

# Parent

# Guide



@twinklparents

We are excited to share this content with you. If you are interested in finding more resources made especially for Parents, then check out these links to different areas of the **Twinkl Parents** hub.

**SEND Support**



**Subject Guides**

**Pregnancy & Baby**



**Health & Wellbeing**

**Supporting Learning**



## What is this resource and how do I use it?

If your child has sensory or auditory processing disorders or if you think they may show signs of these, use our comprehensive guide to understand more about the conditions, including what they are, the signs and causes. It offers practical help and suggestions of what you can do at home to support your child and manage the conditions.

## What is the focus of this resource?

Symptoms of Sensory Processing Disorder

Symptoms of Auditory Processing Disorder

Empowering Parents of Children With SEND

## Further Ideas and Suggestions

We have lots of parent support guides in **this category** at the **Parents' Hub**. In this category, you'll find support for a range of diagnoses, including **selective mutism** and **ADHD**. This **Parent Guide to SEND Support in School** explains how schools target support for the children in their care.

Parents Blog



Parenting Wiki

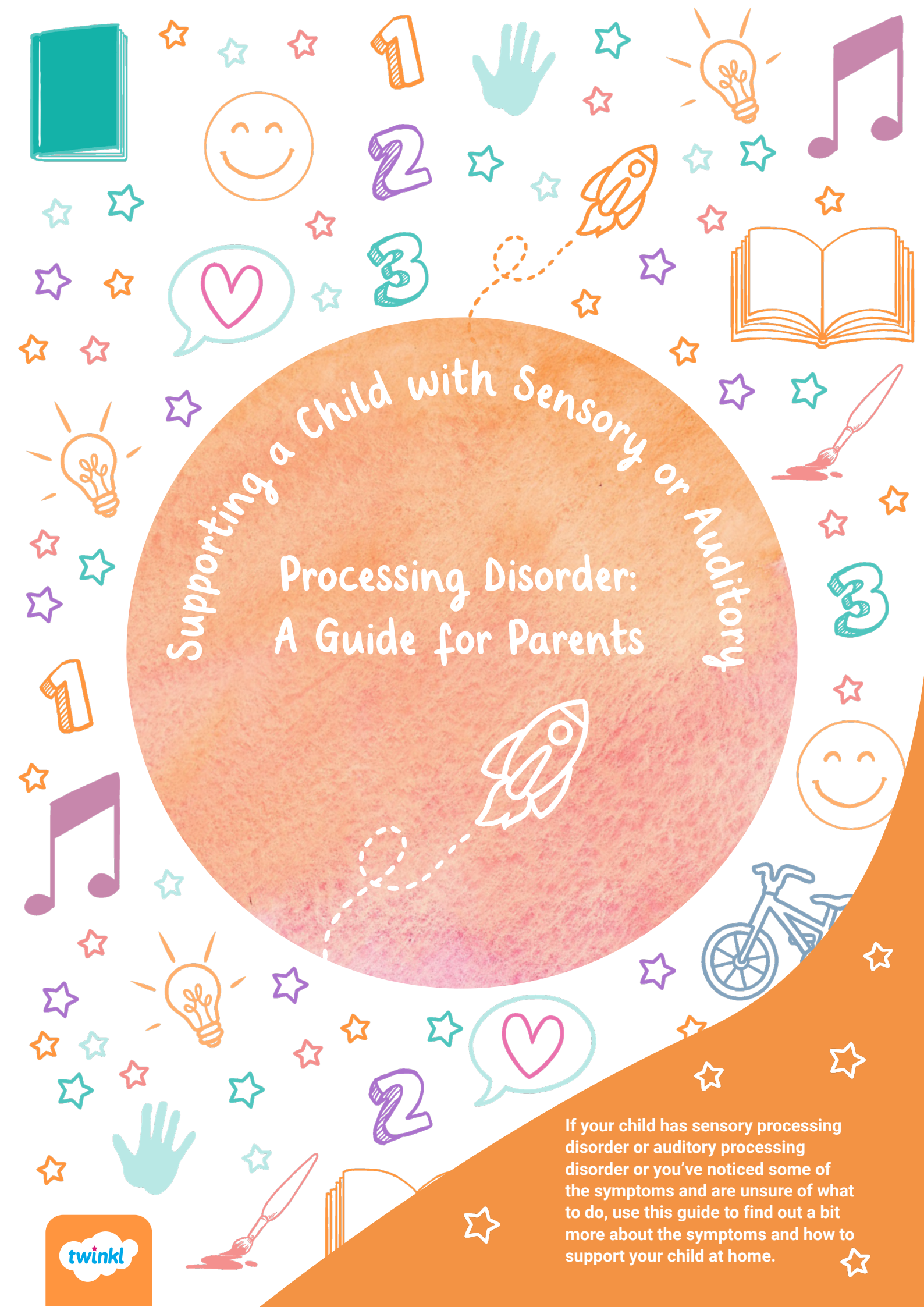


Parenting Podcast



twinkl

Parents Hub



Supporting a Child with Sensory or Auditory Processing Disorder:  
A Guide for Parents

If your child has sensory processing disorder or auditory processing disorder or you've noticed some of the symptoms and are unsure of what to do, use this guide to find out a bit more about the symptoms and how to support your child at home.

# What is sensory processing disorder?

**Sensory processing disorder** is a disorder that occurs as a result of the brain having trouble receiving and responding to the information obtained through the senses. This can be an under- or over-responsiveness to the signals received. Symptoms are so severe that they interfere with normal everyday functioning.

## Signs

There are many signs of **sensory processing disorder** and your child may have some of these, depending on the sense that is affected and whether they are over- or under-sensitive. Some signs of sensory processing disorder can include:

- distracted by background noises that others are not aware of
- fear or extreme reaction to noises (such as high-pitched, loud or sudden noises), touch and movement - or under-reaction to these
- avoidance of physical contact such as hugs with others, even familiar adults; avoidance of close proximity - or conversely, a constant need to touch others, becoming inappropriate
- doesn't understand the concept of personal space
- fear of crowds
- poor balance and coordination
- overly worried about falling despite little risk of doing so
- picky eater or restricted eating habits
- fidgety and unable to sit still
- high pain threshold and can hurt others without meaning to
