On select Tuesdays, The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh has sensory-friendly hours from 1 pm - 5 pm with various accommodations. Social stories are available on their website to read with your child before you go. In addition to sensory-friendly hours, the Children’s Museum and Museum Lab have inclusive camps scheduled throughout the summer of 2020. And don’t forget to attend their yearly Boo-To-You-Too sensory-friendly Halloween party this October! Check out their website for more information: https://pittsburghkids.org/visit/accessibility

On several Saturdays each year, the Andy Warhol Museum holds a sensory-friendly event for teens and young adults aged 13-21. Each meeting is 90 minutes long and includes a visit to the museum’s art gallery. The participants will get to create their own work during this time. The museum also presents sensory-friendly events to raise autism awareness. For example, in April 2020 an Autism Acceptance Disco will be held for teens, where participants will be given wireless headphones that allow them to turn the music soundtrack on and off as needed. They will be able to control volume levels. Check out their website for more information: https://www.warhol.org/accessibility-accommodations/

Heinz History Center is a wheelchair-friendly site and there are now sensory bags to create a more sensory-friendly experience for families. Check out their website for more information: https://www.heinzhistorycenter.org/visit/accessibility
Carnegie Museum of Natural History has sensory-friendly Saturday's throughout the year from 8:30 am - 10:00 am. Museum staff will guide tours and be on hand to answer questions. Quiet areas will be available for families that need a break. Advance registration is required. Check out their website for more information: https://carnegiemnh.org/visitor/sensory-friendly-saturday/

Carnegie Science Center has Sensory Sensitive Science Hours for children and adults with autism and/or sensory needs. Exhibit lights will be lowered, sound effects will be quieter, and special activities will be planned. Calm down areas, fidgets, headphones, sunglasses, and more will be available. Check out their website for more information: http://www.carnegiesciencecenter.org/visit/accessibility/ OR http://familyfunpittsburgh.com/the-carnegie-science-center-sensory-friendly-hours/
Sensory-friendly shows are offered throughout the year and include changes such as reduced lighting and sound, quiet areas, relaxed house rules, and warnings when a sound or light effect may cause distress. Families are welcome to bring their own fidget toys or other comfort items. Check out their website for more information: https://www.littlelake.org/sensory-friendly-performances

The Trust announces select sensory-friendly showings each year that will include dim lights, reduced use of special effects, lowered sounds, quiet areas, and fidget toys. Show rules are relaxed so that families can move around as needed. Check out their website for more information and stay tuned for 2020’s sensory friendly performance: https://trustarts.org/accessibility/sensory_friendly.org=1

Located on the North Shore, Prime Stage Theatre welcomes people of all ages and abilities to join them for classic plays and shows. Check out their website for more information: https://primestage.com/about-2/accessibility/

The Pittsburgh Ballet offers sensory-friendly performances for several shows. These shows offer a friendly and supportive environment for families, and provide trained volunteers to assist you as needed. The theater relaxes its rules for an evening to allow families to stand and move around. They will also lower sound levels, remove startling sound effects, dim the lights, and allow the use of iPads and other electronics for therapeutic use. There will be quiet areas in the lobby with fidget toys and ear plugs if needed. Check out their website for more information: https://www.pbt.org/performances-tickets/sensory-friendly-performances/

At least once a year, scheduled sensory-friendly performances will be announced for certain shows. These shows welcome guests with special needs and their families. Special accommodations, including reduced house lights, reduced special effects, reduced sound, quiet areas, trained staff and volunteers, and relaxed house rules will be enforced. Check out their website for more information: https://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/accessibility/sensory_friendly

Sensory-friendly shows are offered throughout the year and include changes such as reduced lighting and sound, quiet areas, relaxed house rules, and warnings when a sound or light effect may cause distress. Families are welcome to bring their own fidget toys or other comfort items. Check out their website for more information: https://www.littlelake.org/sensory-friendly-performances
Pittsburgh CLO offers Creative Discovery Classes designed for children on the autism spectrum led by trained instructors. The classes give kids a supportive space to learn new things. There are several classes and age groups you can select from during their two teaching seasons (January through May and September through January). Check out their website for more information: https://www.pittsburghclo.org/education/clo-academy/new-horizons

On the 1st and 3rd Fridays of each month, Flight Fit N Fun is open just for children who have special needs and their families from 6 pm - 8 pm. Lights are lowered, sounds are reduced, and trained staff are there to monitor the safety of jumpers. The cost is $8 for one hour and $15 for two hours, plus one family member or caregiver can jump for free. Check out their website for more information: https://www.flightfitnfun.com/locations/pittsburgh/activities/

