



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 046 | Sensory processing concerns

Sensory-seeking patterns

What it means

Sensory-seeking patterns involve frequently pursuing movement, touch, pressure, sound, or other sensations. Seeking input can be part of typical development or a helpful form of self-regulation. It becomes a concern when it creates distress, risk, or substantial barriers to everyday participation. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Sensory seeking can occur with developmental differences, including autism or ADHD, or within ordinary individual variation. A child may also be exploring, communicating a need, coping with stress, or responding to environmental demands. The behavior alone does not establish a sensory diagnosis or identify one biological cause. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

Patterns may include repeated jumping, spinning, touching objects, making sounds, or mouthing items. Frequency and context matter. Some repetitive movements are harmless and useful; unsafe climbing, injury, or persistent mouthing of nonfood items warrants further attention. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

Assessment asks what the child is gaining or communicating, what triggers the behavior, and how it affects routines. Occupational therapy, developmental, communication, and medical input may be relevant. Hearing, vision, pain, nutrition, or swallowing concerns are investigated when indicated. Questionnaires describe patterns but do not prove a cause. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Support can provide safe movement and sensory options, adapt routines, teach accessible communication, and address discomfort or attention needs. Occupational therapy should use participation goals and review benefit. Evidence for particular sensory techniques is variable. Harmless self-regulation should not be suppressed simply because it looks different. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Offer safe, enjoyable activities and predictable breaks matched to the child's needs. Supervise hazards and choose toys that are safe for age and chewing behavior. Ask the therapist before using specialized weights, swings, or restrictive products. Help the child request movement, rest, or another activity.

When to seek help

Repeated injury, ingestion of nonfood items, choking, sudden behavior change, or loss of skills needs assessment. Breathing difficulty or suspected poisoning requires emergency care.

Questions for your care team

- What function does the behavior serve for this child?
- Which safe alternatives support the same need?
- What outcome will show whether an intervention improves participation?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss sensory-seeking patterns. Sensory-seeking patterns involve frequently pursuing movement, touch, pressure, sound, or other sensations. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: Not every repetitive or sensation-seeking behavior needs to be stopped.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Sensory seeking: actively pursuing particular sensations.
- Self-regulation: managing arousal and emotional state.
- Function: the purpose or effect of a behavior.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Sensory Integration Therapy

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Sensory-Integration-Therapy.aspx>

[2] Sensory Integration Therapies for Children With Developmental and Behavioral Disorders

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/129/6/1186/32067/Sensory-Integration-Therapies-for-Children-With>

[3] Treatment and Intervention for Autism Spectrum Disorder

<https://cdc.gov/autism/treatment/index.html>