

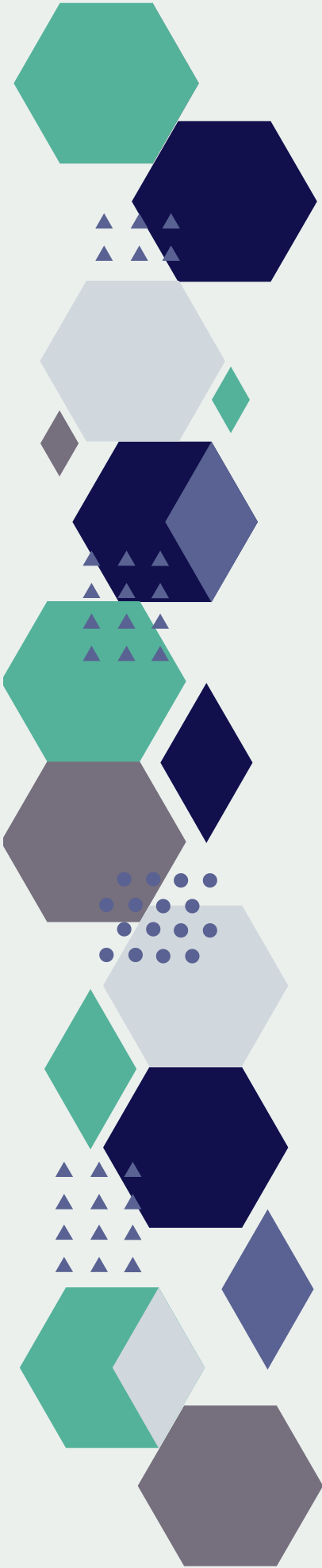
A Difficult Age

Why would it be that your firstborn loves to play outside? The dirtier he can be the happier he is. Your youngest one loves exploring the world, asking for wipes after lunch while big brother is still eating with his hands. Both are intelligent little humans, but it's almost as if their mechanisms work differently.

We all understand the five senses we were taught at school right? Sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. There are other senses though that also play a major part in your system, namely the vestibular sense (position of your body) and proprioception (movement ability). To this, you can also add body temperature and even pain. These are the mechanisms that inform you what is going on around you and enhance your experience of your environment. Your senses are processed in such a way though that it can actually impair your ability to perform daily actions and activities that you should not even think about.



Researchers describe a default in your sense mechanisms as Sensory Modulation Disorder, which is described as difficulty responding to sensory stimuli appropriately. It's hard to identify and easily mistaken for a "difficult age" or a "challenging child", as the senses can be over-responsive, under-responsive or sensory seeking. This is confusing, but also sounds more like a disruption in the system rather than a disorder.



Doctor Google is quick to make a diagnosis, but even quicker to describe a sense-related disruption as normal behaviour for that age. The good news is that it can be treated and with the right support it could even disappear completely. We believe that a child should be happy if raised in a happy and safe environment. If however the child is unhappy much of the time, something might be disrupting their sensory mechanisms.



Eliminations commence when a child's behaviour is inappropriate. Teething? Tired? Dirty nappy? Hungry? No? This child is just being difficult. But why would a child choose to be unhappy if being happy is just so much easier and more pleasant? There are a number of things that can make a child feel overwhelmed or upset. Parents read up about Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), but when a child experience both hyper- and hyposensitivity it's contradicting and SPD gets disqualified as an option. Children can be both sensory seeking and sensory avoiding, as this depends on how the child self-regulates or "copes" with the environment. If this is possibly what you have been experiencing lately, it's time to get yourself an anxiety log.

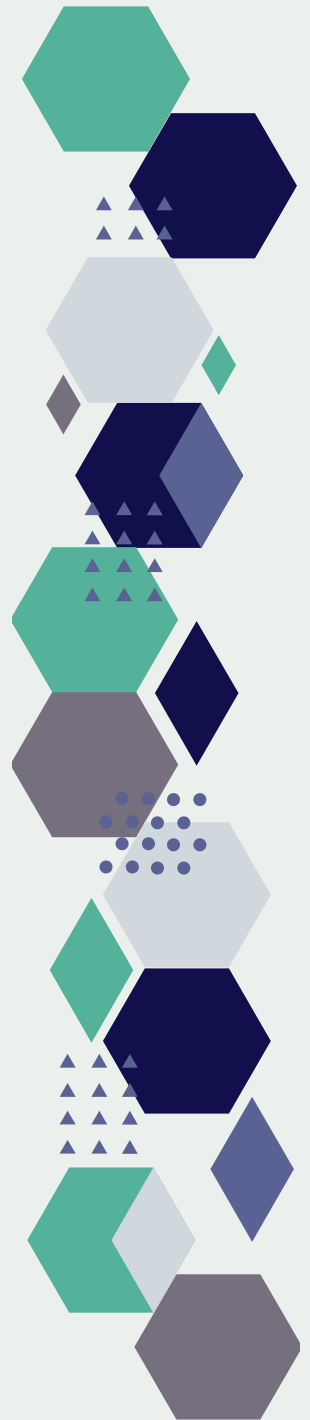
When your little one experiences a meltdown, is having a hard day or just seems irritable more than often, it's important to keep track of the following: time of day, what was happening in the moment, which signs did you see, what helped your child to calm down and how intense was the outburst?

Also important is to rate yourself on how you handled the situation using a score of 1 to 10 (1 being low and 10 being very high). By so doing, this can indicate a pattern and be helpful in finding out what is creating an unpleasant situation and upsetting your child.

Getting upset or frustrated affects bed routines amongst other things and can even influence the whole family. A child who finds it difficult to self-regulate feels out of control after a long day loaded with sensory input. In such situations, try holding your child while taking deep breaths. There are other calming techniques as well to use and support the sensory disruption that a child experiences. Using a red or orange night lamp instead of white or blue might help as well, as these latter colours send your body daytime messages, making it more likely for the child to want to stay awake.



Identifying a pattern after keeping track with your anxiety log for two to three weeks should provide you with many answers regarding your child's behaviour. As a mom, you know your child and want to see him or her happy. If you feel as if there might be something upsetting him or her unnecessarily, it could possibly be a disruption in his sensory input. If you suspect that this is the case, please contact an educator or sensory-integration-trained therapist to assist you with creating a calm environment and doing a little maintenance on that sensory mechanism in his tiny body. If you apply the correct activities and address the disruption in the correct way, the effects could be magical.



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For more information, visit <http://www.younghealth.co.za>.**

To find a Kinderkineticist practicing in your area, visit www.kinderkinetics.co.za.

