Sensory Policy

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Introduction:

Sensory Processing is a person's ability to organise and process incoming sensory information from our senses. Sensory modulation is a person ability to interpret sensory input and to respond appropriately.

At Sallygate we appreciate the continuous need to interpret and respond to sensory experiences. The aim is to support students' sensory needs across the school day in a variety of ways to have a 'just right' challenge.

We are all familiar of the 5 basic sensory systems:

Visual(sight)

So much of our society focuses on our visual sense. We gain colour, form, shape, and scale from our visual sense. It is an external sense which means it receives information from outside of our body. Our eye takes in the visual information, our brain receives these messages, flips this image upside down and that is how we are seeing our environment now. Our brain merges the 2 images from each of our eyes so most of us are just seeing one picture when both of our eyes are open rather than 2 slightly different images. One of the first ways we take in visual information is through contrasts. Things that are opposites, there are lots of baby toys which are black and white this is designed to help with this development.

Auditory(hearing)

You may find yourself relying on this sensory system more than others. It is an external sensory system; sounds enter our ear from outside of our body. Our auditory processing helps us to understand where we are in relationship to a sound. Sound enters our ear; our eardrum vibrates and 3 tiny bones in our ear amplifies these vibrations which tells the cochlea what type of sound it is. We hear through vibrations and electrical impulses are travelled to our brain where we interpret this noise. Many deaf people can still enjoy music as they can feel the vibration and their brain translates this into a meaningful sound. Therefore, anything in our environment which creates a vibration - makes a sound. This means we do not always consider that as we are tuning into such a small amount of these sounds.

Gustatory(taste)

We need the saliva in our mouths to help us to detect the taste of food. There were theories in the past that suggested we detected taste directly from our tongue. We now know that the tongue detects the food and molecules, but it is our brain that tells us which taste we are sensing. The 5 tastes that we sense are Bitter, Salty, Sour, Sweet & Umami (savoury).

Olfaction(smell)

Our primitive sense is our sense of smell it helps to alert us to danger and changes in our environment. We use a different part of our brain to process smell compared to our other senses. This 'limbic' part is where we process memories and emotions. Because of this we respond emotionally to smells whether we realise it or not. For example, when you walk into a room you are likely to notice how you respond to that room if it is smelling particularly unpleasant or if it smells fresh and fragrant.

Tactile(touch)

Our tactile sense is known as being our largest external sense. It is all of the outside of our body but also inside our body to help us recognise temperature - when we drink a hot or cold drink for example. It is largely linked with our social development and interaction too. When we greet people, we use this sense; we might shake their hand, kiss them on the cheek or hug them. All of these involve touch and can be particularly difficult for someone who is sensitive to a particular type of touch.

These basic senses or 'far senses' respond to external stimuli from the environment, however, less familiar sensory senses exist within our bodies called:

Interoceptive

Interoception is our internal sense which alerts us to messages relating to hunger, thirst, tiredness, needing the toilet etc. This sense is hugely linked with us recognising and responding to our emotions. Interoception is an internal sense which gives us information from our organs and therefore tells us. It tells me when I am in pain when I am hot, cold, sleepy etc. A key component to understanding these messages is understanding our emotions in relation to this. I must have an understanding that a lethargic feeling can relate to me being tired. We must learn to piece together little pieces of information from these internal messages to recognise how we are feeling.

Proprioceptive

Our Proprioceptive sense is arguably our most important sensory system for our development. It is an internal sense which receives information from our joints and muscles to tell us where our body is in space. We use this sense to position ourselves, move and know how much force and pressure we use. We are constantly using this sense - you can feel where your hands are right now without needing to see them. This is based on the understanding and information being received from this part of our body. Our proprioceptive sense helps us to adjust our we use our muscles and joints - think of a children's birthday party, there will be drinks in plastic cups on the table. There will probably be one or 2 children who pick up a drink and squeeze it a little too much so some of the drink overflows - this is our proprioceptive sense that helps us to recognise this pressure.

