Sensory Symptoms Checklist

The following checklist is not a diagnostic tool. Rather, it is an indicator of sensory over- or under-responsiveness. The purpose of this tool is to assist in developing an appropriate treatment plan, and/or sensory diet, for an individual with sensory modulation difficulties.

Remember that it is normal for all people to be sensitive to certain sensations. Sensory modulation becomes a disorder only when it is negatively impacting a person’s life (i.e. ability to pay attention, learn, socialize, relax).

* Indicates Sensory-Seeking behavior. Sensory-Seeking is a form of under-responsiveness but these individuals seek intense sensation to make up for the under-responsiveness of their nervous systems. The general under-responders tend to be more passive and sedentary than the sensory-seekers, but still share many symptoms.

TACTILE (TOUCH)

**Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:**
- _____ avoids affectionate touch
- _____ bothered by seams in clothing, tags, waistbands, etc.
- _____ avoids messy play including finger-painting and play-doh
- _____ dislikes nail-trimming/hair-cutting hair-brushing/tooth-brushing
- _____ limited food preferences, sensitive to food textures
- _____ excessively ticklish
- _____ avoids standing close to others
- _____ startles easily when touched unexpectedly
- _____ overreacts to minor injuries or mosquito bites

**Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:**
- _____ always touching others*
- _____ as a young child, may prefer to be without clothes and barefoot
- _____ doesn’t seem to notice messy hands or face
- _____ touches everything, brings objects and toys to mouth frequently*
- _____ may stuff too much food in mouth
- _____ seems unaware of light touch
- _____ doesn’t seem to notice cuts and scrapes, doesn’t mind shots
- _____ drools, doesn’t wipe runny nose
- _____ unintentionally rough on pets or other kids
- _____ craves intense flavors – salty, sweet, sour, spicy*
- _____ difficulty with fine motor tasks
PROPRIOCEPTIVE (PRESSURE ON MUSCLES AND JOINTS)

Since proprioceptive input is always helpful to the nervous system, we do not see over-responsivity in this category.

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:
- loves jumping, climbing, wrestling, and crashing activities*
- walks on toes*, or walks heavily
- difficulty with fine motor tasks
- prefers crunchy and chewy foods*
- sucks thumb or fingers, chews on clothes and toys
- grinds teeth, cracks knuckles*
- loves tight hugs and “squishing” activities or positions*
- chooses thick or heavy blankets
- self-abusive behaviors – pinching, biting, head-banging*
- prefers tight-fitting clothes or may wear a snug jacket constantly*

Other symptoms of proprioceptive dysfunction that are not classified as either over- or under-responsiveness include (circle all that apply): accidentally breaks objects frequently, presses too hard or too light when coloring or writing, uses inappropriate force on objects (i.e. may squeeze juice boxes too tightly), uses too much force for things like opening/closing doors, plays roughly with animals and other kids.

VESTIBULAR (MOVEMENT)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:
- as a baby, dislikes being held away from adult’s body or tossed in air, may be “clingy”
- avoids swings, slides, anything that requires feet to be off the ground
- fearful of escalators, elevators, and all heights
- gets motion sick easily
- dislikes leaning back for hair-washing or floating on back in pool

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:
- as a baby, needs to be rocked a lot, is happiest in stroller, swing, bouncer*
- dislikes sedentary tasks*
- is in constant motion, loves spinning, swinging, being upside down*
- may have low muscle tone (muscles and joints seem too soft and floppy)
- “W” sitting on floor, slumps, leans in chair
- loves spinning, loves amusement park rides, is a “thrill-seeker”*
- rocks self or moves head back and forth while sitting*
AUDITORY (SOUND)
Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:
_____ as a baby, startles easily, cries with vacuum, hair-dryers, toilet flushing
_____ dislikes noisy places
_____ easily distracted and bothered by background noises
_____ cries, covers ears with loud or unexpected sounds
_____ asks others to be quiet

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:
_____ may not consistently respond to name (rule out hearing loss)
_____ prefers t.v. and music to be loud*
_____ often doesn’t notice background noises
_____ makes own sounds frequently, enjoys silly sounds of others*
_____ says “What?” frequently even though hearing is intact
_____ may appear oblivious to some sounds, has difficulty locating sound
_____ may use self-talk to get through a task

VISUAL
Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:
_____ bothered by bright lights, sun
_____ dislikes visually busy places (stores, playgrounds, cluttered rooms)
_____ avoids eye contact
_____ prefers dim lighting, shade
_____ rubs eyes a lot, may get headaches from reading

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:
_____ loves shiny, spinning or moving objects*
_____ difficulty with eye-hand coordination tasks (catching a ball, stringing beads, tracing and writing)
_____ loves action-packed, colorful t.v. shows and electronic games*
_____ difficulty distinguishing between similar letters and shapes
_____ difficulty with visual-tracking, may lose place frequently while reading

GUSTATORY AND OLFACTORY (TASTE AND SMELL)
Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:
_____ talks about smell a lot, notices odors others don’t notice
_____ plugs nose, avoids places with strong smells (some restaurants)
_____ dislikes new foods, may have very limited food preferences

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:
_____ smells and licks inedible objects such as toys and play-doh*
_____ likes strong odors such as perfume, cleaning products, and gasoline*
_____ prefers strongly flavored foods - spicy, salty, bitter, sour, sweet*

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior. See note at top of form.