- completes tasks often with too much force or too little; handwriting can be too light or too hard
- might appear to be lethargic
- might have low muscle tone and have a slumped posture
- difficulty regulating own emotional responses -
- prone to tantrums
- easily frustrated
- has a need for control or is over-compliant
- poor sleep patterns
- loves movement and might seek out intense pressure such as spinning, jumping and crashing into objects
- difficulty accepting changes in routine and transitioning from one task to another
- can be easily distracted and has poor concentration
- does not like self-care tasks such as hair-washing and brushing, dressing, tying laces, self-feeding
- seems to seek thrills and doesn't have a sense of danger
- doesn't respond to extreme heat or cold
- might enjoy being underneath heavy clothing or blankets
- difficulty engaging with peers and doesn't understand how to play with other children - therefore prefers lone play
- delayed communication skills
- chews on things
- might walk on tiptoes

If your child displays some of these symptoms, don't worry - some children might have a few of these and they might improve over time as they develop. It is worth keeping a note of any signs so that you can refer back to them later.

# What is auditory processing disorder?

**Auditory processing disorder** is the difficulty someone has understanding sounds, including spoken words. It is not a hearing difficulty. It often starts in childhood but it can develop later.

## Signs

Some signs of **auditory processing disorder** include:

- feeling overwhelmed in noisy environments and difficulty understanding people speaking in noisy places
- doesn't understand some spoken instructions and appears not to follow directions
- trouble differentiating between similar sounding words
- trouble understanding people who talk quickly or with different regional accents
- difficulty following conversations
- finds it hard to express themselves verbally
- frequently has to ask people to repeat what they've said
- doesn't remember nursery rhymes
- doesn't remember details of what they have been told
- trouble learning to read and spell

Try to keep a note of any signs you notice so that you can refer back to them at a later date when talking with professionals.



# What causes sensory processing disorder?

It is not clear exactly what causes **sensory processing disorder**. Studies have shown that it can run in families. Problems with sensory processing are also related to Autism and ADHD, although just because your child might have a sensory processing disorder, it doesn't necessarily mean they are autistic or have ADHD. It is also thought that a child born prematurely or with a low birth weight has a greater risk of sensory processing disorder. Some research suggests that infrequent handling of a baby or decreased interaction with them affects the stimulation required for sensory development.

