need to attend to?

There's kids talking here, and there's other stuff, there's the lawnmower going outside, and my teacher's telling me I need to do this and this, and it's working out what's important to attend to and being able to filter out all of that other noise that's going on around me. I think there are more than just the five senses that we talk about. Can you tell us more about those? Good old five senses. I always say

to people, oh, I learnt them at school, the five senses. I don't know why, I don't know if anyone else learnt them at school. Oh, there we go. So we've got touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing.

And then we've got the three other senses that I think as Occupation Therapists we focus a lot on. Do you want me to talk about one? Yep, you can go on. So one that I often think about because it's one that I struggle with myself is proprioception, which is kind of having that body awareness, really, of where your body parts are in relation to yourself and relation to other people. I struggle a little bit with that area myself. So I am someone who often will misjudge how close I am to things. I will kind of bash myself on things. Spatial awareness. Yeah, that sort of, and I'm often a little bit clumsy with my movements and things like that.

And we have little proprioceptors in all of our muscles and joints. So right now, okay, I like to do a little activity. So I'll get you to wiggle your toes while we're talking. Yep. So you're wiggling your toes, but you didn't look at your toes to work out. Where they were, you knew where they were because your proprioceptors were giving you all that information and your brain's going, okay, that's where my toes are. And this is the movement that I need to do. So sometimes, you know, that's kind of key for being able to move around, being able to position ourselves, to know that we are very close to the person beside us or that we need to be a little bit further away, those sorts of things.

Yeah. All right. So proprioception works really closely with vestibular sensory input, which I'll explain in a second, and also touch to give you a sense of body awareness, where your body is and how your body's moving. So vestibular, I'll do that one. Vestibular input is, it's the receptors for vestibular input that are in your inner ear. Vestibular input gives you information about where your head is and how your head is moving. So how fast your head is and how fast you are moving. And what direction your head is in, so whether you're upside down, whether you're going forward, when you're going backwards, whether you're doing roller-polies, how you're moving.

So, yeah, that's vestibular, really. The other one is interoception. So interoception is the new kid on the block, really. It's the one that we're all learning about. Not a lot of people have. And to be honest, I probably haven't heard about it until the last few years. It's really, it's a new thing. It's a new thing. It's a new thing. It's a sense that we, it's new, and we're all learning about it and finding out about what it is and what it means. So interoception is, sorry, I should have said that. It's information from inside your body. So it's information from all, things like, I'm going to be knowing whether you're hungry, whether you're thirsty, whether your blood is full, whether you need to use the bathroom, whether you've got pain somewhere in your body.

What else, what else? There's another one. Hot and cold, whether you're hot and cold. Temperature regulation. It's, yeah. It's all about feeling those senses and responding to those senses, and it ties in closely with, as well, emotions. So knowing, like, if your heart's beating fast or you're breathing fast, what sort of emotion you might be feeling if you've got that sort of sensation happening. So it's really new. Yeah. And it's quite a interesting, really interesting. I think there's sort of some findings coming out that, you know, our body actually responds before our brain can. Our brain cognitively makes sense of how we're feeling.

So it's actually picking up on those body changes, which we do pretty much a lot of the time, and then our brain makes sense and goes, oh, oh, I notice my heart's beating faster. What does that mean? Am I excited? Am I anxious? What's actually going on? And then your brain kind of makes sense of it, but we know that it's those changes that are occurring before we work it out. Yeah. So it's very interesting. It is interesting. It is interesting. There's going to be lots more research I think about this. So, yes. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

2. Sensory processing - Sensory seeking and sensory avoidance

Clinicians, sometimes you hear them talking about sensory seeking or sensory avoidance, what does that mean? Yes, yes. So this is kind of coming into that thing of what happens when your brain isn't processing that sensory information perhaps as effectively as other people might. So, and often we can talk about, I guess we talk about sort of a little bit of unders and overs, don't we, in terms of how that sensory processing change or difference might work for different children. We, in our service, we use the terms under-responsiveness and over-responsiveness. So if you are over-responsive to sensory input, that's when you might be sensory avoiding.

Sensory input is really overwhelming for you. It's like a little bit. A little teeny tiny bit of sensory information feels like an awful lot for you or for the brain and it's really overwhelming. And then the under-responsiveness reaction is when you can either be sensory seeking or you might be low registration. So here the sensory input, a lot of sensory information feels like a little bit. So, and when you're sensory seeking, you want, you like that sensory information, you love that sensory information, you're trying to get that sensory input. You're trying to do more to get that sensory input that your brain needs.