On the last Monday of each month, Bounce U has a Sensory Bounce from 6 pm - 7:30 pm. Accommodations include a limited number of people bouncing to reduce crowds, reduced noise, and trained staff. Reservations are required. Check out their website for more information and to see which location is closest to you: https://www.bounceu.com

Fun Slides Carpet Skatepark now has sensory and autism-friendly skate sessions. This allows kids to skate and not worry about crowds, sudden noises, flashing lights, or loud music. Check out their website for more information or to book a session: https://funslidespark.com/announcing-our-sensory-friendly-skates/

On the first Sunday of every month, select Chuck E Cheese locations open their doors 2 hours early and invite children with autism or with other special needs to come have some fun! Check out their website for more information: https://www.chuckecheese.com/events/sensory-sensitive-sundays

All throughout Pittsburgh, Carnegie Libraries have Sensory Storytime for children 3-5 years old who have developmental disorders. The program includes reading stories, singing, and activities. Check out their website for more information and see when your local library is hosting Story Time: https://www.carnegielibrary.org/events/
Kennywood is now a certified autism-friendly park! They have made rides more accessible, offer sensory bags for guests in the park, and provide resources for families. They also have started identifying low-traffic areas for families who need a break. Check out their website for more information: https://www.kennywood.com/kennywood-certified-autism-center

On the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month there will be sensory-friendly showings of popular family-friendly films. On the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month they even have a showing of more mature films for older teens and adults with special needs. During these showings, lights will stay dim, sounds are at a lower level, and movie-goers are welcome to get up and move around at any time. Check out their website for more information: https://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films

The Pittsburgh Zoo has begun providing families who have a child with sensory needs a variety of accommodations at no extra cost, including a social story on an app you can download, sensory bags and weighted lap pads. Check out their website for more information: https://www.pittsburghzoo.org/sensoryinclusion/

The National Aviary on the North Shore offers a sensory guide for their exhibits that warns families on what to expect when moving through the exhibit so they can plan ahead, or avoid that area altogether. There are even sensory friendly bags available for families to use located at the ticket desk! Check out their website for more information: https://www.aviary.org/sensory-guide

Keep your eyes on Phipps seasonal exhibits, as many of them include interactive sensory experiences! While you're there, head to the Discovery Garden for some play time. Check out their website for more information: https://www.phipps.conservatory.org

While not specifically labeled as sensory-friendly, this might be a great holiday activity for the family! A warehouse in the Strip District is transformed into a winter wonderland full of holiday lights, decorations, and activities for people of all ages to enjoy. The only warning is that sometimes a live band plays in the other room, so be sure to plan ahead if your child is sensitive to sounds. Check out their website for more information: https://www.lumazelights.com/pittsburgh-christmas/
Family Events & Activities: Bonus Travel Resources

Did you know that there is a sensory room at Pittsburgh International Airport? Head down terminal A to Presley's Place, and just use the phone right next to the door to request access! Check out their website for more information: https://www.flypittsburgh.com/programs-services/services/sensory-room

Autism on the Seas offers a disability-friendly family vacation option for families with children who have autism, down syndrome, and other disabilities. Trained and qualified volunteers will be on board to assist families as needed and to help with planned events. Check out their website for more information: https://autismontheseas.com

Autism Travel has made vacationing easier for families with a loved one diagnosed with autism or other special needs. They provide resources to families and provide families with sensory-friendly or autism certified locations. Check out their website for more information: https://autismtravel.com

Here is a list provided by the Friendship Circle that gives a few tips on how to prepare a child with special needs for a flight: https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/01/09/a-special-needs-pre-flight-checklist/

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**Eruption Athletics**
Pittsburgh, PA

Eruption Athletics works with individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities to help them become more physically active and stay healthy. They offer group and individual training sessions. Check out their website for more information: [http://www.eruptionathletics.com/about.html](http://www.eruptionathletics.com/about.html)

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**Special Olympics**

Special Olympics consists of sports teams that vary by season and location. To be eligible, one must have a cognitive delay, or a developmental disability. You can become an athlete starting at age 8 and there is no upper age limit. Search the Special Olympics website to find and contact your local organization: [https://specialolympics.org/programs](https://specialolympics.org/programs)

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**The Miracle League**
Pittsburgh, PA

