



VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Sensory Challenges

Families living with autism spectrum disorder often look for tips on how to handle the many different challenges that may arise. “Real Life Tips for Kids with Autism” is a series of practical videos and resources presented by the experts at Children’s Specialized Hospital.

A lot of children with autism have many sensory challenges. This could occur when they go out to an amusement park or a barbeque or even just getting a haircut. Some children can be hypersensitive. They can overreact to the situation or they could be hyposensitive, which means they’re under-reacting.

Typically we have our regular five senses that we all learn back in kindergarten, about taste, touch, smell, hearing, seeing. But there are two other senses that a lot of people forget and that’s our proprioceptive and our vestibular system. Our proprioceptive system is gonna help us organize and control our movements. So, how we walk, how we grab our pencil, how we do those big movements. Our vestibular system provides us with a sense of balance and awareness to the relationship to our environment so that keeps us steady and where we are, not bumping into objects, or bumping into people.

Some general tips to help your child to get into the new environment is preparing a schedule for them. Either you could take pictures of where you are going and set up a little photo album for them, or also I know a lot of parents have iPads out there. There are wonderful apps that you can set up for their schedules.

Another great tip that parents could use is to dampen the sound when you go to a movie theater or go into get a haircut, or going to see fireworks in the summertime or any activity. You can use these small little earplugs and just, they’re very discreet, put them in there. Even if the child can’t tolerate both of them, at least have one on and that will calm the sound down.

Another great tip for parents if you want to set them up to have a class and be more exposed to glue and different textures, have them prepare at home. You can explore by playing rice bands or little bean bands and even play with some food like pudding. Different textures like that will help them prepare to go into the class that they are taking or even at school so they are not so afraid when they do an art project for example, and they have to handle with glue and glitter and markers.

Another great tip for parents is to provide your child with a little sensory chest that they could take along anywhere that they have to go – to school, to your trip. Some stuff you can include in your sensory chest is some stress reliever, like a little stress ball, like this, or even a little squishy ball they could just put in their backpack.

Some other strategies that can help children is have a heavy backpack. They can stuff it with all the different books and by providing this pressure, this will calm the child down. Even if your child is going to get a haircut and they need that little extra input, you can bring their stuffed animal and stuff it with some beanbags in there to provide that weight on the lap, so they don't have to move or jiggle so much and it gives them that sense of comfort, and more awareness that they are there sitting. Some other activities that you can include in your sensory chest is just basic warm-up like jumping jacks, wall push-ups, just moving around in place, even taking a walk and just stepping out of the situation for a little bit. Another great strategy, provide also snacks. Crunchy snacks like pretzels, carrots, or even chewy stuff like gum, licorice, jelly beans, but you want to stay on the healthy side.

So you can start with a gross motor activity before getting a haircut or going to the movie theater. Some of these activities can consist of doing a jumping jack, doing some wall push-ups, doing an obstacle course. Now the reason why you want to do this is going to help your child organize their body, to be in a more calmer state. Also as a parent, you do want to try to get in touch with the movie theater or even if they are going to go get a haircut, with the barbershop or the salon, to let them know "My child is sensitive to these sounds. Can you work with me?" Having the child maybe come a little bit earlier, or the day before, and have them experience it, even if it is five minutes. This way it will decrease the tantrums, decrease the anxiety with you and your child.

As a parent, you do want to find out more information about sensory processing and the best way to find out that information you want to get in contact with an occupational therapist. The occupational therapist will explain about the whole nervous system and how our body works with our environment. The occupational therapist will specialize on these activities and gear it to your child because every child is completely different. So they will come up with a plan with you and your child and activities that will help them either calm them or get them ready for the environment.

Through occupational therapy they're gonna come up with some really fun activities. The child is not even gonna know, like "What am I doing? Jumping jacks? This is making me feel great." So with them they're gonna become aware of what they dislike and they do like. What makes them happy and what doesn't make them happy.

Once these strategies are in place, you can see your child just blossom and to be able to go throughout the day without having any meltdowns because not only as a parent you know what to do, but the child becomes more aware of what they need to do to help them in that situation. And that's our biggest goal is to have our children to be independent.



Through a partnership with Kohl's Cares, Children's Specialized Hospital is improving access to care for children with special health care needs.



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