And then low registration, these kids aren't so active in trying to get that sensory input. They are more relaxed about it. They're not aware of sensory input and tend to sort of really, really high level. So they're not aware of noise until it's really, really loud. Or somebody points it out to them. So they might not be aware of the teacher giving them an instruction in class because there's a lot

going on. And they haven't registered that sensory input until the teacher comes right up to them, looks them in the face, taps them on the shoulder and gives them extra information to help them out.

Can a child have both? That is such a common question. We get asked that every single time we run the course from somebody in the... I should have said that. Yes, you can have both. It can look like you can have both. So it can look like you might be over-responsive, say, in your touch. You might be tactile processing. But you might be seeking of auditory input and sound. So you can have mixture, mixed responses. Or you might be neither. You might be neither under or over in another sensory input. You might show both characteristics in the same sensory area. So often I'll have questions of, well, you know, my child's in the car and he's telling everyone else to be quiet.

But then he's singing along to the noise of the radio and he's making all his noises. But he's telling them, shh, when his siblings are talking. And so sometimes the way I tend to frame that is that it seems to be a bit about control. So if you can imagine when we're making the noise, when we're touching things, our brain is ready for that. Our brain is the one going, I'm touching this or I'm making this noise. And so that feels quite good. But if someone else is making a noise, there's actually been some research that's shown that for people who have some sensitivity to noise, what happens is every time that noise happens, they go into like a fright kind of situation.

So their brainwaves go up and then they drop down again to rest. And then another noise happens from the other sibling and the brainwaves go up again. The person gets another fright and then it goes down to rest. So you can imagine how tiring, to me, that would be. If your brain's always having a fright, every time something is happening. And so if you make the noise yourself, that might cover those other noises, first of all. So that might make your brain a bit calmer. And it feels good for you. It helps your brain to adapt and to cope. So you're kind of trying to block out some of that other stuff.

Yeah, I think it can often appear that the child is under or over responsive in the same sense. But yeah, if the child has control over that sensory input, then it's more likely that they are over responsive to it. It's more likely that they're becoming overwhelmed by that sensory input. And they're blocking that out. They're blocking that out by taking a really active, positive way of helping them cope with that sensory input that they're over responsive to, that they're sensitive to.

3. Sensory processing - Sensory issues - the impact on sleep

Can the way you process your senses and your input, can that affect your sleep? Yes, absolutely. It might not be the only thing that affects sleep, but yes, it definitely can affect sleep. Getting to sleep, or then waking up in the morning? Or is that something different? I think getting to sleep is always a tricky one. And so, as you know, it can be for us as well, as adults, as well as our kids. And sometimes I think, you know, sometimes from my perspective, it's about experimenting, and parents feeling okay to experiment about what sensory things someone might need to help with sleep. Because sometimes I think, you know, often our received wisdom is that we need a good calming down time, and I think for a lot of children that works really well.

But some children I've worked with need a, that you need to kind of have a bit more movement, and a bit more focus. And a bit more of an oomph before bed. Because actually they kind of need to almost get their sensory things up, and get that movement that they need, and then they drop down into being tired. My son does that every night. He gets really wired and hyper at sort of nine o'clock. Yes, yes. You know, and goes dancing, singing and dancing, and he's not that kind of kid at all. But before bed he does, but then he sleeps very well. Yep. Yeah. And I think it's okay to perhaps go with that because I think sometimes parents might feel like, oh no, you can't be doing this, you've got to be calm, and you've got to, you know.

But some children need, they need that kind of sensory input at that point, and then that helps them to go down into sort of a, a sort of quiet state after that. Yeah. It's like any, any activity that a child does throughout the day, really. It's looking at the child's sensory preferences and differences. So if the child is over-responsive to, to auditory input, to noise, and they're struggling to sleep because there's too much happening, like there's the sound of the heat pump, or there's the sound of the clock beside them on the, on the bedside table, or the car's going past, it's looking at finding strategies to help them child with that, help a child to help them cope with that, that sensory input.

So you might use green noise or white noise to drain them. The sounds that they don't like, or you might use, there's some headphones that you might use that, that might help your child. Yeah. Yeah, so it's just, you're thinking about your child's sensory needs and how they impact on all, all those, all the activities that they do throughout the day. Yeah. It's the same sort of. Is that also a factor to like, we often have the sheets not perfectly flat. Yes. There's a crumb in here, I can feel a crumb. Yes. Yeah. That's it. You can't do sensitivity. With a crumb. Yeah. So really that whole, my whole system is quite sensitive to anything that feels like that.

Yeah. They touch it. Yeah. Yeah. Or their hair on the pillow is, is touching their face or their neck, and that feels, that feels horrible. We can't, we can't have blankets tucked in. Yeah. Yeah. Why are you making my bed? Don't make my bed. Yeah. Yes. That's so, that's so personal, isn't it really? Yes. Because another child might love that tucked in sensation. Yes. Really tucked in tight. Because they, they

love that, that proprioception, so they can put through their muscles and joints. Yeah. That, that firm touch that they, that they love and they enjoy and it helps them to feel calm. So it's such a personal thing.