Vestibular

This is our sense of movement which is detected with our head movements. We have fluid between our ears which moves, when this happens, we gain movement input. It's this movement which tells us how fast we are moving. We know that some people with auditory impairments or sensitivities may also be sensitive to movement, and this is due to where we sense this movement - between our ears. Vertigo is linked to our vestibular sense. Being over-stimulated in this movement sense can mean someone feels dizzy, sick, and just want to feel grounded.

The brain locates sorts and orders sensations. This is necessary if a person is to move and learn normally. The tactile vestibular and proprioceptive processing is at a core of sensory systems, leading to the 5 basic sensory systems.

With some students, such as those with ASC, the processing of sensory experience may be disordered or delayed. The slightest change or difficulty with processing such information can influence how we manage daily living skills, academic progress, and social interactions.

As each person will process and modulate sensory information differently, these experiences are unique to everyone and something that is comforting and pleasant for one person is uncomfortable and unpleasant to another.

At Sallygate we provide sensory training for all staff with recommendations for:

- Environment adaption and resources.
- Universal and targeted sensory strategies provide by class teams.
- Specific individual sensory plans are developed and monitored by SENCo alongside the sensory team and delivered by the class teams.

Universal strategies are embedded in school curriculum to prepare and support students learning and development for example: calming/alerting movements, prepare, lighting adjusted between dim or bright and student positioning/location in the room to aid focus and maximise engagement.

Initial factors we consider:

- Lighting – natural and artificial
- Sound
- Furniture – size in relation to students
- Temperature
- Space and number of people
- Décor – colour of wall paint and displays.
- Location of students and staff.

Strategies we may implement:

- Use of blinds to dim the natural light.
- Use of music to calm and alert students as appropriate.
- Use of soft furnishings to defuse sound.
- Zoning of classrooms.
- Changing the size of furniture to accommodate taller or smaller students.
- Managing the heat/cold from the radiator or open windows and student's alertness.
- Use of physical boundaries or open space to enable students to feel secure.
- Limiting the displays according to the student's stimulation needs.
- Position identified students away from windows/opening doors to reduce distractions.

Assessing and managing needs:

At Sallygate we have a multi-disciplinary approach to students with sensory processing difficulties. The Sensory team is made up of SENCo, Sensory detectives, Speech and language and the classroom team. The team offers different tiers of interventions including whole school approach and class specific trainings/interventions.

All classes receive input from The Sensory Team through a referral process, the class team alongside The Sensory Team will work collaboratively to develop strategies to best meet pupils needs.

These referrals are typically discussed at our meetings – Urgent cases will be discussed as soon as possible. This ensures that basic sensory strategies have been tried and that other factors impacting on behaviour and learning have been addressed. E.G appropriate pupil snapshots in place and referral to CAMHs considered.

In order to monitor and measure the impact of interventions we carry out a learning walk that focuses specifically on environment and sensory processing. The learning walk is used to identify both what is working well and what areas need to be developed. This exercise gives a whole school view of how individual needs are met from a sensory perspective to best cater for all our learners' sensory needs we strive to maximise our learning environments and ensure that they enhance functional use, offer that 'just right challenge', encourage independence and are flexible to be both stimulating and grounding.

The environments cover all areas of the school that the students engage with, the environment learning walk is carried out by the SENCo, The Sensory Team, class teacher or learning mentor. This is to represent a whole school perspective and to deepen the information gathered and shared. The information gathered from the learning environment walk then feeds into the sensory development plan for that student.

We will schedule a significant proportion of our staff training time to develop all staff's capabilities in communication and sensory approaches in class practice.

Resources

Shared working protocols lay out which resources the school are responsible for, providing resources can include:

- Large pieces of equipment-swings, sensory room equipment.
- Individual pieces of equipment-ear defenders, move and sit cushions, chewy toys, fidget toys.
- Assistive devices-pencil grips, adapted scissors, slanting boards for working.
- Changes to the environment-blinds, lighting, wall coverings, shelves, seating.

Training

The Sensory Team can offer a range of informal training, when necessary, on a range of different subjects, school staff are informed regularly of more formalised training programmes. EG: Sensory Integration courses and attend at the discretion of the leadership team or as part of an identified need in their continuing professional development.