

B5 - Organising strategies

One of the essential elements of self-organisation includes the way we modulate incoming sensory and motor information within our central nervous system.

As we become more aware of the different sensations, each person's individual response to sensory information and the strategies we tend to use (to seek or avoid) influences our ability to self-organise, in order to functionally engage in meaningful activities.

Within the occupational therapy literature, sensory modulation is referred to as the ability to organise and regulate one's responses to sensory and motor stimulation in a graded and adaptive manner.

The process follows a simple course of events to support new or unfamiliar learning of skills.

- Our brain locates sorts and orders the information it receives from our senses.
- It also filters out unnecessary sensations, the humming of a fridge or a computer in the background to allow us to give our whole attention to what we are doing.
- Our brain acts like a sieve letting through the important information and straining out the unimportant information. Once the brain has processed the sensation it organises our body to produce an appropriate response to these sensations. Some of us take longer to process the information from our senses to produce an action.
- The action can be described as the behaviour seen as a result of the processing of sensory information.
- Some children's brains sieve out too much information and some children's brains sieve out too little information. Some children may need a lot more information than normal to get the right amount to go through the sieve, to produce an appropriate action.
- Everyone has a different threshold to sensory input and we respond differently to sensory input according to the time of day or how we are feeling.

It is important to remember that sensations that the child tends to avoid are usually the new experiences that require additional adult support to positively accept graded exposure to, in order to develop acceptable levels of tolerance to progressively build on.

Sensory challenges	Suggested strategies
<p>Child reacts negatively and emotionally when touched lightly (exhibits anxiety).</p> <p>Child withdraws or punches others who touch him lightly.</p> <p>Young person may prefer firm touch.</p>	<p>Always touch firmly and assure the child that you will touch firmly and that you will not move your hands unpredictably.</p> <p>Tell the young person when you are going to touch them what you will do and how you will do it. "I'm going to put my hands on your shoulders and give you a squash" as you provide reassuring firm compression to the shoulders. Respect the young person's need for control.</p>
<p>They may pull away when approached for a friendly pat or caress from a relative or friend.</p>	<p>Explain to others that the child feels light touch more strongly and as if they were being hit.</p>

Young person may reject touch altogether from anyone but their mother or primary carer.	Approach the young person from within his/her visual field to ensure the young person is able to anticipate the sensation of touch
Self-stimulatory behaviours are often oral or can be hand-biting, spitting, pinching, head banging, etc.	Provide as much explanation of the situation as possible.
These behaviours can deter other people from building relationships	Use alternative oral stimulus such as chewing gum, crunchy foodstuffs, chewy tube, chewy toys.

What can be difficult to notice is the information children pick up from the subtle cues we give them (about life skills) before we actually teach the new skill. Examples would be the child understanding what happens in the bathroom or toilet, or being able to pull clothes off before we expect the child to dress themselves.

Think about the information and experiences they need before they learn the skills expected of them.

For motor planning to occur, a child must be encouraged to THINK about what they are doing. If no thought is involved in the task, then it is no longer beneficial on a planning level.

Therefore during activities ask the child to:

- Visualise the task before they do it (close eyes)
- Verbalise what they are going to do before doing it, or they must repeat what it was they were told to do.
- Verbalise the sequence: what they must do next and what was done previously.
- Verbalise the end result before doing it, as planning involves the anticipation of the end result.
- A child must be encouraged to analyse if their plan worked after the execution, and if not successful they must work out an alternative method.

Activities involving complex motor planning

Furniture and/or play equipment **obstacle courses** are excellent for treating motor planning. They can be graded from simple to complex in the following way.

- Set up and demonstrate to a child
- Set up and then verbal instructions are given to the child
- Set up, then a child uses own initiative in using pieces of equipment.
- Verbal encouragement and support are given and a child sets up the obstacle.

Planning how we use our play spaces effectively and efficiently also adds to the quality of play in providing opportunities for a variety of play, to meet a variety of play styles.

Children need space to develop their organisational skills in exploration of:

- challenging activities such as balancing, climbing high, tunnelling, jumping, swinging from arms and by legs
- sensory play opportunities that include sand, mud, water, pebbles, stones, sawdust
- hiding away, making cubbies and campsites, having picnics
- meandering up a shady path, stopping off to pick flowers or watch a snail
- sitting with a friend to talk or play with dinosaurs or butterflies
- meeting as a group to sing songs, listen to stories or play games
- Imaginative play environments with small dolls, teddies, jungle animals, blocks, etc.
- Pretend work such as shopping, washing clothes or building tunnels as well as real work such as gardening, sweeping and tidying up.
- Running, ball games, chasing bubbles, pushing and pulling, rolling and spinning and riding wheel toys.