## What causes auditory processing disorder?

It is not clear exactly what the causes are of **auditory processing disorder**, although children who have frequent childhood ear infections are at greater risk. Faulty genes, complications at birth and head injuries are also possible causes. Auditory processing problems are also related to dyslexia and ADHD, although just because your child might have auditory processing disorder, it doesn't necessarily mean they will have dyslexia or ADHD.

## Diagnosis of Sensory Processing Disorder

In order for you to give as much information as possible to any specialists involved with your child, try to keep a diary of symptoms you notice - take note of where it was, what your child was doing and how they reacted. This will help the professional to build a better picture.

Talk to your child's teacher and the **SENDCo** at school so that you can discuss your observations and ask them for their input. The SENDCo might be able to do some more formal observations of your child to help build a bigger picture of how your child's difficulties are affecting their learning. Discuss these with your doctor, who might refer your child to an **occupational therapist** or a **physiotherapist** for a more detailed analysis of your child's difficulties.



To check for sensory processing disorder, your child will be assessed by a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist, who will perform a range of tests as well as observing your child's behaviour, interactions and responses to sensory stimulation. They will ask your child some questions and they'll want to get a detailed developmental history. They'll ask you about your child's behaviours too - so the notes you have kept will come in very handy. They'll especially be interested to know whether:

- the behaviour affects your child's everyday life
- symptoms come on suddenly or become more pronounced
- your child's reactions to sensory stimulation have become hard for you (or them) to manage
- your child's learning is affected as a result of their difficulties in sensory processing

## Diagnosis of Auditory Processing Disorder

Make sure you have notes about the symptoms you've noticed, the background noise and environment when you observe these symptoms and the specific problems your child encounters at different points in their everyday life.

Talk to your child's teacher and the **SENDCo** at school so that you can discuss what you have seen at home or out and about and ask them for their input. The SENDCo might be able to do some more formal observations of your child to help build a bigger picture of how your child's auditory processing difficulties are affecting their progress in school. Discuss these with your doctor, who might refer your child to an audiologist for some more detailed assessments to ascertain the extent of their difficulties.



To check for **auditory processing disorder**, the audiologist will complete a series of tests requiring your child to respond to small signals, for example by pressing a button or repeating something back. In order to assess accurately, your child will need to be mature enough to take the test - it is not normally offered under the age of seven.

The audiologist will:

- ask your child to spot small changes in sounds
- assess the extent of your child listening and understanding speech with background noise
- ask your child to fill in missing parts of words

They also might:

- complete some speech and language tests with your child
- attach electrodes to your child's head to assess how your child's brain reacts to sounds
- assess your child's memory, language and concentration



# The Next Steps

There is no cure for **sensory processing disorder**, but there are things that can be done to help your child to develop coping strategies. Your child might find that they have fewer issues as they mature. Therapy for those with sensory processing disorder is most effective when it is started very early. There are other methods, such as auditory training, which will focus on developing your child's listening and concentration. Problems with auditory processing can increase with age.

Once your child has been assessed for sensory or auditory processing disorder, the results of the tests should be shared with you and your child's school. From this, an education plan can be drawn up between school staff, your child and you. This will consider how best to support your child to manage and overcome their difficulties. This support might include extra intervention, different teaching approaches and adaptation of the classroom environment in order for your child to receive the best possible opportunity to make progress and thrive.

## What can I do to support my child?

### Follow a Sensory Diet

Created in 1991 by Wilbarger and Wilbarger, a sensory diet is a plan of activities and adaptations for a child that meets their sensory needs. Usually, an **occupational therapist** will devise a sensory diet; you'll be able to follow this at home and teachers will be able to use this to make adjustments in school. These scheduled activities will form an important part of how your child manages the day to day routines of life and the activities will differ according to your child's individual needs. For example, activities might include fidget toys, having deep pressure applied, listening to music, having chewy snacks, squishing on a beanbag, bouncing on a trampoline or playing with toys that make noise.