Kids ages 5 and up can learn how to play baseball with The Miracle League in a fun, supportive environment. Check out their website for more information: [https://www.miracleleaguesouthhills.org/play.html](https://www.miracleleaguesouthhills.org/play.html)

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**Steel City Icebergs**
Pittsburgh, PA

This program aims to teach both children and adults with developmental disabilities how to play ice hockey in a way that fits their needs and abilities. Steel City Icebergs is led by volunteers and is funded by fundraisers and donors with the hope that there is no cost to families to participate. Check out their website for more information: [https://www.pittsburghspecialhockey.org/about-us](https://www.pittsburghspecialhockey.org/about-us)

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**iCan Bike**
Sewickley, PA

As part of the iCan Shine program, iCan Bike is a program being hosted in Sewickley over several days in June. This program allows kids to feel the thrill of riding a bike in a safe setting with their peers. Check out their website for more information: [https://icanshine.org/programs/find-a-program/](https://icanshine.org/programs/find-a-program/)

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Evolve Dance Complex is offering dance classes to children with a variety of special needs. Check out their website for more details: https://www.evolvedancecomplex.com/AdaptiveDanceProgram

The Pittsburgh Ballet Theater offers adaptive dance classes at their practice facility in the Strip District. Classes are taught by instructors with special training, and parents are more than welcome to stay and help. Check out their website for more information: https://www.pbt.org/pbt-school/school-year-programs/adaptive-dance/

Every Thursday night, there are two 45-minute long dance sessions where kids can learn Jazz, Ballet, and Contemporary Dance! This class is for children with various disabilities and only requires that the student is able to go to the bathroom independently, or that somebody who is able to help with toileting stays. Check out their website for more information: https://canegri2552.wixsite.com/icandance
Best Buddies is a volunteer-based program that pairs people with and without intellectual disability to form friendships, build socialization skills, and create inclusivity. Check out their website for more information: https://www.bestbuddies.org/pennsylvania/

The Friendship Circle is a community-based organization that provides a wide variety of programming for people of all ages with disability and their families. Friendship Circle hopes to provide a warm and accepting space for personal growth and new friendships. Check out their website for more information: https://www.fcpgh.org

Many YMCA's across the country have events, programs, and camps catered toward children and adults with special needs. Check out your local YMCA location, or their website, for more information: https://www.ymca.net

The Woodlands has a variety of programming for children, teens, and adults living with a disability. These programs include weekend retreats, summer camps, community events and clubs. The Woodlands has trained staff on hand 24/7 and are able to care for your child's medical needs. Check out their website for more information: http://mywoodlands.org

Horse N’ Soul provides a therapeutic horseback riding program for both children and adults, claiming there are a variety of benefits. Check out their website for more information: https://www.horsensoul.com

Run by trained local college students, Harmony Pittsburgh meets once a week to rehearse and learn various theater skills, including dancing, acting, and musical skills. The program is free and a great way for children to integrate into the community. Check out their website for more information: https://harmonypgh.weebly.com/about.html
Three Rivers Music Therapy offers individual music therapy sessions, group sessions, drum circles, guided relaxation, and adaptive music lessons. Check out their website for more information: www.3riversmusictherapy.com

Camp Laugh-A-Lot is an inclusive day camp for children 5 and up, as well as adults, who have intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, or mental illness. The cost is $100 per week and the camp is held Monday through Friday from 8:30 am - 2:30 pm. Check out their website for more information: http://www.archumanservices.org/camp-laughalot.html

WISP is an inclusive summer camp designed for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other special needs to help support the development of social skills through interactions with typically developing peers. Check out their website for more information: www.thewatsoninstitute.org/programs/summer-programs/

Band Together offers a universally accessible music studio that provides lessons, performance opportunities, open mic night, DJ services, drum circles, and a welcoming music community. Check out their website for more information: www.bandtogetherpgh.org

Music Journey offers music therapy services across western Pennsylvania. Check out their website for more information: www.musicjourney.com

Three Rivers Music Company provides individual music therapy sessions, group sessions, drum circles, guided relaxation, and adaptive music lessons. Check out their website for more information: www.3riversmusictherapy.com

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Over the last several years, more and more stores across the country are offering sensory-friendly shopping hours. Try contacting your local Target, Giant Eagle, etc. and see if they have these hours or are willing to hop on board with this idea. Here are some tips from The Friendship Circle on navigating grocery shopping when you have a child with special needs: https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/08/27/15-tips-to-help-individuals-with-special-needs-shop-for-groceries/

