

## Sensory Differences

We all respond slightly differently to sensory input. Reactions in children with ASC tend to be at the more extreme ends of the spectrum. Below are some examples of over and under-reactions and poor registration:

**Over-reacting to sensation:** upset with hair washing, agitated by loud noise, fussy eater, can't cope with messy hands, avoids cuddles, avoids movement activities

**Under-reacting to sensation:** fidgets, fiddles, chews, heavy handed, toe walks, spins

**Poor registration** doesn't notice temperature / pain / food on face / shoes on wrong feet

**Modulation** is the ability to respond 'just right' i.e. to neither over or under-react. When a child over & / or under-reacts to sensation we say they have '**sensory modulation difficulties**'.

Children may show a mixed pattern of over & under reaction in all the sensory systems: touch, sound, taste, smell, light, vestibular (movement & gravity), proprioception (body position from muscles and joints).

Sensory modulation difficulties contribute to difficulties with: sleep, feeding, toileting, behaviour, emotions, social interactions, concentration, learning.

### How to help

1. Understand your child's sensory profile, and help others (siblings, teachers, grandparents to understand it too). This allows you to make allowances.
2. Allow the child to be in control of the sensation when possible.
3. Adapt the environment where possible e.g. minimise distractions.
4. Help your child to change their nervous system through an everyday '**sensory diet**'.

### Changing the nervous system

General advice for calming the nervous system is:

- Proprioception – push, pull, lift
- Deep pressure touch – squash, hug, squeeze, rub
- Linear (straight-line) movement (ensuring threshold for movement has been met)
- Head down
- Quiet, low toned voice
- Steady visual environment

Our senses heighten when we are stressed by new situations, changes of routine, boredom, & lack of understanding. Sensory approaches should work alongside other support strategies like visual timetables, use of timers, PECS etc.

Change takes time and needs a consistent approach. New, stressful situations can alarm the nervous system – re-apply the calming principles that have worked for your child.