

# Learn at Home

Sensory Processing & the Learning Environment

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*Click here for  
audio  
information*

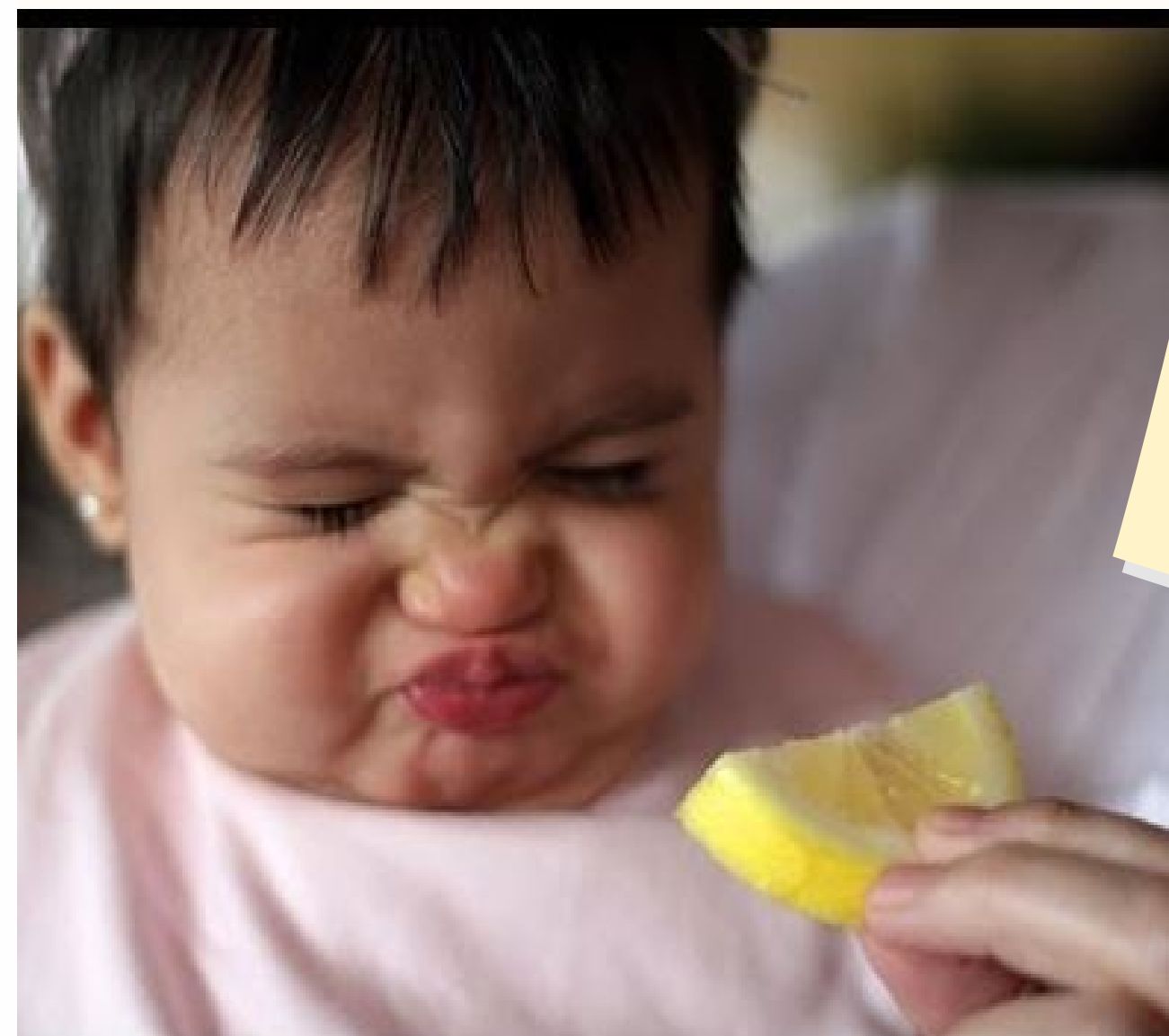
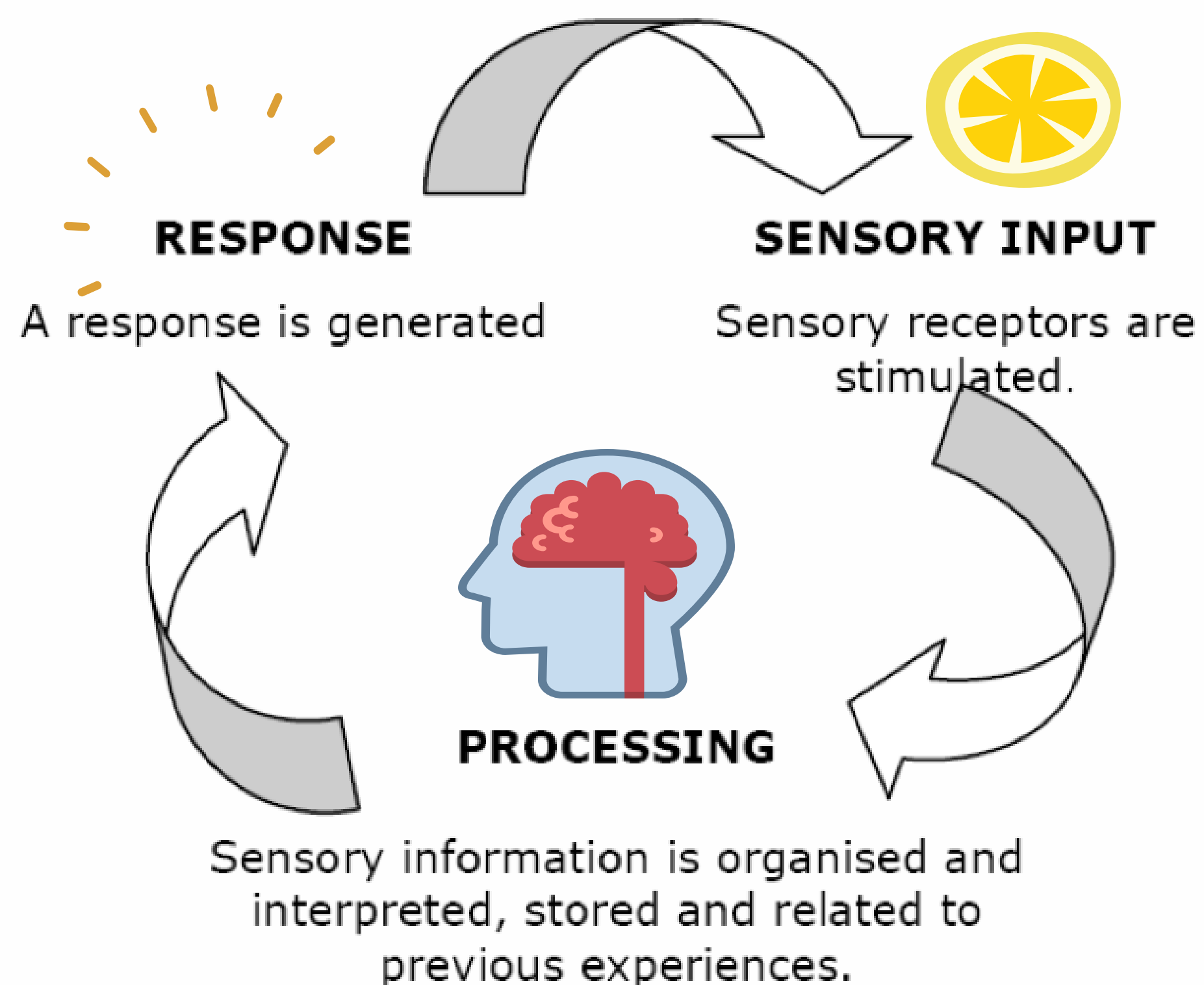
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**Algonquin & Lakeshore**  
Catholic District School Board