Disability awareness is better than ever, but we still have some work to do with restaurants. While unable to find sensory-friendly restaurants in the area, it's always worth a shot contacting the restaurant ahead of time to see if they are willing to work with you! Here is a website that offers tips on going out to eat with a child who has special needs: https://www.performancehealth.com/articles/children-with-special-needs-eating-at-restaurants

The Children's Institute has a sibling support group for adolescents who have a sibling with special needs. This is a 6-week program for children ages 11-14 that requires a referral. Please check out their website for more information: https://www.amazingkids.org/Medical-Services/BH-sibling-support-group

The Children's Institute recently opened its doors to caregivers of children with special needs. While the Children's Institute provides a space the first Tuesday of each month, those who attend the support group are expected to plan and facilitate the group. For more information check out their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/events/460955514595687/

Parents in TOTO is a non-profit autism resource center with a store front located in Zelienople, PA. Parents in TOTO offers a large variety of services to people living with autism, as well as their families, all for free. They host frequent events for young adults with autism, hold group meetings, provide guidance for families, and much more. Check out their website for more information: https://parentsintoto.org
Talking to others that can relate to you is a great way to cope with stress. Here is a list of support groups in Allegheny county that may fit your needs: http://www.hsao.info/downloads/alleghenycountyresources.pdf OR http://www.familyresourceguide.org/family-support/sibling-parent-support.aspx

The CCR is a consultative service that can connect you with a wide variety of services in your area. Check out their website for more information: www.ccrinfo.org

Run by a woman who has a son diagnosed with autism, AUC is a support group committed to assisting African American, minority, and economically disadvantaged communities navigate autism. Check out their website for more information: www.aucofpgh.org

ASERT’s (Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training) website has many great resources and links to help you find local support groups. They also have online education courses to teach parents and professionals about specific topics regarding autism. Here is the link for more information: https://www.paautism.org

This resource aims to support families by working toward meeting the developmental needs of their children through a variety of different early intervention, DART, or school services. They provide services for free in Allegheny County outside of the actual city of Pittsburgh. Check out their website for more information: https://www.education.pa.gov/Early/Learning/Early/Intervention/Pages/default.aspx

This group links parents of children with a variety of disabilities to other parents of children with similar disabilities to act as a peer support network. Check out their website for more information: www.parenttoparent.org

The Pittsburgh Center for Autistic Advocacy promotes discussion around autism and connects parents with one another for peer support. Check out their website for more information: www.autisticpgh.org

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Useful Apps:

- **Baby Connect**
  - $4.99
  - Baby Connect allows you to track everything you could imagine in one place. Medications, weight, height, you name it!

- **First Then Visual Schedule**
  - $14.99
  - The First Then Visual Schedule app to create a visual schedule to let your child know what to expect in his or her daily routine.

- **iReward**
  - $2.99
  - iReward uses positive reinforcements to motivate your child to achieve goals!

- **SaferKid**
  - Free
  - When your special needs child gets to that age where they want their own phone, use SaferKid to block inappropriate content and increase internet safety.

- **Wolf+Friends**
  - Free
  - Wolf+Friends allows mothers of children with special needs to connect with one another.

Helpful Websites:

- https://www.understood.org/en
- https://www.spdstar.org
- https://www.autismspeaks.org
- https://www.autism.org.uk
- https://www.autismsocietypgh.org
- https://autismofpa.org
- https://wfspa.org

Sensory-Friendly Services:

- Sensory Friendly Photography: Captivating Imagery
  http://www.captivatingimagery.com/blog/about/

- Sensory Friendly Haircuts: Cookie Cutters: Haircuts for Kids
  https://www.haircutsarefun.com

- Sensory Friendly Dentist: Allied Dental Group
  https://www.allied-dental.com
  Location: Slippery Rock, PA

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Located in Squirrel Hill, The Children's Institute is an outpatient therapy clinic and home to The Day School, which is a specialized school for children with a wide range of needs. Outside of school hours, the public has access to their fenced-in playground! On the grounds of The Children's Institute there is also a therapeutic garden the public can access.