Yeah. Yeah. And I think that's, you know, that's that kind of which I think you guys do really well, is being curious and kind of going, what is this about? You know? Yeah. And I know myself as a parent, you know, my daughter's always had quite a bit of touch sensitivity. And luckily, luckily I knew a bit about it. So when she was little and there was a lot of issues around shoes and socks and things like that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Just sometimes putting that on the table you can feel like you're encouraging children to do that, which can be a big thing for some children.

You know, I was able to kind of feel a bit like okay there's something happening here and I can go with this. And so that's kind of gradually for her, we've found some ways to manage that. But I think it's that whole thing of being curious and you know what. Yeah. You know, which I think you do really well too. Okay, I do understand that there is something here that's causing you an issue and we need to work it out.

because it's real for for our kids you know it's it's it actually does really feel unpleasant and and really yucky and yeah everyone wants to sleep and as parents you know your child so well you know your child you're the expert on your child and what they like and they don't dislike and you've already got an idea of what they might be sensitive to and under responsive to so it's um yeah it's it's thinking about what if what if you thought about trying what if what have you read about trying and trying those stretches out but also and giving them a good guy like giving them up to eight weeks of trying that strategy consistently to see if it works or doesn't doesn't work and first time you try it might actually not work but just keep on keeping on because yeah eventually it might might help after those eight weeks and you'll know if it doesn't then try something else

4. Sensory processing - Sensory issues - the impact on eating

How, sensory processing, how can that affect eating? Yes, well, quite a lot. It's a big thing, isn't it, really? There's so many sensory factors in eating. It's probably one of the most sensory... It involves a lot of the activities that we do, really, sensory activities that we do. So, yeah, it's not just about the taste or the texture of the food, eh? It's the look. We were talking before about these. The look, the smell. Foods that are white and no colour to them often are the foods that the kids like. So, yeah, the beige foods. Yeah. Natural things that look the same and taste the same have the same mouthfeel each and every time.

Predictable. So the temperature, like, no, chicken's always hot. You can't... I have cold. You didn't like that. Yes. Yeah, the temperature of food is a big thing as well. What is the smell and how it feels in your mouth or how it feels on your hands when you pick it up. Coordinating your movement and using the proprioception from your hands to manipulate the colour. It's such a... I mean, sitting on the chair. And coping with the noise in the... I mean, mealtimes are often big social things with lots of people talking. So there's so much happening. And I think that's... You know, that's one of the things I've...

Talking to some of the other parents I've been working with is, you know, is maybe it's OK if their child takes their book and goes and sits over here at dinner time rather than sitting at the table and having those expectations because I know some parents have found that they will actually eat if they take their headphones and their book and go over there. Yes. Instead of the expectation of, well, I've got to sit with the big family and it's noisy and there's people doing things I don't like and I have to hear someone else chewing and I have to look at someone else's mouth and, you know, and taking some of that away has been successful for some people.

And, you know, it's like a society thing. We sort of go, well, you need to do it like this. But maybe you don't. One of my children has to eat on her own. And she has her headphones and her iPad. She's listening to a music or a video or something. And she eats beautifully with that. If she's at the table with us, she's mucking with her fork and she's playing in the water and it's too much and she doesn't eat. Yeah. We virtually have to feed her. She's 20. But if she's on her own and doing her thing and she eats fine. That's wonderful that you've found a strategy. She's found a strategy that helps.

People say, oh, she's not eating with her. No, she's not. It doesn't work for her. But what's the goal? The goal is for her to eat. Exactly. And good nutrition. Yeah. And you've found a way. So that's just brilliant. I'm going to do a plug. We've got a couple of online resources on our website, on the Child Development Service website. So one of them is called Nutrition Matters. And that was written by, well, they were both written by a couple of dietitians and an occupational therapist from our service. Nutrition Matters is looking at the child's diet and whether they're getting all the vitamins and minerals that they need and gives some ideas about how to expand a child's diet.

And the other one that we have is, ah, and it's gone, Creating More Positive Mealtimes is that one. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Have you seen them? Because they're really good resources. I feel like I've seen the Positive Mealtimes. And I think I read that quite some time ago. That one's more about sensory processing and more about what you can do to make mealtimes less stressful for the child and your family so they are, yeah, available through the Child Development Service and resources for parents. Yeah, yeah. And what I would also

say, because at Social Speaking we also do a bit of work in schools, and, you know, sometimes I've found with schools being, you know, they feel like they're trying to be helpful and they might say, well, you know, this child brings chocolate to school every day, so no, that's not good for their nutritional needs or they need to bring a sandwich.