# What is Sensory Processing?

- We use our senses to **gather information** from our environment.
- Each sense provides different information which is combined and **interpreted by our brain**.
- Our brain processes this information so that we can **respond** accordingly.
- Effective sensory processing helps us **filter out** unimportant information (ex. background noise) so that we can focus on what we have to do (ex. read this slide)



Sensory processing is automatic and happening all the time!

# Why Does Sensory Processing Matter?

**The sensory sensitivities and preferences of children must be taken into consideration to support their learning.**



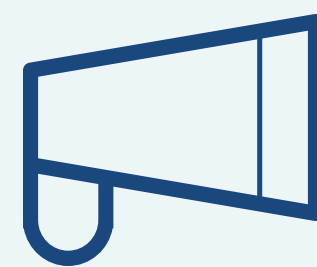
Sensory processing allows us to understand and **connect with the world** around us.



It has a major impact on our lives – it is how we **learn, participate** in activities, and helps us **protect ourselves**.



Everyone processes sensory input differently. It is important to be **aware of and sensitive to** individual **differences**.



Some people are more **sensitive** than others to sensory input. *ex. People in the same house prefer different TV volumes*



It supports **self-regulation** – the brain and body's ability to manage stress and maintain a calm-alert state.



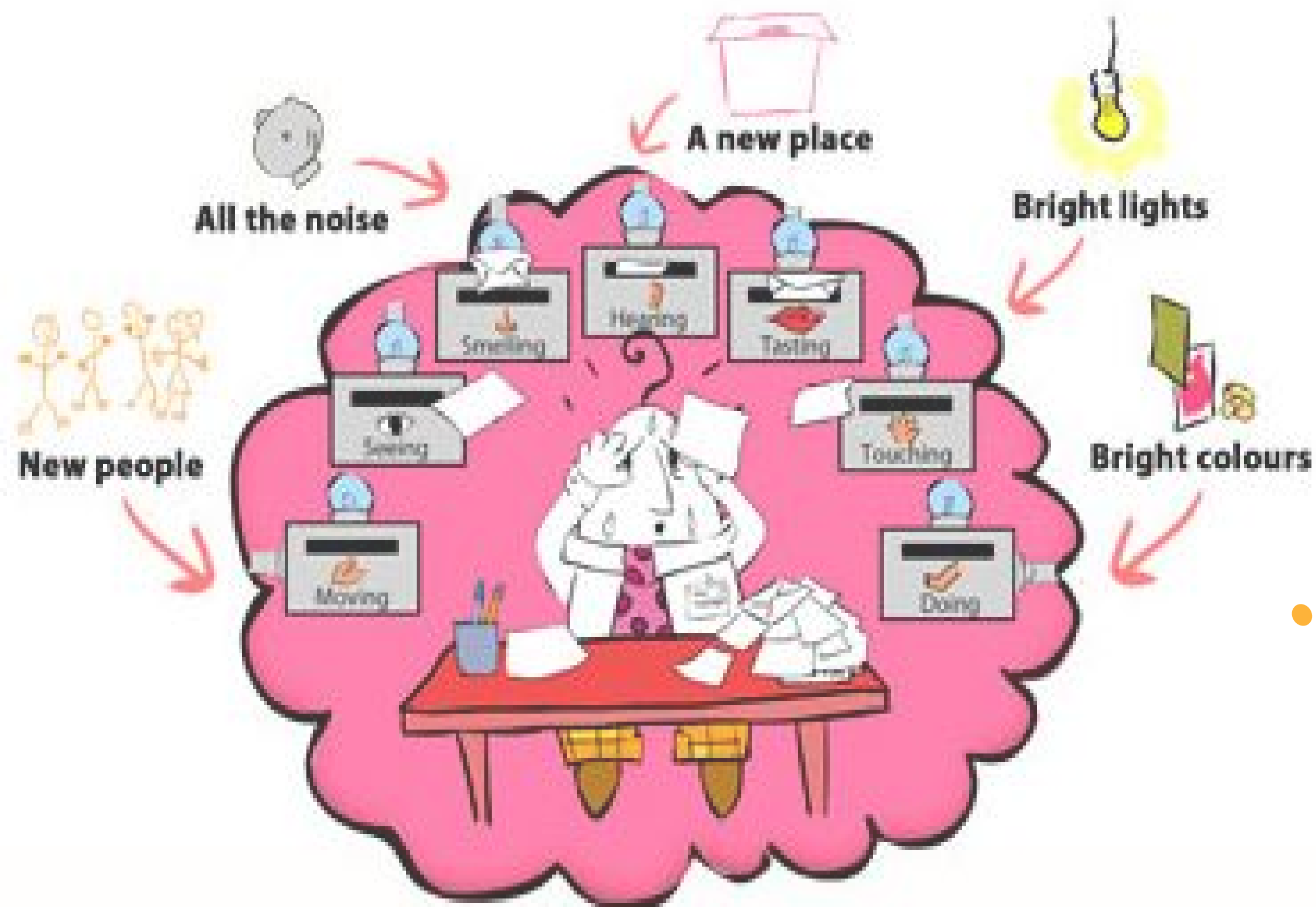
Lights, sounds, scents, touching things can become **distracting, overstimulating, frustrating or confusing** due to sensory processing issues.

