

## Sensory Symptoms Checklist: Babies and Toddlers

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.

***Depending on the age of your child, many symptoms will not be applicable. Just check the symptoms you observe at this stage of development and leave others blank.***

### TACTILE (TOUCH)

#### Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:

- cries/arches back when held/cuddled
- difficulty transitioning to solid foods
- 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
- cries/fusses during diaper change
- distressed by baths
- startles easily when touched unexpectedly
- over-reacts to minor injuries or mosquito bites
- difficulty transitioning to solid foods

#### Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:

- always touching others\*
- prefers to be without clothes and barefoot\*
- doesn’t seem to notice messy hands or face (beyond 12 mos)
- seems unaware of light touch
- may stuff too much food in mouth\*
- doesn’t seem to notice cuts and scrapes, doesn’t mind shots
- drools, doesn’t notice runny nose or food on face (beyond 18 months)
- after 18 months, doesn’t appear to notice wet/soiled diaper
- delayed fine motor skills

## 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:

- \_\_\_\_\_ only sleeps when held or requires positioning aids/swing/bouncy seat
- \_\_\_\_\_ 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 (beyond 18 months)
- \_\_\_\_\_ very attached to pacifier (beyond 1 yr)
- \_\_\_\_\_ grinds teeth
- \_\_\_\_\_ loves tight hugs and “squishing” activities or positions\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ chooses thick or heavy blankets
- \_\_\_\_\_ self-injurious behaviors – pinching, biting, head-banging\*

## VESTIBULAR (MOVEMENT)

### Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 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
- \_\_\_\_\_ resists leaning back for hair-washing or floating on back in pool

### Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 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
- \_\_\_\_\_ rocks self or moves head back and forth while sitting\*

## INTEROCEPTION (INTERNAL SENSATIONS)

### Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:

- \_\_\_\_\_ seems to have a low pain tolerance
- \_\_\_\_\_ displays significant distress when cold after bath or after stepping outside on hot day
- \_\_\_\_\_ frequent complaints of various aches and pains

### Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:

- \_\_\_\_\_ difficult to toilet train
- \_\_\_\_\_ apparent lack of hunger/thirst
- \_\_\_\_\_ high pain tolerance or shows inappropriate response to pain
- \_\_\_\_\_ difficulty falling asleep/staying asleep
- \_\_\_\_\_ doesn't seem aware of symptoms of illness such as sore throat or nausea

## AUDITORY (SOUND)

### Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 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 TV 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

### Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:

- \_\_\_\_\_ loves shiny, spinning or moving objects\*
- \_\_\_\_\_ difficulty with eye-hand coordination tasks (catching a ball, stringing beads)
- \_\_\_\_\_ loves action-packed, colorful TV shows and electronic games\*

**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\*

**AFFECT**

**Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ generally fussy, irritable
- \_\_\_\_\_ very particular; seems to be a certain way things have to be done
- \_\_\_\_\_ difficulty self-soothing

**Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ generally happy, laid back
- \_\_\_\_\_ seems "tuned out" frequently
- \_\_\_\_\_ constantly "on the go" at an early age; hard to manage physically