Opened in 2015, Casey's Clubhouse in the South Hills is a park for people of all abilities and is also a wheelchair-friendly park. This park is open to kids of all ages! Check out their website for more information: https://www.miracleleaguesouthhills.org/clubhouse-playground.html

Use this link to find a list of other ADA/wheelchair accessible parks in the Pittsburgh area: https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/1204_91%20ADA-Accessible%20Playgrounds%20Final.pdf

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**Museums:**
1. Children's Museum of Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh, PA
2. Andy Warhol Museum - Pittsburgh, PA
3. Heinz History Center - Pittsburgh, PA
4. Carnegie Museum of Natural History - Pittsburgh, PA
5. Carnegie Science Center - Pittsburgh, PA

**Parks:**
1. The Children’s Institute - Pittsburgh, PA
2. Casey’s Clubhouse Playground - Pittsburgh, PA (South Hills)
3. Other ADA accessible parks - Various Locations

**Fun Events and Activities:**
1. Cultural Trust Sensory-Friendly Events - Pittsburgh, PA
2. Prime Stage Theatre - Pittsburgh, PA
3. Pittsburgh Ballet Theater - Pittsburgh, PA
4. The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra - Pittsburgh, PA
5. Little Lake Theater - Canonsburg, PA
6. Pittsburgh CLO - Pittsburgh, PA
7. Flight Fit N Fun Trampoline Park - Bridgeville, PA
8. Bounce U - Multiple Locations
9. Fun Slides Carpet Skatepark - Pittsburgh, PA
10. Chuck E Cheese - Participating Locations
11. Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Sensory Storytime
12. AMC Theater at the Waterfront - Homestead, PA
13. The Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium - Pittsburgh, PA
14. The National Aviary - Pittsburgh, PA
15. Phipps Conservatory - Pittsburgh, PA
16. Kennywood - Pittsburgh, PA
17. Lumaze Holiday Light Exhibit - Pittsburgh, PA

**Programs:**
1. Best Buddies - Multiple Locations
2. Friendship Circle - Pittsburgh, PA
3. YMCA - Multiple Locations
4. The Woodlands - Wexford, PA
5. Horse N’ Soul - Washington, PA
6. Harmony Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh, PA
8. Camp WISP - Various Locations
9. Band Together Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh, PA
10. Music Journey, LLC - Various Locations
11. Three Rivers Music Therapy - Multiple Locations

**Sensory-Friendly Services:**
- Sensory Friendly Photography: Captivating Imagery
  http://www.captivatingimagery.com/blog/about/
- Sensory Friendly Haircuts: Cookie Cutters: Haircuts for Kids
  https://www.haircutsarefun.com
- Sensory Friendly Dentist: Allied Dental Group
  https://www.allied-dental.com
  Location: Slippery Rock, PA

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Physical Activity and Sports:
1. Special Olympics - Multiple Locations
2. The Miracle League - Pittsburgh, PA (South Hills)
3. Steel City Icebergs - Pittsburgh, PA
4. iCan Bike - Sewickley, PA
5. Eruption Athletics - Pittsburgh, PA (Locations in the North and South Hills)
6. Evolve Dance Complex Adaptive Dance Program - Cranberry Township, PA
7. Pittsburgh Ballet Theater - Pittsburgh, PA
8. ICANDance Adaptive Dance Program - Harmony, PA

Helpful Apps:
1. Baby Connect ($4.99)
2. First Then Visual Schedule ($14.99)
3. SaferKid (Free)
4. Wolf+Friends (Free)

Helpful Websites:
1. https://www.understood.org/en
2. https://www.spdstar.org
3. https://www.autismspeaks.org
5. https://www.autismsoctyypgh.org
6. https://autismofpa.org
7. https://wfspa.org

Travel:
1. Pittsburgh International Airport - Moon, PA
2. Autism on the Seas - Various locations
3. Autism Travels - Various Locations

Helpful Resources & Support Groups:
1. The Children’s Institute - Pittsburgh, PA
2. Parents in TOTO - Zelienople, PA
3. Other Support Groups - Multiple locations
4. Center for Community Resources - Multiple Locations
5. Autism Urban Connections, Inc - Pittsburgh, PA
6. ASERT: Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training - Various Locations
7. Bureau of Early Intervention Services and Family Supports - Allegheny County
8. Pittsburgh Center for Autistic Advocacy - Pittsburgh, PA
9. Parent to Parent of Pennsylvania - Various Locations

INFORMATION UP TO DATE AS OF:
March 2020

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What is Sensory Processing?

Difficulty at any of these steps can result in **SENSORY DYSFUNCTION** which may be contributing to unusual behaviors, emotional outbursts, or difficulty completing everyday activities.

What might this look like in my child?

