



Understanding the 8 Senses

(A gentle introduction to sensory processing)

A gentle note for parents,

When we think about senses, we usually think of five.

But there are actually eight, and all of them affect regulation, behaviour, and communication.

Many children with additional needs experience the world differently through their senses. This isn't "bad behaviour", it's information.

The 5 Senses we all know

- **Sight** (Vision): How we process what we see.
- **Hearing** (Auditory): How we process sounds.
- **Touch** (Tactile): How we experience textures, temperature, and contact.
- **Taste** (Gustatory): How we experience flavours.
- **Smell** (Olfactory): How we process scents.



HEARING



SMELL



TASTE



TOUCH



VISION

The 3 hidden senses

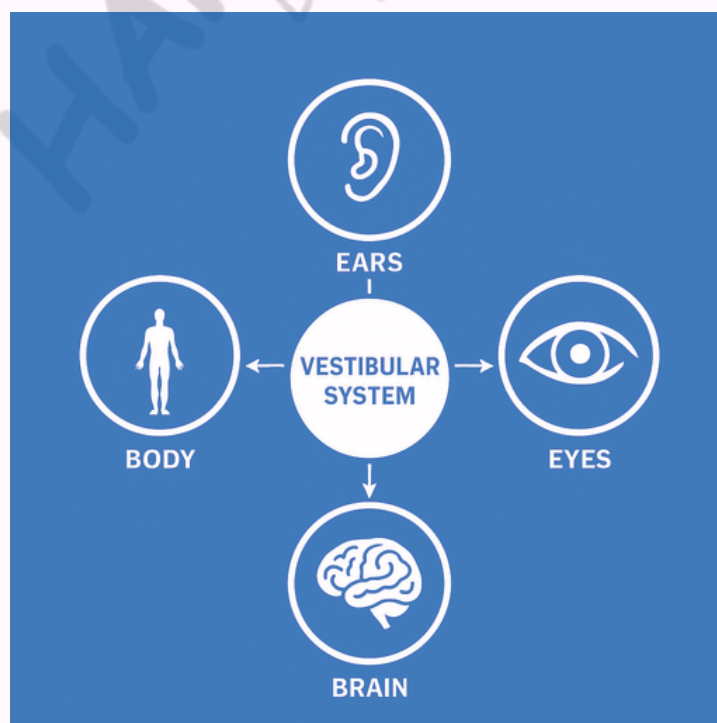
These are often the ones that impact regulation the most.

Vestibular (movement and balance)

Helps us know where our head and body are in space.

Children may:

- Spin
- Jump
- Avoid swings
- Struggle with balance



Practical Uses

Balance. Identifying if we are falling, spinning, moving fast or slow.

Regulating

Gentle rocking or swinging in a rhythmic/linear movement.

(C) Spinning, hanging upside down. (S)

Hypersensitivity

Signs	Gets motion sickness. Avoids tumbling, spinning activities. Avoids taking feet off the ground. Avoids the playground equipment.
Tools	Build tolerance slowly. Respect this hesitance to engage and find less challenging activities to start with.

Hyposensitivity

Signs	Does not register movement. Has poor balance. May appear clumsy.
Tools	Support them to build confidence and competence slowly. Encourage them to use other senses such as sight to warn them if they are falling.

Discrimination Disorder

Signs	Gets lost easily as finds it hard to orientate self. Does not register how fast they are going, May not register they are falling until it is too late. May overreact to unexpected movement.
Tools	Build discrimination skills with exposure to, and discussion of, similar but different movement activities – fast/slow linear/spinning on swing, bikes, scooters. Do activities in different positions, sitting, standing, lying down.

Sensory Craving

Signs	Moves all the time! Hangs upside down, spins, runs.
Tools	For all cravers: balance enough input to get them stimulated, with calming activities to stop them from being overwhelmed. Seek support from an OT. This profile is like having a fuel tank with a hole in: it can take a lot of fuel to fill it, as some is always leaking out. At any moment, it could explode. Tread carefully!

Proprioception (body awareness)

Helps us know how much force to use.
Children may:

- Crash into things
- Squeeze tightly
- Appear clumsy
- Seek deep pressure

The sense that helps a child with body awareness is known as proprioception.



What is Proprioception?

Proprioception is the **body awareness sense**. It helps with:

Knowing where our body parts are



Scratching an itch and knowing where to scratch without looking



Touching hands to feet, also known as "finding your feet"

Understanding how much force to use



Using a pencil with the proper amount of force



Holding a delicate item without breaking it

Coordination between body parts and senses



Riding a bike and coordinating the movements to stay on track



Using hand-eye coordination to catch a ball



Interoception (body signals)

Helps us understand internal signals (hunger, thirst, needing the toilet, tiredness).


Some children may not recognise these signals easily.

Important reminder

Sensory differences are not misbehaviour.

They are communicating.

If you'd like to understand your child's sensory profile more deeply, we explore this in detail during parent consultations.



Interoception

Interoception is awareness of your body's internal signals. It tells you how you feel, including:



Nausea



Thirst



Pain



Hunger



Itchy skin



Muscle tension



A full bladder



Anxiety or nervousness



Hot or cold temperatures



Your heartbeat