And then, you know, the parent made them a sandwich and they came in with a sandwich and then they ate nothing for the whole day. So, you know, supporting parents, I think, to advocate with schools, to help schools to understand that it's OK, this is what, you know, it's better that my child has something to eat rather than they bring something that you consider to be sort of acceptable, I guess. It's such a stressful thing for parents though, isn't it? I mean, it's, as a parent, you want your child to have a good, rounded diet. It's just incredibly stressful. I think if you're worried that your child's not getting what they need from their food, talking to your GP, blood tests can be horrible, can't they?

But if that's OK for your child getting one of those, to work out whether they're missing anything from their diet. It's quite, yeah, stressful because my daughter's very anxious so she won't eat breakfast before school and she won't eat at school, so she's not eating till 3.30. And I think that's quite common from what I've heard from people. And you've been trying to do everything else. So lately at school we've sort of been talking about, is she allowed a chop of milk at her desk with a straw? Has the school asked you? No, I suggested it was OK that the student had that. Absolutely. Because it's like, at least something is going into her system.

She's got some energy throughout the day. Yeah, my son doesn't eat at school either because of the things he does eat. He's worried that kids are going to say, why have you just got crackers and chips and pretzels and things? Because he goes to a school that provides school lunch. And it's things like bolognese and meatballs and cheesy pastas and things. He doesn't eat any of that kind of stuff. And I know this. So he refuses to eat at school because he's worried about what other people are going to say. But he does have a good breakfast. And he has a chop of milk and toast. And after school he's ravenous.

It's not about not wanting to eat, but he's worried about what other people are going to say about what he is eating. Yes, and that's not, I think for some of the teens, that can be fairly common. And I worked with a young man and he struggled to eat during the school day. And in the end, what we found out worked for him was that he would have a packet of, it was like those, the biscuits with the hundreds of thousands top on them. He would have a packet of those in his pocket. And what he would do was he would just eat some when he was sort of walking across from here to here sort of thing. And the school knew that he was allowed to do that.

And that was just what he did. So he sort of got a little bit of what, some nutrients in. And it was what he liked because that was important. But it was kind of something. And it was a way that was sort of, other people didn't really notice. It was sort of out of the radar. Yeah, well even if it is just sugar, at least it's energy, you know? Absolutely, yeah. My daughter's diet is shocking. I'm really embarrassed about what goes in her packed lunch box. But I know that she's going to eat it. And I think that's, it's important as parents to look at not just one meal at a time, but look and think about the, like 24 hours, 48 hours.

And what is your child taking on during that time period? So I know that when she comes home from school, she's going to have a good dinner or afternoon tea. She's going to eat some things there. But yeah, it's really stressful. And as our parents, it's one of our big main jobs. We have a little bit of that. My kids had a vision to stickers. Right. All over their lunch boxes. And fruit has stickers on it. And if they see a sticker, they're suddenly nauseous. They're gagging. They can't eat. So that's been quite a hard thing to negotiate. Isn't that funny? Yeah. Yeah. Because you can control it at home.

I can make sure the stickers are off all the fruit. But then they sit down at lunchtime and they're supposed to sit in a group with these kids. And the other kids have stickers all over their lunch boxes. That's hard. Yeah. And it can be the same with like smell. Like, you know, you've got to sit next to someone and they've got a banana and they really dislike this and may actually want to gag. But you don't feel like eating. So any of those kind of aversive responses that children have. And trying to explain it to a teacher or someone else. Like if it's a dirty teacher, it's not their normal teacher that knows them.

Yes. Because if someone over there has a sticker on their lunch box, it's quite hard, especially for a small child, to advocate for themselves. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. And I know sometimes parents find it hard even advocating with a school as well. And that concept I think you were saying about that, you know, as a parent, you're the expert in your child. But I know sometimes parents feed back to me that when they go to school, it may not feel like that. Angie, sometimes I've been told, oh, you can't pack that into his lunch. Yes. Yes. When he was younger. Yes. No. Well. This is what he will eat. I've got bigger fish to fry than worrying about food.

Yeah. Yeah. That's okay. Yeah. It must be hard for teachers though, hey? Yes. I mean, as a parent, you can't be one or a few kids with sensory processing needs but have a whole class that have got probably a range of diverse sensory processing preferences. It must be really hard. It must be a trick. Yeah. We heard on the news that our lunches are healthy and rubbish free. Yes. And it's understanding. And I think schools are starting to get that, you know, like the idea of the boy with the chocolate. Yeah. And the school then understood that actually he needed to bring the chocolate. That was at least something that he was eating.

