

# *Sensory Issues and Self-Regulation in **AUTISM***

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**AUTISM MATTERS**





# *SENSORY ISSUES IN PERSONS WITH AUTISM*

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People with **AUTISM** might have sensory issues with:

- Sights/Sounds
- Smells/Tastes
- Touch/Balance
- Awareness of body position and movement
- Awareness of internal body cues and sensations

# *WHAT DO SENSORY ISSUES LOOK LIKE?*

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Many persons with **AUTISM** show certain behaviours when they are experiencing a sensory issue:

- Increased movement such as jumping, spinning, or crashing into things
- Increased stimming such as hand flapping, repetitive noise or rocking back and forth
- Talking faster and louder or not talking at all
- Covering ears or eyes
- Refusing or insisting on certain foods or clothing items

# *WHAT DO SENSORY ISSUES LOOK LIKE contd.*

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- ❑ Frequent chewing on non-food items
- ❑ Frequent touching of others or rough playing
- ❑ Difficulty communicating or responding as the brain shifts resources to deal with sensory input (*shutdown*)
- ❑ Escalating, overwhelming emotions or need to escape a situation (*meltdown*)
- ❑ Difficulty recognizing internal sensations like hunger, pain or the need to use the bathroom

# *SENSORY ISSUES* contd.

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Persons with **AUTISM** experience both *hyposensitivity* (under-responsiveness) and *hypersensitivity* (over-responsiveness) to a wide range of stimuli.



# WHAT IS HYPOSENSITIVITY?

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This refers to abnormally decreased sensitivity to sensory input. Hyposensitivity (**under-responsiveness**) is especially common for persons with **AUTISM** and is more often seen in children. Common examples are:

- ❑ A desire to touch everything
- ❑ An inability to sit still for long periods of time
- ❑ Difficulty recognizing sensations like hunger, pain, illness
- ❑ Attraction to loud noises, bright lights and vibrant colours

# *WHAT IS HYPERSENSITIVITY?*

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This involves **over-responsiveness** to one's sensory environment, for example

- a child feeling the need to cover their ear when he hears loud noise.
- Certain tastes, sounds, textures can be overwhelming
- Refusing to brush their teeth





# *WHY IS SELF-REGULATION IMPORTANT?*

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- ❑ Teaching emotional regulation is one way to help children with **AUTISM** or anxiety handle unexpected events and control their emotions.
- ❑ The skill of managing feelings so that they don't reach overwhelming levels and interfere with learning and development will assist in such areas as **being able to sit and listen in school**.
- ❑ Many people on the spectrum need support as they struggle to manage their emotions and mitigate their anxiety (Temple Grandin)

# WHAT DOES SELF-REGULATION LOOK LIKE?

- ❑ Some children are instantaneous - they have a huge/strong reaction; without a build-up or lead-in they can't inhibit that immediate behaviour response.
  - ✓ regulating reactions to strong emotions like frustration, excitement, anger, embarrassment
  - ✓ focusing on a task
  - ✓ refocus attention on a task
  - ✓ control impulses
  - ✓ behave in ways that would help them to get along with other people



# *WHAT DOES SELF-REGULATION LOOK LIKE*

## *contd.*

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- ✓ Being able to take turns in games and conversation, share toys, and express emotions in appropriate ways - make friends
- ✓ Being able to make appropriate decisions about behaviour and learn to behave in new situations with less guidance from someone else

# HOW AND WHEN SELF-REGULATION DEVELOPS

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Children develop self-regulation through warm and responsive relationships. They also develop it by watching the adults around them.

- ❑ Self-regulation starts when children are **babies**. It develops most in the toddler and preschool years, but it also keeps developing right into adulthood. For example, **babies might suck their finger for comfort or look away from caregivers if they are tired or need a break.**
- ❑ **Toddlers** can wait short times for food and toys. But toddlers might still snatch toys from other children if it's something they really want. **Tantrums happen when toddlers are overwhelmed by strong emotions.**

# HOW AND WHEN SELF-REGULATION DEVELOPS contd.

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- ❑ **Pre-schoolers** are starting to know how to play with other children and understand what's expected of them.
- ❑ **School-age children** are getting better at controlling their own wants and needs, imagining other people's perspectives and seeing both sides of a situation. For example, *they might be able to disagree with other children without having an argument.*
- ❑ **Pre-teens and teenagers** are better at planning, sticking with difficult tasks, behaving in socially appropriate ways, and to consider how their behaviour affects other people. For example, *they may think about others perspective on things*

# *HOW TO IMPROVE SELF-REGULATION*

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- Practice deep breathing exercises
- Establish zones of regulation; get away from stimuli
- Discuss appropriate reactions
- Model appropriate behaviour
- Communicate expectations calmly
- Acknowledge your child's feelings



# 12 Ways To Self-Regulate



**get  
fresh air**



**journal  
experiences**



**use breathing  
techniques**



**read  
a book**



**create a cool  
down area**



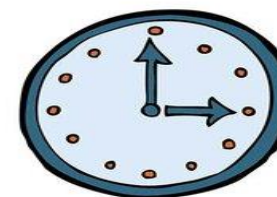
**label your  
feelings**



**develop  
a routine**



**take  
a nap**



**take a  
break**



**hug someone  
you love**



**color a  
picture**



**talk it out or  
ask for help**