# Parent Fact Sheet

## Signs and Symptoms of Sensory Processing Disorder

### What is Sensory Processing Disorder?

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), first identified by Dr. A. Jean Ayres, is a problem in how children use sensory information for self-regulation and skill development.

Also known as Sensory Integration Disorder (DSI), children with SPD may demonstrate behaviors characteristic of one or more types of sensory processing problems, listed below.

Children with SPD often demonstrate problems with:

- Attention and behavior
- Social skills or self-esteem
- Play Skills
- Fine/gross/oral motor skills
- Daily living skills (i.e. eating or dressing)
- Sleep/eating/elimination

It is estimated that between 5—13% of children entering school have SPD and that 3 of 4 are boys.

In addition, SPD is often associated with other diagnoses such as:

- Learning disabilities
- Attention deficit disorder
- Pervasive developmental disorder/autism spectrum
- Language disorders
- Anxiety disorder/depression
- Behavioral disorders
- In Post-institutionalization

### Signs of Sensory Processing Disorder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensory Modulation Disorder</th>
<th>Sensory Discrimination Disorder</th>
<th>Postural-Ocular Disorder</th>
<th>Dyspraxia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common Signs</strong></td>
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<td>- Easily distracted by noises</td>
<td>- Jumps a lot on beds</td>
<td>- Seems weaker than other children</td>
<td>- Problems with daily life tasks like dressing or using utensils</td>
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<td>- Overly sensitive to sounds</td>
<td>- Bumps or pushes others</td>
<td>- Fatigues easily</td>
<td>- Eats in a sloppy manner</td>
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<td>- Dislikes nail/ hair cutting</td>
<td>- Grasps objects too tightly or uses too much force</td>
<td>- Frequently moves in and out of seat</td>
<td>- Difficulty following multi-step directions</td>
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<td>- Dislikes clothing of certain textures/ fits/ or styles</td>
<td>- Frequently drops things or knocks things over</td>
<td>- Slumps while sitting</td>
<td>- Strong desire for sameness or routines</td>
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<td>- Upset about seams in socks</td>
<td>- Mouts, licks, chews, or sucks on non-food items</td>
<td>- Difficulty making eye contact/ tracking with the eyes, e.g. reading</td>
<td>- Has an awkward pencil grasp</td>
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<td>- Difficult time falling or staying asleep</td>
<td>- Craves movement, e.g. likes to spin self around</td>
<td>- Falls and tumbles frequently</td>
<td>- Has poor handwriting</td>
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<td>- Reacts defensively to tastes/ textures of food</td>
<td>- Afraid of heights/ swings or slides</td>
<td>- Feels heavier than anticipated when lifted</td>
<td>- Dislikes or reluctant to participate in sports</td>
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<td>- Easily distracted by visual stimuli</td>
<td>- Has poor balance</td>
<td>- Has flat feet</td>
<td>- A problem with planning, sequencing &amp; executing unfamiliar actions resulting in awkward &amp; poorly coordinated motor skills typically seen with a sensory processing deficit. It is usually seen with difficulty doing new activities or those that are done infrequently. (May-Benson, Teasdale, &amp; Koomar, 2006)</td>
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</table>

**Definition**

A problem in recognizing/interpreting differences or similarities in qualities of stimuli. It is commonly seen with problems in processing body sensations from touch, muscles and joints (proprioception) and head movements (vestibular–inner ear sensations).
SPD Facts

Developmental Information
(May-Benson, Koomar, & Teasdale, 2006)

• **SPD** is typically identified in early childhood or adolescence but may be seen throughout the lifespan.
• Problems may be seen in natural or adoptive children living in birth, foster, or adoptive families.
• Children do not “outgrow” the problem. Difficulties persist into adulthood, although sometimes severity of symptoms may appear less as individuals learn coping strategies.
• Children with **SPD** often demonstrate difficulties in developmental activities. A recent study indicates parents report that:
  * 47% did not go through the “terrible two’s” or did so late
  * 37% have a brief or absent crawling phase
  * 33% have strong positioning preferences as infants
  * 32% have sleep problems
  * 31% have feeding problems
  * 28% were hesitant/delayed going down stairs
• **SPD** impacts many areas of children’s emotional and physical functioning:
  * Children’s sensory processing problems have a strong relationship to their behavior difficulties. (Cohen, May-Benson, Teasdale, Callahan, 2006)
  * Children with **SPD** have significantly poorer coping skills than typical peers. Their sensory processing problems are significantly related to coping abilities. (May-Benson, 1999)
  * Children’s motor coordination problems are highly related to decreased participation in leisure activities. (Koomar & May-Benson, 1999)

Birth History Information
(May-Benson, Koomar, & Teasdale, 2006)

• Children with **SPD** often had difficulties during labor and delivery. Conservatively estimated prenatal and birth problems are:
  * 42% had complications during labor or delivery
  * 32% delivered by assisted delivery methods
  * 25% mothers had infections or illnesses during pregnancy
  * 18% mothers had unusual stresses during pregnancy
  * 13% were pre-term, ≤ 37 weeks
  * 5% had cord wrap/prolapse at birth
• Children with **SPD** appear to be at a greater risk for early childhood health problems. A recent study found:
  * 62% had chronic ear infections
  * 40% had allergies/asthma
  * 27% experienced serious injuries or illnesses
  * 25% had jaundice at birth
  * 20% had colic as infants

Parent Information
(Cohen, May-Benson, Teasdale, Callahan, 2006)

• Parents of children with **SPD** are impacted as well. Parent sense of competence is moderately related to their child’s sensory processing and strongly related to their behavior.
  * 1 of 3 parents report being tense, frustrated, & anxious about parenting their child with **SPD**.
  * 2 of 5 parents report feeling they cannot always figure out what is troubling their child with **SPD**.
  * 2 of 3 parents feel that parenting their **SPD** child is often difficult and sometimes not manageable.

References and Resources

Research Articles


Books


Websites

www.spdnetwork.org
www.quirkykids.com

For More Information
www.thespiralfoundation.org
617-923-4410

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Developed by T. May-Benson, 2006