But that has stopped me. I feel a bit sorry. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. But he goes, I don't want lunch. And it's really hard. And I'm not going to force it. No. Because he's packing food. He's not going to eat it. So I'm thinking waste it. Yep. Yeah. Absolutely. Because you know what lunch is like at the end of the day from the lunch box. Yes. Yes. And you can't reuse that. It's that school smell. And it's the smell. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And he won't touch it. So. Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes packed lunch boxes are just vessels, aren't they, really, for taking the food to school and then bringing it home again.

[illegible]

How do I work out what is an issue for my child, and are they aware of that themselves sometimes? Mmm, yeah. Yeah. Okay. It's a hard question. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. No, no. That awareness is, a lot of time children, a lot of the children I've worked with have been aware that something's not right, and I think their behaviour shows that, but they can't necessarily articulate that. They can't make it feel better themselves. Yeah. Or they may be doing something to try and regulate themselves because it feels bad, like what we were saying with the auditory stuff where they're singing or making a lot of noise themselves.

And it turned out that he couldn't stand the noise of pencil on paper. Oh, that one? Yes. Oh. But he couldn't. Oh. He couldn't articulate that. He just knew that this time was horrible, and he hated it, and he just wanted to not be there. But he couldn't say this was the actual problem at that point. And so nobody knew, but he knew there was a problem. And so it was when he got a little bit older and he had a great teacher who was able to go, well, here's a lot of different things you could write with. Is there anything that might work for you? And where do you want to go to write? And he chose to go out the door and write in the cloakroom.

Or is it because any activity involves heaps of different sensory inputs? So which is the one that's the issue here? It's really, really, really, really tricky for parents, for professionals sometimes as well. It's not easy. I think, I'll do another plug, sorry. On our website, on the Child Development Service website, we have another online parent resource. This one is called Let's Talk About Sensory Processing. This one's about sensory processing. So we go through what each sense is, sensory input is. We look at what under-responsiveness looks like in that sense, what over-responsiveness looks like in that sense.

Listening to Families · listeningtofamilies.co.nz · Auto-generated transcript, not proofread.

I'm not going to go into in-house courses. But yeah, and some kids do know their own sensory needs and sensory differences and preferences.

And others don't. Others need more support around that. As they get older, as kids get older, they become more aware in general. And some kids have worked out ways to help them manage situations. But sometimes those behaviors aren't helpful. They might find noise overwhelming and they run off or it's something that maybe they're doing that's not okay in that environment. So it's just finding a way to support the child. Find things that they think is going to be helpful for them. Or talking to others about their own sensory needs, like teachers. Yeah, and sometimes it's a bit of trial and error.

You know, like everything. And we're humans. And that's one of the things that I notice when I work with children is, you know, even if I might have done a sensory profile where I'm looking at assessing kind of the sensory areas and what's happening for that child, you know, sometimes a particular score will come out of that. But then when I start working with that child and I think, well, maybe these types of activities might be helpful for this child, actually, it doesn't work for them. So then it's about actually going a bit deeper and thinking a little bit more laterally. And thinking, right, you know, what else might happen?

And what else might work? And sometimes I get children, and this is a simple thing, if parents are trying some strategies at home, to, you know, have a smiley face chart. So I have like a frowny face and an okay face and a smiley face. And I get them to also identify what they actually enjoy. What sensory experiences they're actually finding make them feel good. And then I'm also looking to see, how does that change what I would say their state of alertness? So does it make them more, hoo-hoo, hyped up and excited? Or does it make them feel a bit calmer and more relaxed? It's so important, isn't it, to look at, yeah, the things that the children prefer as well as things that they find difficult.

It's so individual, isn't it? It's so individual, yeah. All different. Yes, yes. We are all different, so it's a lot of thinking. It is kind of that experimenting a little bit. And what I find really interesting, is that some of the teenagers I've worked with, is they start experimenting within themselves about what might work for them in a different situation. So say when they're at school, and they find that they like a bit of deep pressure, so they like something heavy on them. How do they do that? So they might put their, I've had some people put their bag on their knee and just kind of have that in class a little bit.

Or some people have said to me they sort of sit down and they just sort of push through their legs. Or they just do kind of lots of sort of, stretches and really get a bit of pressure through their body in those ways. Just finding different things that fit in different environments. Because many children at that age, or teens at that age, are very aware of others. And they don't want to look different. But they do have sensory needs and preferences. And it's finding how do we support you with those sensory needs and preferences so that you look like your peers and you feel supported in that environment.

I want to be the same as everybody else, which isn't life. But I think there's an intense need just to feel the same. And it's that age, I think. Teenagers, they're looking at their peers, aren't they? And their brains are changing as well. So, yeah.