# Too Much Sensory Information

While everyone is different, it is not uncommon for children to become **overstimulated** by sights, sounds, etc. in their environment.

This means that their brain is trying to process **more information than they can comfortably handle**. (sensory overload)

It becomes **hard** for the brain **to ignore**, or filter out, extra information and focus on a task (like school work).



**Reducing unnecessary or extra information can help a child focus.**



# Detective Work

Children may not understand or recognize overstimulation and sensory overload.

It may take some detective work by adults to identify possible sources of sensory overload.



Strong smells



Cluttered work space

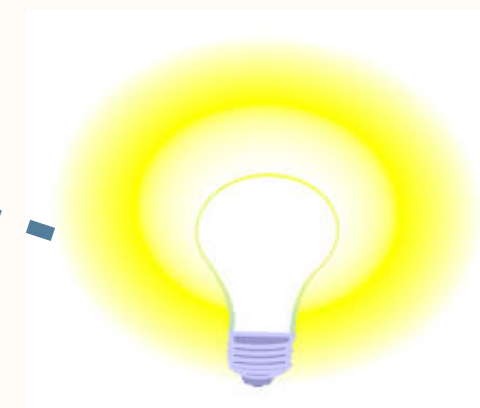


Screen time with stimulating visuals

Uncomfortable seating causing back pain



Other activity in the house



Lights too bright



Television on in background

# Strategies at Home - Preventing Overload During Homework

## Signs of Sensory Overload:

- difficulty focusing
- restlessness
- irritable
- stress
- overly excited
- covering ears or eyes

## Triggers of overload are different for different people.

Any sensory information that is distracting, and which a child has trouble ignoring, could contribute to feeling overstimulated.



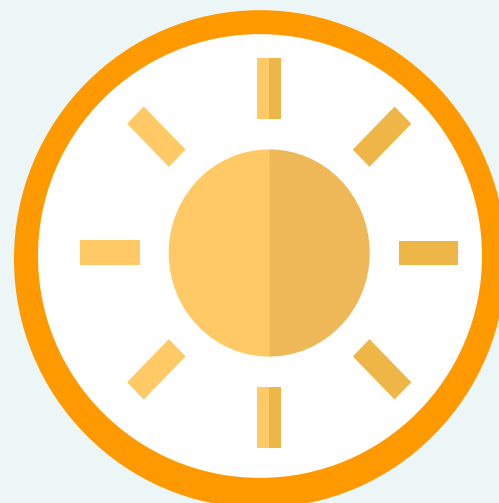
Set up a space just for homework. Position the work space away from busy places in the house.



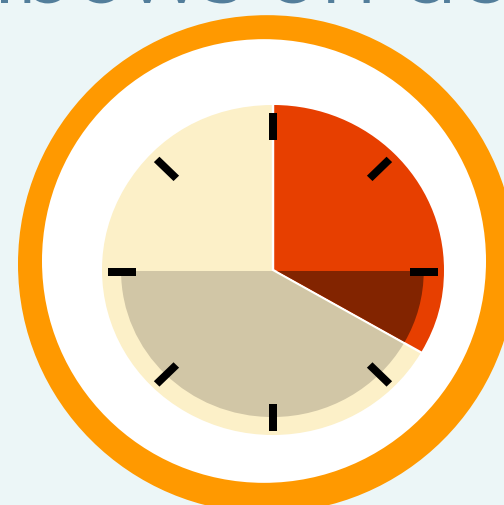
The table/desk and chair set-up fits the child. Feet flat on floor/ footstool, can rest elbows on desk.