# What can I do to support my child?

## Liase with School

Forging strong relationships with your child's school will help to keep lines of communication open and enable you to share ideas about what is working for your child. You might need to explain in more detail your child's processing difficulties: every child with a processing disorder will have a different experience and teachers will find what works for some children might not work for others.

## Suggest Adaptations

Don't be afraid to ask questions and to suggest adaptations that you feel will work: teachers will be more than happy to take advice and try things out in order to help your child to make progress and feel settled. These adaptations might include:

- extra time to complete activities
- regular movement breaks
- sensory breaks in a quiet, calm space
- consideration of seating within the classroom so that your child is head on to the teacher, in a distraction-free position
- use of fidget toys to focus attention
- the use of ear defenders
- visual and mutli-sensory teaching opportunities
- appropriate work which will give your child the opportunity to be successful and develop self-esteem
- use of a soundfield system
- provision of opportunities for art, cooking and messy play
- social skills intervention programmes
- alternative methods of recording work, including the use of a laptop or other technology
- the use of visual timetables within the classroom and 'now and next' boards to help manage transitions

# What can I do to support my child?

## Play Together

Depending on your child's sensory needs, it can be easy to set up some fun activities to do together which meet their needs:

- Play with playdough.
- Create a sensory path for your child to walk on barefoot.
- Make a sensory tray: add items such as sand, dry pasta, uncooked rice, foam, shredded paper, small pebbles, leaves and acorns - you can also theme them with other small world figures, vehicles or tools.
- Do some finger painting.
- Do some cooking with your child - include recipes that require mixing with the fingers, kneading and shaping.
- Make a big obstacle course together and then challenge each other to complete it - encourage a range of movements including jumping, running, skipping, rolling and lifting.
- Give body massages, applying pressure on different body parts according to needs.
- Play sound spotting: get your child to sit with their eyes closed and guess the noise while you make some sort of noise in the environment such as knocking on a door, pinging a hairband or clinking glasses together.
- Go on a listening walk together and note down the different sounds you can hear.
- Repeat the sound - make a sound or a pattern of sounds by clapping, clicking or tapping a pencil and ask your child to count the number of sounds or to repeat the sound patterns.



# What can I do to support my child?

## Be There

It can be confusing for your child to understand why they feel a certain way and how their sensory or auditory processing difficulties affect them. They need time to adjust and an acknowledgement of their difficulties. Other people might not realise the extent of support your child needs and may want your child to 'get over it'. This is where you need to be strong: people often don't understand what they've never experienced, so try to explain and educate so that they can become a support for your child.

Talk to your child about what they find hard and suggest practical adjustments that can be made to help them manage their difficulties. Encourage an open conversation where you both talk about their needs and their reactions in order to understand them more.

## Keep an Eye on You

Caring for a child with sensory or auditory processing disorders can be exhausting - you're trying your best to be their advocate, but that sometimes means you become hyper-sensitive to the environment in order to identify and remove possible obstacles for your child. Just relax and take a step back. It's a learning curve for you both and you're never going to be able to avert every single problem. Just remember, you're doing your best and your child will thrive under your guidance, love and care.



Disclaimers: We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.

This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. If you require medical advice, you should contact a suitably qualified professional. You should not rely on the material included within this resource and Twinkl does not accept any responsibility if you do.

This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. As this resource refers to sensory activities, you must ensure that an adequate risk assessment is carried out prior to using this resource. You must contact a suitably qualified professional if you are unsure. Twinkl is not responsible for the health and safety of your group or environment. Sensory activities can engage children in their play and learning, but supervising adults should check for allergens and assess any potential risks before the activity and only proceed if it is safe to do so.

This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. As this resource refers to physical activity, you must ensure that an adequate risk assessment is carried out prior to using this resource. You must contact a suitably qualified professional if you are unsure. Twinkl is not responsible for the health and safety of your group or environment. It is your responsibility to ensure the resource and the information/activity contains are safe and appropriate to use in your situation. It is your responsibility to decide whether to carry out the activity at all and, if you do, to ensure that the activity is safe for those participating. You may wish to take guidance as to whether and how participants should warm up before taking part in any activity, and carefully assess any environmental risks to be sure participants have a safe space in which to take part.