6. Sensory processing - When to push - when to accommodate

Do people grow out of having sensory issues? That's just sort of ways of having to manage them. Yeah, I think people adapt. I don't know. I've seen, because we see people right through, we're so lucky, right through to adults, because we run groups where people are coming as young adults and things. And so it's really interesting to actually see that full journey for some people. So some people we've met at eight or nine, and then we're seeing them at 21. And so we've actually seen that whole journey for them and seen how their sensory needs have adapted and then what they do now. So they might be at university or they might be working or they might be doing lots of volunteer jobs and how are they managing some of those kind of sensory needs in terms of feeling a bit overwhelmed with noise or feeling like they have some touch sensitivity and things like that.

And often people have really adapted and got some interesting things that they use, but also the way that they've gone in their lives. Like all of us as adults, we tend to go towards things that work for us, don't we? So I don't do team sport because I'm really useless with my proprioception and all that sort of thing and my coordination. So, you know, like young people who might be, you know, really doing, they do volunteer work at SPCA because one of the things, that's calming for them is sort of that touch of animals and things like that. So they've actually created their own way of sort of looking at that and having an activity that's meaningful for them, but also helps to manage their touch and also the noise they're hearing are the animal noises, which actually works well for them versus the noise of people and talking and things like that that might not work so well for them.

That's fantastic. Yeah, that sounds awesome. I work with them. I have a bag of kids. I work from 0 to 16-year-olds in our service. So, but there's research to show that the sensory personality, your sensory preferences are kind of set when they're around the age of 4 to 5. So a child, a preschooler, yeah, a baby, toddler, that has touch sensitivities, is over-responsive to touch, will then become a school-aged kid with those issues and will become an adult with those issues. So you're kind of taking that sensory, yeah, sensory differences

throughout your life and they don't change. What changes is our ability to be aware of those sensory differences and to be able to do things to help us manage those sensory differences, to put those things in place.

And some children need more support than others in order to do that. Some children need more support to identify their sensory needs and to put those strategies in place. And for some kids, we will need to scaffold that an awful lot and put those supports, those strategies in place. And other kids, they'll be more independent and they'll do things themselves. So yeah, it'll just really vary, isn't it, really? Yeah. Yes. Yes. Yeah. I think the hardest thing I've struggled with as a paragraph sensory kid, and it's got better as they got older and they've worked with OT and things, but when do I push them and when do I make all the accommodations?

And also in school, like, that's really hard because they're going to go into the world. They have to actually learn to have. They have to have some tolerance of these things, like, that balance is really hard as a parent. Like, my school's like, should we take her to assembly or not? And how many things do we, like, she goes to assembly and she's got noise caps and headphones on. She's kind of missing out on the experience. Whereas if she has a small fidget or she has a little whiteboard, that can help. But it's like, and then what age do we wean off? It's so hard, isn't it? It's so tricky. And what's your gut reaction as a parent?

Because often your gut reaction as a parent is the right one. And sometimes you don't know how she's reacting. I mean, you said the explosion. I don't know. I don't know, but how is she? That's the hardest thing is when to push. Yes, yes. Yes, like, we went to the supermarket the other day and it was, she did the shopping list. It was a big outing. Managed to get her dress to go. And then the sticker thing. There was a sticker on the trolley that we picked. And her focus had become totally on that sticker. And so in the thing I was like, do I try and push her to the, oh, she's already doing so much.

It's like a list. Let's go change the trolley. Yeah, which I think is perfect. Yeah, it's perfect. Yeah, yeah. Is that the wrong thing? Like. Yeah. And we know that if we challenge a child and they do an activity that's really stressful for them and they're really anxious about. And then they get through that and it hasn't been too bad an experience. Next time they go to do it, they know that they've had that really good experience of, I coped okay last time. Maybe I'll do it okay this time. So over time, they get that knowledge of that experience of being able to cope with that sensory environment.

So, yeah, it's hard. It is hard. It is hard. Absolutely. And you try to, okay, do they have, what do they have later on in the day? Yes. Trying to like, what do I, do they only have this and maybe we can push through. Yes. That today. Yeah. Yeah. And I think you're right. And I think with things like if, if you know your child has a particular perhaps phobia on something, then, and then you're doing another experience, which is quite full on, then, yeah, your, your focus at that point is we're not teaching about managing this particular thing. Yeah. But being in the supermarket and managing all of the visual experiences, because that's something that I, I find people don't talk a lot about is visual overwhelm.