Take a "mindful minute" to check the environment. When quiet and still - what can you hear? see? feel? smell? Are there any distractions?



Lighting is not too bright - Avoid fluorescent lighting. Use sunlight when possible.



Schedule homework time when child is not tired. Schedule breaks every 15 minutes.



Headphones or ear plugs are available if needed.

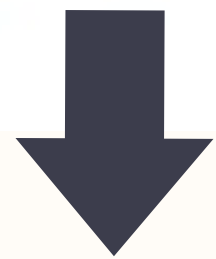
# Sensory Processing and Self Regulation



## **Understimulated**

Sleepy, lethargic, sluggish, and spacey. Has a hard time focusing.

A child who is under stimulated, will need more sensory input to feel "just right".



## **Increase sensory input & increase alertness**

Examples:

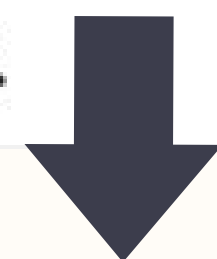
- movement break
- chewing gum



## **Just right:**

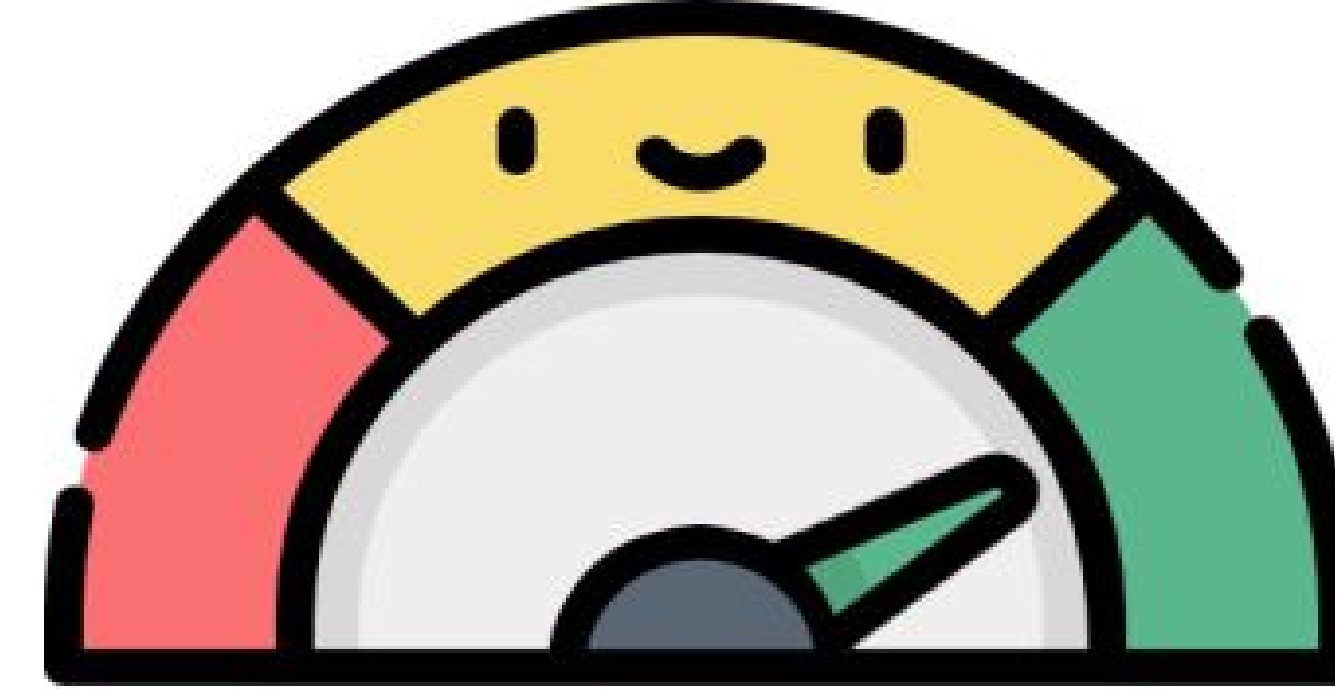
Calm, alert and focused. Ready to play and learn.

