

# What is Sensory Processing Disorder?

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is sometimes known as Sensory Processing Difficulties or Sensory Integration Dysfunction.

SPD is when the brain finds it difficult to do its most important job, which is to organise and respond to the messages it is receiving. A person with SPD finds it hard to process and act upon information received through the senses, which can create challenges in performing everyday tasks.



The characteristics of SPD are often misunderstood to be negative behaviours. These might include breaking things, biting, pushing people, fidgeting with objects, humming and rocking.

## Our Senses

### Our External Senses

We are all aware of the original 5 senses and can probably remember learning about them at school.



These are our **external senses**, as all of the information comes from outside of our body and travels into it.

However, there are also 3 more senses, which are hugely important in development, particularly when beginning to identify characteristics of SPD.

### Our Internal Senses

**Proprioception** - This sense tells our body where we are in space using feedback from our joints and muscles. It tells us whether something is light or heavy.



**Vestibular** - This gives us a sense of movement and is modulated internally by fluid in the inner ear. It helps us to determine how fast or slow we are moving and relies on gravity, as well as information from our eyes.



**Interoception** - This internal sensation tells us how our body is feeling inside. It includes messages like how fast our heart is beating, if we need the toilet, if we are thirsty or tired. Messages from our external senses can over-ride recognising these internal feelings.



*Smells like deodorant and aftershave lotion, they smell so strong to me I can't stand it. Perfume drives me nuts!*



### How to identify characteristics of SPD

The way we respond to our surroundings gives our friends and families a clue to what we are feeling and thinking. For example, if music is playing really loudly in a cafe I may put my hands over my ears or speak louder to compensate for this.

People with SPD will constantly find ways to support themselves in the environments they are in in very much the same way. SPD can mean that someone may be processing too many sensations (hyper / over-responsive) or not enough (hypo / under-responsive).

### Key Figures

- 1 in 20 people have SPD
- SPD can affect anyone
- 75% of those with Autism are also diagnosed with SPD
- SPD is familiar with ADHD, Fragile X, Epilepsy, Dyspraxia, learning difficulties and many other diagnoses

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*The world hurts.  
All sounds happen at all times.*



**Supporting people with SPD**

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