So, you know, so lights, but also people moving around even. So for some children, just seeing lots of people, lots of movement and other people moving is really quite overwhelming. So, you know, the, those sort of situations, so I don't want to go to the mall and I had a child once who had. Their parents remote control for the garage door because the parents had said, we're going to the mall. So, you know, but you think the mall has got, so he didn't want to go to the mall. It's got lots of lights, it's got lots of noises and it's got lots of movement and it's got potentially touch experiences that people are bumping or, you know, so all of those things are all part of the supermarket as well.

So even just managing being in the supermarket for like five minutes is, is for some children, that's great. You've given them that experience. They don't need to be in there any longer. And the same with assembly. Why do we have to sit in assembly and, you know, and sit still and watch people and have all this other stuff going on and people right next to us and people moving and not feeling like I can get out and all this noise of everyone coming in and out. It's, you know, it's, yeah. But it comes back to the basics of knowing your child, knowing whether they're over or under responsive in a certain sense and putting those strategies in place.

So if they are overwhelmed by the noise of the shopping mall, because, yeah, they're incredibly busy, noisy places, having the headphones or whatever, having a cap on or sunglasses for the light if that's overwhelming for them. If they are under responsive and seeking for movement, maybe doing some running around before they do something that's, that's, you know, that's, you know, that's, you know, something that's, that's, that's quite incidental. Yeah. So, like walking around the shopping mall or afterwards. And also I think with all those tools, you know, trying them at home before you go to the shopping mall.

So getting, so some children need a little bit of time to get used to stuff. So they're going to wear their cap and their sunglasses and, you know, making sure they've had a bit of time wearing those at home. You know, some people don't like wearing the headphones, don't like the feel of that. So kind of seeing what we can experiment with when we're in a car. And, you know, that's, that's a very important thing. And then, you know, we've got to do it in a safe environment. So it's the same thing. I think, you know, when you want to challenge a child or try something different, do it in their safe place, which I think is what you're doing.

And then once it's successful in the safe place, see if you can take it into some other environment. Yes. I can't face this. You won't push it. Yeah. No, exactly. And it's picking your battles, isn't it really? And it is, yeah, if you're going to do something stressful, maybe the rest of the day is something really, really cruisy. Yes. Yeah, totally. Last year, my son went for camp and didn't want to go for camp because, A, we have to sleep in a tent and it might be scary. He's not afraid of the dark anymore, but he used to be. Yes. But he's never slept in a tent. He might have to sleep with someone he doesn't know.

Yes. What are they going to make me eat at camp? Yes. Are they going to make me jump off into the wharf? Yes. Off the wharf into the water because he doesn't like water on his face or head. Yes. And I don't know. I don't think he likes the water. Yes. I know. It's just something to be aware of. Yes. And he was, you know, he was in tears about it. Yeah, yeah. And so in the end, I drove over to, over the peninsula, took him on day one, where they did some mountain biking and stuff. He didn't go on the middle day because that was the water day and he didn't stay overnight and I took him home. And then I took him on the last day, so they were doing something else.

That's brilliant, because they still participate in the camp. And it was a bit funny, they said, why didn't I stay? And I said, but did you enjoy the day? Well, yeah, it was actually alright. But I took him out of the day that they were going to have to be in the water. Was he happy? He was, because that was his main thing. They showed them a video of the camp from the year before, and it focused on them all jumping off the wharf into the water. He was horrified. He did swim, but not very well, because he doesn't like water. And when he saw that, of course, his level of anxiety would have gone up.

Sleeping in the tent and the food they're going to make me eat. It was too much, so he didn't go. But you found a way that he could be part of it. For the days that were okay, and he didn't have to stay. Which is brilliant. It was very cool. And I think sometimes I've had situations where the child does, they want to be there, but it's all those unknowns. And sometimes to help support the school to be able to think, well, what can they adapt? Are there things, so I've had someone who was able to actually sleep in a little cabin instead of the tent. Yeah. And they were able to actually work out who they would be with.

Yeah. And organise that before they went. So, you know, sometimes, and that might be a next step even, you know, for your son. Yeah. For another camp might be, well, we're going to stay, perhaps we'll try and look at one night, but let's make it really predictable what's going to happen. Yeah. Because there's so many unknowns, and they do relate to all this. And, you know, in a tent, you know, can you have a little, you know, you can get those little lights that you can just have on. Yeah. And they come by battery little lanterns. Yeah. And you can have those on all night. Yes. You know, why not?

Yeah. You know, there's lots of ways that I think just perhaps neurotypical people need to learn to adapt a little bit. Yeah, totally. For many of us who are neurodiverse, you know. And what I love most about your story is that you knew your child best, and you knew what was going to work and not work. Yeah. It wasn't a teacher saying, let's do this. It wasn't a therapist saying, do this. Yeah. Yeah. It was just the child that came up with, yeah, and that is just, I mean, that's . . . You knew. You organized the plan. Yeah. It's awesome. It worked. And you were his advocate, and you were able to do that for him, and that's just awesome.

