

Sensory Processing Milestones

Sensory processing is how the brain interprets and responds to information from the senses.

OT helps when sensory input causes distress, avoidance, or seeking behaviours.

Birth to 1 year

- Reacts to light, sound, and touch
- Calms to rocking, and sucking
- Explores textures with mouth/hands

1 to 2 years

- Listens to speech without distraction
- Shows strong sensory likes and dislikes
- Enjoys movement (e.g. spinning)
- May resist certain clothing or textures

2 to 3 years

- Seeks or avoids input (e.g. noise, messy play)
- Uses movement to calm or focus
- May show meltdowns from sensory overload

*This flyer is intended as a **general guide** to support understanding of developmental skills across age ranges. It is **not a diagnostic tool** and should not be used to make formal assessments or diagnoses.*

*Children develop at different rates, and variation is normal. However, **persistent challenges in one or more areas** may suggest an underlying difference or condition.*



3 to 4 years

- Manages noisy spaces with adult support
- Begins recognising sensory comfort items
- Shows awareness of what feels "too much"

4 to 5 years

- Uses sensory tools independently (e.g. fidget, headphones)
- Understands personal sensory preferences
- Understands others sensory preferences might be different
- Manages transitions better with strategies

6+ years

- Advocates for sensory needs (e.g. "I need a break")
- Uses movement, sound, or calm space to regulate
- Adjusts own environment for focus

Delays or differences may relate to:
Autism, Sensory Processing Disorder, ADHD, trauma.

Every child processes the world differently.

This flyer is designed to help families understand individual sensory needs, not to define what is "normal." Not meeting certain sensory expectations may reflect a difference, not a delay or disorder.

Our approach is neuro-affirming, strengths-based, and focused on supporting each child's unique way of being.