

# “Help! My child is having problems with... Sensory Issues”

WITH OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ALISON CAIRNS



Hello again. I'm Alison Cairns an HCPC registered Paediatric Occupational Therapist, working locally with children aged 0-19 years. I qualified in 1989 and have spent the last 20 years working with children. I am passionate about my job and feel that not enough is known about the really beneficial work Occupational Therapists can do for children with special needs.



In my first article, I discussed handwriting problems. This time, I am focussing on children who have sensory processing problems. Development of sensory processing is the foundation on which a child is able to develop a sense of the world around them, understand how to interact with it and organise themselves and their body, ultimately being able to focus and learn.

Sensory processing difficulties are very common in children who may have problems with their development and with motor coordination difficulties. Commonly they are related to over or under sensitivity to touch, visual input, textures, tastes, smell, movements and head and body position noises.

These difficulties can prevent the child participating in normal play (messy play may be avoided at pre-school), going to the cinema or shops (too noisy & busy visually), going swimming (fear of being bumped / splashed) or enjoying playground equipment.

Some children fear a movement such as swinging or rotating on a roundabout. Others avoid being touched and hugged by those dearest to them, unless it is on their own terms. Meal times can be very difficult with a child not noticing mess around their mouth or avoiding a lot of textures / tastes.

Some children have a difficulty regulating themselves, often seeking out too much of a range of sensory experiences which can impact on their ability to pay attention and focus.

An Occupational Therapist is able to assess and treat children with these types of issues and use specialist treatment techniques to help the child, parent / carers and education workers understand the problems. Sometimes a range of simple strategies, activities or adapting the environment may be suggested. Direct treatment may be required on a regular basis.

If you have concerns relating to a child's sensory processing or other areas of development such as the handwriting skills I discussed previously then a referral can be made to a Children's Occupational Therapist within the NHS. The referral can be made via your child's pre-school or school by contacting the Special Needs Coordinator or via a GP.

Alison can be contacted on 01252 691133 for information about referral to an OT or you can contact a local NHS OT service to ask for further advice or search online at the Royal College of Occupational Therapists website [www.rcot.co.uk](http://www.rcot.co.uk)

*Alison*

Alison is Registered with the Health Care Professions Council, Royal College of Occupational Therapists in Independent Practice, RCOT Specialist section - Children Young People and Families, Sensory Integration Network of UK and Ireland.



[www.acechildrensoccupationaltherapy.com](http://www.acechildrensoccupationaltherapy.com) 01252 691133