

Supporting the Child

Prior to and following a forensic interview, caregivers may notice a shift in their child's behavior. Your child may become sensitive to loud noises or cry when the routine of the day changes. These behavioral changes are very common and are attributed to a shift in how your child's brain is responding to sensory information.

Sensory information comes to us constantly throughout the day and in a variety of forms. It is the responsibility of the brain to integrate and organize this sensory "input" so that we can function effectively in our environment. The types of sensory input that we use to understand behavior are: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, movement, and pressure.

Stress can alter the way a child responds to sensory information in their environment. Parents/caregivers may notice that their child has difficulty focusing or is having periods of hyperactivity. However, some may notice their child becoming lethargic or avoiding physical activities (i.e. running, jumping, climbing). The goal, when noticing these changes, is to help your child return to a "calm/alert" state.

Parents/caregivers can increase a calm state within their child by determining which end of the spectrum their child is moving towards; either hyperarousal "too high" or hypoarousal "too low." Once the parent notices the direction, he/she can adjust their child's environment accordingly. (Please refer to table on page 2).

Children that are "too high" or hyper-aroused often exhibit the following:

- aggression when overwhelmed by their environment
- irritable, fussy mood
- upset by transitions or unexpected changes
- increased startle response

Children that are "too low" or lethargic often exhibited the following:

- Passive, quiet, withdrawn
- Easily exhausted and apathetic
- Doesn't cry when physically hurt
- Prefers sedentary activities

My child's energy level is:

TOO HIGH:

TOO LOW:

Touch	Firm massage in a pattered, repetitive movement. Circular motions across the back in the same direction.	Rubbing hands together briskly, back and forth (should look like the child is trying to "warm up")
Smell	Lavender oils or aromatic sprays (lightly administered)	Lavender oils or aromatic sprays (strongly administered)
Taste	Avoid sugar, fruit juices, and citrus. Oatmeal, plain yogurt, whole grain breads are best.	Eating pickles, citrus fruit, sugar-free gum. Tapping the mouth firmly with the hand.
Sight	Low lighting, limit television and video games; headphones during quiet activities	Increased time out doors in the sunlight.
Sound	Low music; limit time in a group setting	Drumming; loud, patterned rhythms
Moving	Rocking in a chair; butterfly breaths (deep breaths where the child lifts and lowers the arms with the breaths)	Rolling on an exercise ball, swinging, dancing; spinning (with assistance)
Pressure	Wall pushes; bear hugs; pillow squishes; swaddling; hanging from a monkey bar	Jumping in place; running in place; Trampoline jumps (with assistance)

Parents should continue to modify the environment until the child is able to maintain a calmer state. Sensory exercises or adjustments can be used to support the therapeutic process but do not replace the need for therapy.

For more information about sensory processing and its affects on behavior please visit the following websites:

www.spdfoundation.net

<http://www.developmentalfx.org/>

<http://www.alertprogram.com/>

<http://www.sensory-processing-disorder.com/>