*Every child uses information from their environment differently and has their own unique sensory experience.*

**SEEKER**
- Busier and more engaged in sensory experiences
- May make noises while working, fidget, always touching things, chew on things, lack consideration for safety, very active and excitable

**SENSOR**
- React more quickly and more intensely than others
- Might appear cautious in some situations due to being overwhelmed, aware of everything in their environment without ability to handle it appropriately, may have meltdowns, cry, or hit others

**AVOIDER**
- More likely to retreat from unfamiliar situations
- Can be rule bound, ritual driven, or uncooperative because sensory input is difficult to understand/organize or might feel threatening

**Bystander**
- Miss more sensory cues than others
- React slowly or may not notice things in their environment that others notice, can be difficult to engage

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REFERENCES


The Visual System

Vision is a dynamic process of identifying (what is this?), organizing, interpreting (what does this mean?) and understanding what is seen. Vision is a process that integrates sensory (what your body is taking in from the environment) and motor (how your body moves to react to information it gets) information generated by the brain and body to understand it and help you to decide what to do next.

What might this look like in my child?

- Unusual head tilt while looking at things
- Holds objects close to face
- Trouble finding objects in busy background
- Poor hand/eye coordination & depth perception
- Trouble copying work from whiteboard
- Confuses similar objects, shapes, and letters
- Difficulty spacing letters/words while writing

What can I do to help my child?

- Provide bright lights
- Create a colorful environment
- Utilize different shapes and objects
- Use of visual supports (contrasts, highlighting)
- Lava lamps
- Fish Tanks

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Eyes do not move together
- Difficulty focusing on faces or toys
- Inability to maintain gaze
- Sensitive to light
- Rubs eyes, covers eyes, squints
- Easily visually distracted
- Avoids eye contact

What can you do?

- Reduce lighting: turn off lights, dim lights, use blackout curtains
- Reduce visual distractions
- Provide sunglasses
- Limit screen time

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Your 8 senses. (n.d.) Retrieved January 4, 2020, from https://www spdstar.org/basic/your-8-senses
The Vestibular System

The vestibular system is the body’s first fully mature system. It develops from the inner ear and helps the body to understand where the head is in space. It is important for balance, posture, and our ability to keep our head upright and stable during movement.

What might this look like in my child?
- Constantly spinning or swaying
- Enjoys jumping
- High activity level
- Appears impulsive or unsafe

What can I do to help my child?
- Swinging or spinning
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Stand while completing work
- Hang upside down
- Jump rope
- Somersaults

Do you see these behaviors in your child?
- Dizziness
- Appears clumsy
- Overly cautious
- Fearful of movement
- Dislikes being upside down
- Dislikes being held

What can you do?
- Rocking back and forth on a rocking chair
- Slow, linear swinging
- Yoga
- Stretching of the head and neck slowly
- Slow rocking lying on ground with knees tucked into chest rocking back and forth

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### The Tactile System

The tactile system detects light touch, pain, pressure, and temperature. It helps inform us if each of these sensations are pleasant and safe or unpleasant and potentially dangerous.

You may also hear this system referred to as the "somatosensory" system.

#### What might this look like in my child?
- High pain threshold
- Enjoys different textures
- Chews on everything, including inedibles
- Touches everything, appears very curious
- May not notice if they bump into things
- Holds things tightly
- Enjoys foods with intense flavor and textures
- May over-aggressively pet animals

#### What can I do to help my child?
- Create opportunities to touch different textures and materials: i.e. sensory bins
- Utilize chewies
- Sensory brushing (Wilbarger protocol - requires training)

#### Do you see these behaviors in your child?
- Touch can feel painful and uncomfortable
- Dislikes having things on hands and feet
- Does not like brushing hair and teeth
- Avoids certain food textures and temperatures
- Avoids standing in lines near others
- Does not like when hands are dirty
- Dislikes clothing textures, tags, seams
- May walk on toes
- Difficulty at bath time

#### What can you do?
- Wear comfortable and loose clothing
- Warn child / ask permission before you touch them
- Introduce new textures slowly
- Use deep pressure or vibration prior to an activity/task the child dislikes

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The Auditory System

The auditory system allows an individual to sense, process, and understand sounds coming from their environment. This system’s main functions include: processing the frequency of sound, recognizing and comprehending language, and filtering out sound. In general, this system allows us to distinguish what sounds are important and which are not.

What might this look like in my child?

- May not respond to name being called
- Constantly responds “what?”
- Difficulty understanding others
- Listens to music and TV at high volumes
- May hum and make noises often
- May be very loud when completing activities
- Difficulty with reading and writing

What can I do to help my child?