A child who is "just right" is getting just the right amount of sensory input.



## **Keep doing the same thing.**

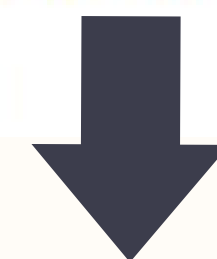
Calm-alert balance.



## **Over-stimulated**

Hyper, over-excited, angry, worried, out of control. Has a hard time focusing.

A child who is over-stimulated is getting too much sensory input. They need less stimulation, or 'soothing' input.



## **Decrease sensory input & increase calm**

Examples:

- turn down volume
- rocking chair

# Sensory Strategies for Self Regulation at Home

We can use our senses to help maintain a "calm-alert" balance.

**Here are some things to try:**

## Calming Activities



- Squeeze a stress ball
- Rock in rocking chair
- Water bottle (with spout)
- Limit sound, or play nature sounds, soft music
- Stretch - hold the stretch to a count of 10
- Rub or draw on back
- Practice deep breathing
- Swing back and forth
- Blow bubbles
- Suck on a candy
- Do 5-10 push ups
- Wrap self tightly in blanket
- Make a calming fort with blankets and pillows



## Alerting Activities

- Have a snack of crunchy foods - apples, carrots, pretzels etc.
- Have a fidget tool available
- Chew gum
- Take a movement break - dance, spin
- Play upbeat music
- Jump, bounce - use trampoline if available
- Mint and citrus scents are thought to be alerting
- Drink cold water
- Getting hands on or "messy play" - sand, play doh, water, dry rice



**Not sure if you need a calming or alerting strategy?**

★ When in doubt, **use your muscles!** Push, pull, crawl, lift, carry, walk, run, bike – any activity that engages muscles, especially using weight or resistance can help without being overstimulating. Click [HERE](#) for ideas that you can do almost anywhere!



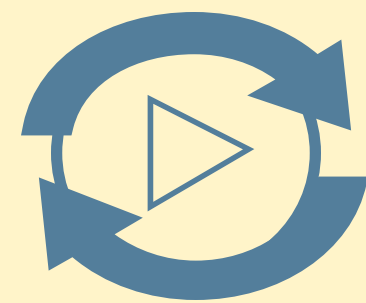
*10 Tid Bits and  
Takeaways*

1. We all process A LOT of sensory information all the time. (automatically)
2. Sensory processing impacts learning.
3. Once aware of it, you will start to notice how it impacts daily life.
4. We are all different when it comes to sensory processing!
5. Self-reflecting on your own patterns makes it easier to understand others.
6. Fatigue and stress can contribute to sensory overload.
7. What sensory strategies will work depends on the individual.
8. Get moving! Physical activity is one of the best ways to support regulation.
9. Screen time is lot of visual and audio information, but not a lot of movement.
10. Enjoy the outdoors - fresh air, nature's colours, calming sounds & open spaces.

# Online Resources

Click sticky notes to go to websites and documents for parents and educators

3 minute video: **Intro to Sensory Processing**

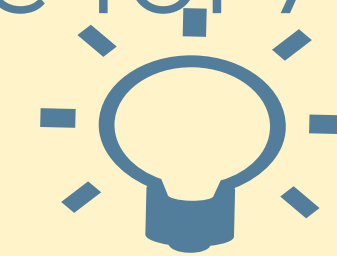


Learn More About Your **Sensory Preferences** with this **Adult Checklist**



**Sensory Strategies & Tips**

Middletown Centre for Autism

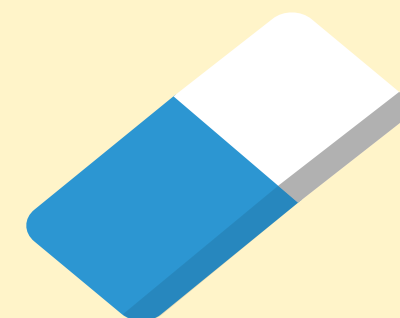


Sensory Processing Disorder

**Info Sheet, CHEO**



Self Regulation **Tips for Homework Time**



**Checklist - Sensory** Considerations for the **Learning Environment**



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