

## Understanding Differences in Autism

Many individuals with Autism experience sensory processing differences. Despite the fact that Autistic persons have been telling us this for a very long time, it wasn't until 2013 that this difference was officially noted in the criteria for diagnosis.

This inclusion is seen as a significant win by many in the Autism Community, who feel it represents an increasing willingness to listen to the voices of Autistic persons themselves to better understand their lived experiences.

### How Sensory Processing Differences Impact Persons with Autism

As sensory processing takes place within the brain, the neurological differences experienced by Autistic persons can also impact one's ability to effectively process sensory input and use it to understand and experience the world around them. Some persons with Autism may also find that the act of sensory processing, which typically occurs automatically, requires more conscious effort. Challenges with sensory processing may lead to difficulties in learning, hyperactivity, poor coordination or balance, as well as other behavioural challenges that can impact a person at school, at home, at work, in play, or really any setting or situation in which the individual may find themselves.

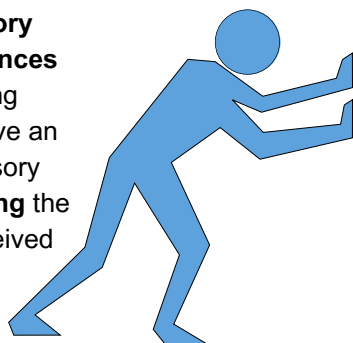
### The Impact of Sensory Processing Differences on Behaviour

Sensory processing differences are typically characterized by a mix of both hyper-responsivity and hypo-responsivity to various kinds of sensory input. Those who experience hyper-responsivity (i.e., over-reactivity or heightened sensitivity) demonstrate sensory defensiveness, leading them to behave in a way that limits sensory input received (e.g., plugging nose to avoid unpleasant smells, eloping from a noisy classroom). Meanwhile, those who experience hypo-responsivity (i.e., under-reactivity or diminished sensitivity) demonstrate sensory registration differences, leading them to seek out more sensory input than they would otherwise receive (e.g., turning up volume to get "more" of a favourite song).

#### Hypo-Responsive (diminished sensitivity)

- ◆ receives too little sensory input
- ◆ demonstrates **sensory registration differences**
- ◆ uses sensory seeking behaviours to achieve an optimal level of sensory arousal by **increasing** the amount of input received

**PUSH →**

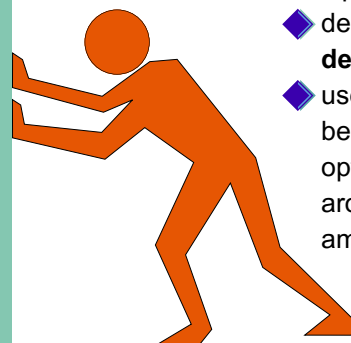


#### Optimal Level of Attention and Sensory Arousal



(i.e., where the amount of sensory input received is "just right")

**PUSH ←**



#### Hyper-Responsive (heightened sensitivity)

- ◆ receives too much sensory input
- ◆ demonstrates **sensory defensiveness**
- ◆ uses sensory avoidant behaviours to achieve an optimal level of sensory arousal by **decreasing** the amount of input received

All persons experience the world around them slightly differently than anyone else, leading the optimal level of sensory input to vary amongst individuals. These differences in sensory perception aren't right or wrong, they simply reflect the natural variability that exists within all of humanity!

For more information, contact Kerry's Place Autism Services:

+1-833-77-KERRY/1-833-775-3779

[intake@kerrysplace.org](mailto:intake@kerrysplace.org)

[kerrysplace.org](http://kerrysplace.org)



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