



By: Jacqueline Wills | It's Time to be Sensory-Aware | October 2021

Advocating for Greater Awareness of Sensory Processing Issues

The prevalence of sensory processing issues is high, with [between 5% and 16%](#) of children in the U.S. battling them. Deficits in sensory processing can either involve hyperreactivity (being over-sensitive to sensory stimulation and therefore avoiding it) or hyperreactivity (being under-responsive to sensory input, which can lead to disengagement or disinterest in activities and other behaviors). Sensory processing issues can be concurrent with other conditions. For instance, one of the diagnostic criteria for children with autism spectrum disorder is hyperreactivity or hyperreactivity to sensory input. Because sensory issues can cause great discomfort and anguish for those who experience them, [boosting awareness in homes](#), schools, and among the general public is key. As a parent or teacher of a child with sensory processing disorder (SPD), what steps can you take to educate others on this subject?

Embracing Lifelong Learning on SPD

Knowledge is power. Whether you are a teacher, a parent of a child with SPD or someone in the general public, knowing about SPD and sharing information you find on your social media channel, blog, or even your company website can help people learn more about SPD, its prevalence, and small ways that they can make life easier for those who are battling these disorders. One of the biggest problems kids with SPD face is stigmatization and judgement

from those who mislabel them as “lazy,” “over-sensitive,” or “difficult.” Share findings such as those in [the breakthrough study that revealed](#) that children with SPD have quantifiable differences in their brain structure. Share statistics on a disorder whose prevalence is something many people are unaware of.

Advocating at Schools for Children with SPD

Schools in typical districts in Phoenix serve [almost two million meals per year](#) between breakfast and lunch. Meals follow USDA-recommended nutritional requirements and include foods like fresh fruit, whole-grain pizza, and other healthy foods. Schools also provide special diets under USDA regulations 7 CFR Part 15b for children whose disabilities restrict their diets. Children with SPD may also require special foods, particularly if they were braces. [Orthodontists recommend soft foods](#) such as dairy, cooked vegetables, and soft fruits, which can help children who already struggle with the sensation of wearing braces reduce their discomfort. SPDs are not considered a qualifying disability, but you can advocate at your child’s school to ensure your child can access foods that do not exacerbate their condition, especially if they wear braces or other orthodontic apparatuses.

Promoting Awareness of SPD at Work

If you own or manage a business and can make important changes, work to promote greater awareness of sensory issues at work. Although children are more likely than adults to have SPD, [adults can have symptoms too](#) – except that most have developed ways to deal with these disorders that hide them from others. Adults with SPD can feel that sound is too loud, or light is too bright. At work, employees should know that they can turn to you if they have special needs with respect to silence, privacy, and/or lighting so they can work comfortably. Additional steps to take include providing staff training on sensory issues, using communication methods that suit all employees (for instance, changing volumes or ring styles on phones, using ergonomic lighting, or providing employees with natural instead of artificial light, and reducing music or technological use in shared workspaces).

Sensory processing disorder can affect up to 16% of children in the U.S. However, it can also cause discomfort and difficulties for adults in the workplace and in other public spaces where they have little control over their environment. There are many ways that parents, friends, and loved ones of children with SPD can advocate for their wellbeing. These include sharing information, enlisting the help of schools, and making necessary accommodations at work.