And was it detrimental to his mental health to make him go and stay those nights and be faced with food that I can't eat, Martin. Yes. Yes. And feel, yeah, and then feel like, I haven't succeeded. Yeah. You know, look, I can't do it. And then, of course, then I won't be doing it next year because I couldn't do it. It was something that he found stressful, but he did, and he got through it, and it was a great experience. Yes. Yeah.

7. Sensory processing - key messages

What about you guys? What would you think of as key messages you think? For me as a parent is, you know your child best, and so feeling confident to advocate, particularly at school, for those accommodations your child needs. Yes, I think that's so key, having to do that so much. And sometimes as a parent you really lack the confidence to feel like you can do that. Absolutely. When I had my daughter I was 21, and I was a bit of a mouse, and I don't think I advocated enough for her. And I have tremendous guilt about that now, she's 20, and doing so well. But when my son was born I was 27, and I'd had six years of my daughter's difficulties.

I think my son has been far more supportive. Supported by me, because I was able to speak up. And his dad too, his dad's great. And he was also more vocal, because we were both learning with our daughter. And with our son, I think he got probably more from us. But as time went on, and my daughter's things changed, she's got a lot of neurodiverse things going on. Yeah. We were better able to advocate for her, and best outcomes for them both. That's awesome. Yeah. It's a learning curve, isn't it, parenthood? Yes. Whether your child has neurodiversity or not. Yes. Yeah, and sometimes being a parent places us in a position where we have to be an advocate.

Maybe we're just not naturally assertive. No, I'm really not. But it's the older I've gotten. I'm less likely to put up with, you know, teething problems, Kim. Okay. That's what I was told when I was younger, and I accepted that it was teething. Yes. That's not a teething problem. No. We actually have something here, and we need to fix it. Or try to. Yes. Yes. With the tools that we have available. Yes. Yes.

What are the other key messages? Yeah, I think as a parent, you know, feeling like, you know, you are enough. And what you're doing is, you know, we're all human. And sometimes, you know, things work out.

You know, we do something one day, and it works a bit better than the next day. But it's kind of also realizing that you are enough, and you are doing the right thing, and you are learning yourself. And I think that's a big thing as a parent myself as well, that we can get very down on ourselves and look at the things that we haven't done. Yeah. And it's really important to kind of, so I'm getting a little bit emotional now. And, you know, it's really important to kind of acknowledge our own, the fact we are learning as well. And we are not going to be perfect. Yeah. But, you know, we have to look after us.

Yeah. Yeah. And I think an important thing hearing from you guys is that these sensory things are real and quite, you know, like, they work with a sock because they can feel the scene. And then a parent goes, you know. Yes. Yes. But you guys say, actually, they're going to be thinking about something else. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. So, actually, they're going to be thinking about that sock for the rest of the day. Yes. And how do you explain that in school? Like. Yeah. Exactly. It is overwhelming their brain, just you guys confirming, yes, it is, you know, a real thing.

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Other people's unhelpful comments such as, oh, they'll eat when they're hungry. Or, um. Yeah. No. Yeah. You know. Yeah. You've got to make them do it or otherwise they'll never learn. Yes. No. It doesn't work like that. It doesn't work like that. You know. Yes.

needs a polo fleece jacket not a waterproof jacket because he doesn't like the sound you know yeah and actually it's not a big deal no why can't we accommodate these things in our world yeah yeah it is it's not a big deal it's not a big deal and it and and um it's only um sensory yes before like if it's affecting you doing something if it's affecting you to being able to go to school because your jacket feels funny yeah then it is a then it is a big deal and if but it's um just finding finding a way of managing those preferences is going to work for the kid it's going to work for the environment it's going to work for other people in their lives and it's just finding that strategy and i guess what i mean is it's not a bit it's a big deal for him but it's not a big deal for the school or for people around him to go that's okay he can wear a different jacket yeah that's fine yeah you know yeah and then that means yeah he can have a successful time at school or if he's going somewhere else you know and we don't have to make it such a huge thing as a yeah that you know you can't wear a different jacket you know that's terrible i spent 60 dollars on that jacket you will wear it today yeah we're not going to change the child are we over no we're not going to change our sensory preferences overnight but we are going to change the environment we are going to change the way that a task is done or or the environment that they're charging so yeah you can make accommodations pick your battles pick your battles because that's probably a key message you know pick your battles yeah look if he's not going to eat broccoli don't serve him broccoli give him something you know my son won't eat brooklyn he will eat an apple that's roughage yes have an apple you know yes absolutely yeah go with what's working yes don't make life more stressful than it already is