



BITING, KICKING, PUSHING

Babies as well as adults all gain comfort and self-regulate through oral activities such as sucking on a pacifier or on candy. Biting builds strong jaw muscles, it provides neck and thoracic stability and it is used for organizing and grounding the body. Parents expect a baby to chew and bite on things, but if the older child still bites on things or people one should recognize his possible sensory reaction or behaviour and provide him with acceptable items to bite and chew on.

One of the most basic demands of our daily existence is to process the sensory information from our environment in such a way that the body can respond to it in a relaxed and joyful way. Learning or survival is therefore the ability of the central nervous system to integrate the information from our senses so that the body can respond in an appropriate way on a physical as well as on an emotional level. Our sensory system consists of touch, smell, taste, hearing, vision, vestibular and proprioceptive input.



Many children with sensitive sensory systems feel helpless and anxious when they are tired, hungry, sick or stressed. They may also feel overwhelmed and out of control when there is change in their routine or surroundings and new situations can be experienced as threatening and scary. The input from their senses may be experienced as a threat and the body will respond with movement e.g. a fight or flight or freeze reaction (panic/biting/pinching/kicking).

Adults may think that she is just not interested or "difficult", but her sensory challenges may interfere directly with the learning or survival process in the brain that interferes with emotions, behavior and schoolwork. The ability to be calm, focused and organized is part of the end product of a well integrated sensory system.

The child will give us warning signs if something in her environment is making too many demands on her. She would prefer to react emotionally or prefer to avoid activities, become distracted or become aggressive. During times of a sensory overload the child can also get fussy, irritable or throw tantrums and it is during these times that conflicts can arise. It is important to become aware of the warning signs and change the situation before it gets worse. We can prevent these relationship dynamics through understanding our own response on the input from our senses as well as our children's reaction to the input from their senses.

The mouth is one of the ways in which the body gain information about the world around him. That is one of the reasons why children put everything in their mouths. When the touch system finds it difficult to register information from the area of the body that is touched, a simple touch may be perceived as a threat.

A smooth texture blanket e.g. cotton, velvet or satin may calm her down or deep pressure may be provided by wrapping her firmly in a blanket or by sitting in a beanbag chair. Use a mirror to make different shapes with her lips or dip fingers in icing and lick each finger off. Play "vacuum-cleaner" with the lips- suck up a piece of paper and carry it to a different place. Make different sounds with the lips e.g. humming, smacking , kissing or clicking. Play with sounds e.g. mmm, ppp and bbb. Provide a box with chewable toys.

The proprioceptive system gives us information about our joint position and movement. The child may have difficulty knowing where her body is in relation to people and objects around her. The child may not know how much pressure to exert with her muscles and biting, kicking or pushing may provide her with enough proprioceptive information to provide a calming effect. Chewing on biltong sticks, mango strips, raw carrots, pretzels or licorice twists or sucking fluid through straws may calm her sensory system down. Provide plenty of toys that he can hit throughout the day e.g. punching bag or musical instruments such as drums. Joint compression for calming can be accomplished by pushing the hands together.

When the vestibular system inefficiently process movement sensations, the child may overreact to movement or he may seek a lot of movement to calm him down e.g. bumping kids over. eah child's vestibular system has differnet needs and should be

evaluated individually e.g. slow gentle movements, rocking or swaying side to side may calm her system down. bouncing, jumping, running, swinging or hanging may alert her system.

The sensation of smell goes directly to the emotional part of the brain. A child may remember an uncomfortable experience in her environment and that negative memory may contribute to her level of frustration. Pay attention to room fresheners, perfume, food smells, etc. in the child's environment.

The child may find it difficult to process what she sees and she may be overwhelmed by moving objects, people or clutter around her. She may panic or become tired or distractible and emotional. Pale or neutral colours and familiar pictures in her surroundings may be calming and provide a feeling of security.

High-pitched noises and sudden loud noises may be experienced as a threat and she may be unable to locate the source of the sound. The child may find it difficult to identify voices between sounds and it may be a challenge and a frustration to follow basic instructions. A rhythmic tone of voice as well as soothing background music may reduce agitation, anxiety and fear.

Environmental control forms the foundation to provide a supportive environment and the goal is to create a climate of caring support. The adult working with the child should remain calm and without judgment. If at any time the child becomes anxious or you are feel you are working against her, re-evaluate the situation and carefully observe any signs of discomfort.

Summary:

Some children with sensitive sensory input may hit or bite even when they aren't angry/hungry . They may be unsettled because a child is sitting too close to them or the amount of movement/noise/space/light in the room is overwhelming OR they may just need some sensory/proprioceptive input through deep pressure and they respond by striking or biting another child. Bite or chew on safe food or items that won't turn mushy in the mouth. Give your child time out to self-regulate e.g. with her dummy or "blankie" and redirect him toward something he is allowed to hit and bite.

Lindsey Biel,OT, explains that biting and smacking are not only ways of expressing the child's irritations, but it also gives her plenty of deep pressure and proprioceptive input that she can control and it may actually be very calming to her system. She suggests lots of input that will prevent her from feeling the need to bite or hit in the first place. Should your child injure another child, give the attention to the other child before dealing with your own so as not to reinforce the behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Heavy pressure massage on the joints
2. Help with heavy work in the house e.g. carry the laundry basket, push and pull boxes or furniture, sweep, dust and mop
3. Backpacking: carry extra weight and walk in the veld or over rocks
4. Jumping or bouncing on a trampoline, inner tube or a large mattress
5. Tug of war or pillow fights or "play wrestling"
6. Make waves with a blanket
7. Hopping like animals/ leapfrog
8. In the kitchen - pouring, mashing, sieving, kneading, rolling dough, pounding, beating
9. Digging in the sand / push a wheelbarrow or filling and emptying buckets
10. Tear, scrunch and roll paper
11. Lift, carry and unpack e.g. groceries
12. Play soccer with an empty paper bag or aim and kick with different balls
13. Swish liquid in a bottle or play with water filled balloons
14. Play music instruments e.g. cymbals or drums
15. Blow whistles or bubbles or candles
16. Use stretch / resistive bands
17. Woodwork e.g. sanding and hammering
18. Chew on a "tubing-necklace" provided by your therapist