- Write down directions or use gestures when speaking to them
- Encourage use of toys that have music or sounds
- Use songs to enhance learning new skills
- Read sound books
- Play music in the background
- Have child sleep with fan or music

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Dislikes loud noises—covers ears frequently
- Reacts to background noises most people wouldn’t notice
- May refuse or dislike loud public places
- Easily distracted
- Struggles academically
- May hide/cry from loud sounds (i.e. vacuum)

What can you do?

- Shut doors and windows to reduce outside noise
- Noise canceling headphones
- Prepare child if loud noises are expected
- Offer gum or crunchy snack or play light music as a distraction from irritating background sounds

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The Olfactory System

The olfactory system detects scents in our environment and tells us if these scents are pleasant and safe, or unpleasant and potentially dangerous, to our bodies. This system is highly linked to the gustatory system (taste) and difficulties in this system can contribute to feeding issues.

What might this look like in my child?

- May often smell/sniff different items: shampoo, lotion, clothing, food, perfume
- May not notice smells or have a reaction to strong or unpleasant smells
- May lick objects to get a better sense of that item

What can I do to help my child?

- Scented play-doh or slime
- Scratch and sniff stickers
- Mr. Sketch markers
- Cooking/baking activities
- Scented sensory bins/bottles
- Strong smelling bath products
- Mint or cinnamon essential oils/scents

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Finds smells of food/objects overpowering
- May be a picky eater
- Makes faces or complaints about scents
- Avoids situations where they know they will encounter an unpleasant smell
- May dislike certain people with distinctive scents (strong perfume, clothing detergent)

What can you do?

- Unscented shampoos, lotions, and detergents
- Maintain a fragrance-free environment
- Allow child to choose shampoo, toothpaste, etc.
- Introduce new scents slowly
- Try to correlate smells with preferred foods

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The Gustatory System

The gustatory system allows us to detect taste from our environment and tells us whether that taste is pleasant and safe or unpleasant and potentially dangerous to our bodies. This system is highly linked to the olfactory system and difficulties in this system can lead to picky eating and other feeding issues.

What might this look like in my child?

- Likes foods with intense flavor
- Places toys and other non-food objects in mouth
- Constantly chews on hair, nails, shirt, etc.
- Uses a lot of sauces and seasonings
- Enjoys vibrating toothbrushing

What can I do to help my child?

- Create a "No" bin to ask the child to place non-food objects in when trying to place in mouth
- Provide child with a small dish of sauce/seasoning to limit amount being used
- Chewing gum, crunchy cereal, dried fruits, raw vegetables
- Make time for oral activities: blow bubbles, drink liquids from a straw, blow up balloons

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

- Picky eater
- Finds some flavors too strong
- Dislikes certain textures
- May gag with non-preferred foods
- Dislikes the dentist
- Enjoys bland foods

What can you do?

- Gradually increase the amount of non-preferred foods on their plate during mealtimes
- Expose repeatedly to new foods
- Eat less preferred foods along with your child
- Positive reinforcement for trying new foods
- Do not force feed

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The Proprioception System

The proprioception system tells a person the location, position, and orientation of their body. It uses muscle, tendon, and joint movement to sense body position in space. This sensory process can be both conscious and unconscious.

What might this look like in my child?

- Stands too close to others, bumps into others
- Enjoys tight clothing
- Likes to be "squished" or hugged
- Enjoys tight spaces
- Difficulty navigating rooms/environments
- Breaks things easily, including pencils/crayons when writing
- Slams doors, walks loudly
- Misjudges weight of objects
- Does not like to over-extend joints/stretch
- Avoids rough play
- Holds objects very lightly
- Avoids weight bearing activities
- Avoids collisions
- Does not like clapping, slapping, or banging

What can I do to help my child?

- Deep pressure: massage, joint compressions, using mats/pillows to "squish" child
- Weighted blankets and vests
- Sitting in bean bag
- Heavy work: animal walks, pushing laundry basket, wheel barrow walks, carry books
- Apply deep pressure or have the child complete heavy work before doing school work

Do you see these behaviors in your child?

What can you do?

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**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY in Schools**

**What is School-Based OT?**

An occupational therapist in the school system works with students so they are able to successfully participate throughout the school day.

An occupational therapist may work with a student in the classroom, cafeteria, playground, bathroom, or other areas of the school where a child may need assistance.

