



A Sensory Life

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Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) Awareness Doctor's Office Visit

What may appear as behavior on the surface is a neurological condition called **sensory processing disorder (SPD)**. My child may display a sympathetic nervous system response (fight or flight) during this visit due to the multi-sensory experience and various forms of unexpected, unfamiliar, and unpredictable sensory input.

A doctor's visit can be difficult for even typical children, but children with SPD are often defensiveness and over-responsive to sensory input and therefore have a lower threshold for pain and other forms of sensory input. Strange sounds, strange smells, new people and new surroundings will likely make this appointment very difficult for my child. **On the other hand**, a child with SPD may be UNDER responsive to sensory stimuli...including pain. The child may have an extremely high tolerance for pain because the brain is under-registering the pain and is under-responsive to the input. In this case, it is extremely important to listen to the parent of the child. As the medical provider, you will need to rely on the parent report in regards to possible illness or injury.

Children with SPD struggle with the ability to self-regulate and may cry, scream, lash out, and appear defiant. Please respect this as part of the disorder and refrain from trying to verbally encourage my child by telling them to "be a big boy or girl". Please respect the fact that this visit will be extremely difficult and my child is not being naughty. **The nervous system is simply protecting itself.**

The longer my child has to spend in the waiting room...the more difficult the visit can be. If waiting is required, provide a quiet, dimly lit room if possible.

Here are some ways in which we can help my child during the visit...

- Prior to ANY touch or hands on interaction with my child...please give a verbal warning and a moment to prepare. This includes even helping adjust body position on the exam table.
- My child may need to use earplugs, nose plugs, or noise cancelling headphones, and/or sunglasses. Please respect this and allow it.
- My child may need to hop, jump, or really get out the wiggles to help self-regulate right before getting on the exam table. Please be patient and give them a moment or two.
- My child may not want to interact with you...it may just be best to be silent, please do not take this the wrong way. It may be best to ask me most of the questions (or all of them) as social interaction in a new, unpredictable, and challenging environment will be extremely difficult.
- My child may want to use an MP3 player with their favorite calming music, need a favorite toy or fidget, or an oral sensory tool. Please allow this if at all possible.
- Please let my child inspect the surroundings and if they need to, let them touch and smell any new equipment prior to any hands on procedures such as checking the in the ears or even listening to their heart.
- If a shot is required, please allow me to take the time to provide deep pressure touch to my child's arm prior to the injection. Also, please use the smallest size needle possible, as well as taking any extra steps to help decrease the pain.
- Encourage my child to take deep breaths throughout the procedure and appointment, this will help with self-regulation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this SPD awareness handout, and most of all, thank you for being respectful of my child's sensory needs and differences during the appointment.

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