**What Areas Can a School OT Address?**

Some of the most common reasons that students are referred to school-based occupational therapy include:
- Fine motor skills
  - Holding pencil, zipping up a jacket
- Gross motor coordination
  - Throwing a ball in PE, putting backpack on
- Visual motor skills
  - Copying notes from board, writing on lines
- Problem solving
- Attention difficulties in class
- Organization issues
- Sensory difficulties

**School-Based OT's Work With:**

- Families
- Speech Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Teachers
- Other Supporting School Staff

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An IEP is an Individualized Education Plan used to support a student at school by allowing specialized instruction.

Occupational therapy services can be included in a student's IEP along with their school goals. During OT sessions, the occupational therapist will work with a student on reaching their goals.

A student may have a 504 plan if they need accommodations or modifications to the general education program. This student may receive OT regularly or occasional OT check-ins.

What Does School-Based OT Look Like?

A school-based OT session is 30 minutes long and may work on:

- Academic outcomes
- Social skills
- Handwriting skills
- Behavior management
- Recess participation
- Work skills
- Self-care skills
- Transportation use
- Safety skills
- School participation
- Use of assistive technology
- Changes to the school space
- Transition after high school

References:
Early Intervention

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

What is Early Intervention (EI)?

Early intervention (EI) is a federally mandated and state regulated service that is provided, for free or at a low cost, to children ages birth to 3 years old.

To qualify for services, the child is evaluated and must show delays in the following areas:

- Physical skills (reaching, crawling, walking, drawing, building)
- Cognitive skills (thinking, learning, solving problems)
- Communication skills (talking, listening, understanding others)
- Self-help or adaptive skills (eating, dressing)
- Social or emotional skills (playing, interacting with others)

How Does Early Intervention Work?

Once you receive a referral from your healthcare provider, a therapist will evaluate your child. This evaluation will be completed in the home or in the child's everyday setting.

After a child qualifies for services, an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) will be made:

- This plan outlines the goals for the child moving forward
- It is created with the family, based on what is best for both the child and the family.
- Once an IFSP is completed, therapy services must be started within 30 days

Early Intervention OT's Work With:

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Role of Occupational Therapy in EI?

The goal of occupational therapy is to promote participation and engagement in daily life. Areas often addressed are:

- Bathing
- Feeding
- Toileting
- Mobility
- Sleep
- Play
- Social interaction
- Family Education

EI promotes the child’s growth and development in their “natural environment” which can include:

- Home
- Daycare
- Community setting (ie. park, grocery store, etc.)

Early Intervention uses a family-centered approach. The family is involved in every step of the process and goals are centered on the family’s wants/needs. This empowers families to advocate for themselves and their child!

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What is Outpatient Therapy?

To receive outpatient occupational therapy services you will travel to a clinic in your area. Often speech therapists and physical therapists work in the same clinic as pediatric occupational therapists. This can allow them to easily collaborate on children receiving multiple services.

Typically, a referral is made by a physician for a child to be seen in an outpatient setting. Then, the caregiver reaches out to the clinic to set up an initial appointment.

Who Can an Outpatient OT Treat?

An occupational therapist can treat a wide variety of conditions and impairments in the outpatient setting, including the following:

- Developmental delays
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)
- Cerebral Palsy (CP)
- Down Syndrome
- Feeding difficulties
- Sensory processing deficits
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), stroke, etc.
- Mental illness
- Vision deficits
- Among many others

Outpatient OT's Work With:

- Families
- Speech Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Nutrition
- Behavior Therapy

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What Does Outpatient OT Look Like?

A typical outpatient occupational therapy session is 30-60 minutes long. Depending on the child's needs, the child may come in for services between one to five times per week.

An evaluation by an occupational therapist using standardized assessments, caregiver interview and child observation will be conducted during the first visit. From there, the treating occupational therapist will create a plan of care for your child including several goals for the child to achieve during their occupational therapy services.

Discharge planning will depend on your insurance and whether the child has achieved their goals. Your occupational therapist will prepare you with activities for the home and further referrals as needed.

What is the Focus of Outpatient Intervention?

Below is a list that gives you an idea of just some of the things an outpatient occupational therapist may work on with a child:

- Sensory processing
- Regulating emotions
- Attention
- Feeding
- School readiness / school-related tasks
  - Handwriting
  - Using scissors and pencils
- Balance and strength
- Bilateral coordination
  - Using both hands at once to wash hair or using both hands to play a game
- Motor planning/coordination
- Visual motor and visual perceptual skill development
  - Writing on the line, copying images
- Peer interaction and play skills
- Age-appropriate activities of daily living (ADLs)
  - Dressing, brushing teeth, or combing hair

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