

Transcript



Meeting your child's sensory needs. This presentation is going to focus on restricted eating.

Picky or Fussy eating can often be terms we hear when parents talk about children who have a restricted diet. This is usually when a child is refusing the foods, becoming upset or frustrated around times when new foods are presented. The majority of children go through phases of fussy eating, particularly as toddlers. This is part of normal development and nothing that needs particular interventions.

Children may refuse food for a variety of reasons such as:

- Stage of development
- Sensory differences
- Fear from previous choking
- Difficulty chewing
- Physical condition which can impact oral development.

Don't expect big changes overnight. It can take several months for sensory strategies to be used effectively. You are likely to need to use the strategies you think work best, for you and your child, consistently for around 3 months before knowing for certain that they work. Be prepared for them not to work each and every time so have a few sensory strategies that can be used in these situations.

Use A SECRET by Lucy Jane Miller 2006

We introduced "A SECRET" by Lucy Jane Miller in our video "meeting your child's needs".

This is a problem-solving tool for parents, teenagers and even for children themselves to think about the seven elements in sensory and motor challenges and to come up with some ideas of things to change to lead to smoother functioning for the child. A SECRET" is an acronym for these seven elements: attention, sensation, emotional regulation, culture, relationship, environment and task. A SECRET is not a rigid formula for what to do, but a flexible format helping you to consider each of these important elements in turn.

The sensation element is only one part of "A SECRET". Think about how each of these elements could be influencing the behaviour and how or if these could be manipulated to allow your child to function smoothly.

Think Sensory Eating is one of the most complex sensory tasks we do as humans. If your child has some sensory sensitivity and is a picky eater, it is likely that some of their difficulties with food are sensory. We all take information in through our senses (visual, smell, touch, taste, sound, movement) to help us understand the world around us. When we are anxious or stressed, our senses become heightened and can result in bigger behavioural reactions. An example of this is if we hear an unexpected sound in our house late at night, we can become very sensitive to any other smaller sounds that may be going on that we previously weren't aware of- for children, this reaction can be around food.

How we use our sensory systems when we are eating

ALL of the sensory systems are involved in the feeding and eating process.

- Eating is one of the only human occupations that involves every sensory system
- If our senses are not functioning together properly, we may not be able to tolerate the feeding and eating process
- Dysregulation --> trigger fight or flight/stress response --> turns off appetite
- We need optimal sensory processing for the feeding and eating process



They say we eat with our eyes! We look at the shape, the colour and the presentation of our food.



We can smell our food before it is even put onto our plate. We can identify what we are having by the smell. Some smells stay for a long time after cooking.



Food touches our hands and face. We feel the food on our skin and moving around our mouths as we chew. This sense tells us the texture and temperature of the food.



We need to keep ourselves in a good position for eating with our head upright.



This is how we decide if something is sweet, sour, salty, bitter etc. We also can decide on the texture and temperature of our food.



We hear how the food sounds when we are eating it. Is it loud, crunchy? Are others eating loudly?



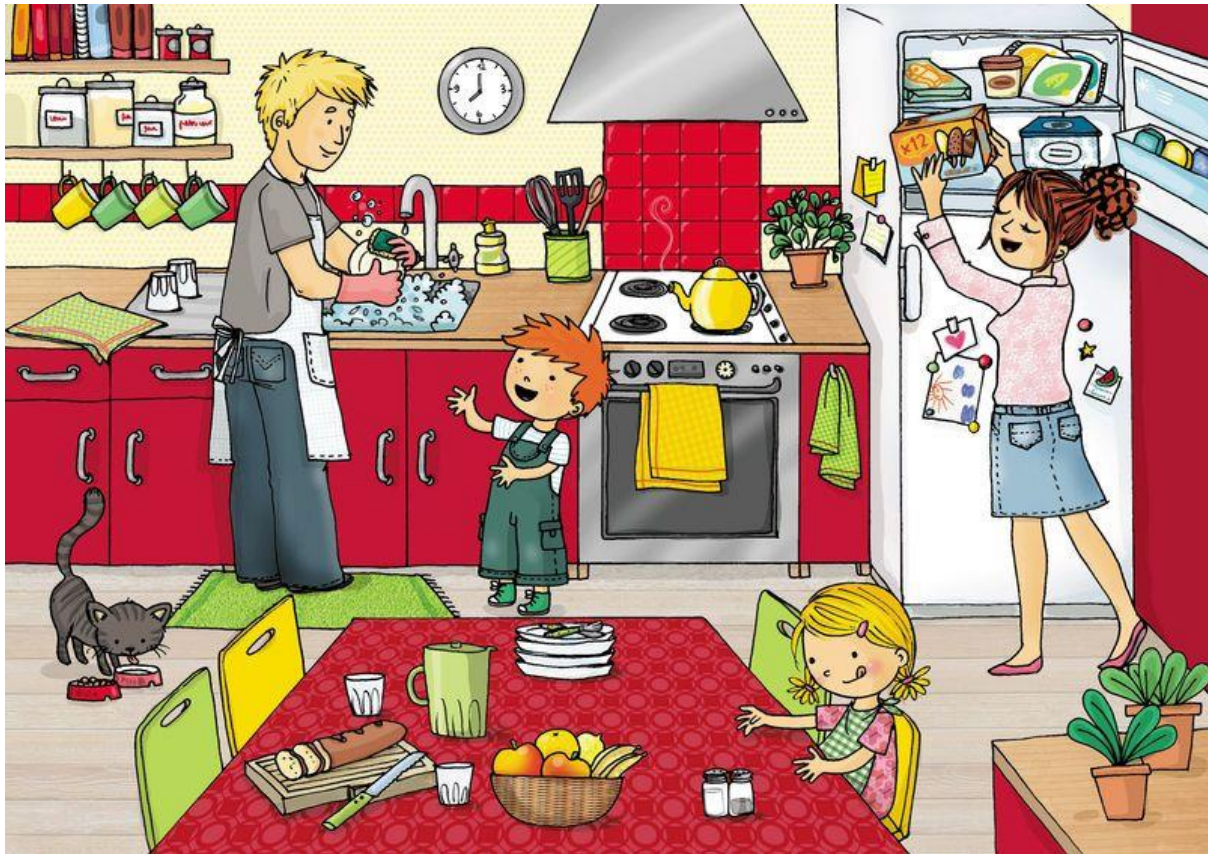
We need to be able to judge the force we are using when biting and chewing our foods. We also need to know when our mouths are full or empty.



Our body gives us signals to let us know that we are hungry, thirsty or that we are full.

It is important to remember that none of the sensory systems work alone, they all work together. You can have processing difficulties in more than one area. Telling your child to "eat something because it tastes nice", "don't be silly, it's not too hot", "no that doesn't feel like worms!" will not help in these situations as their system is processing differently to yours. What they are eating needs to be 'just right' in terms of taste, smell, texture and so forth for them. Foods outside of the 'just right' can feel uncomfortable for your child to eat.

Sensory Environment



Let's have a look at the sensory environment. We can talk through this picture. As we discussed before we all have different sensory needs and perceive this information in different ways. This environment below could be the same for many, but we could all experience it in a different way.

For some this will be a happy environment for someone having their family and pets around them. The smell of their tea which they have just ate lingering in the room. For others this may be too noisy, too busy, the smell of the cat's food, the kettle whistling and the clock ticking. This environment may be too stimulating and this may make mealtimes and eating much more challenging.

What helps your child? Noise or no noise? Quiet or busy kitchen?



Let's look at the school canteen.

Think of the sensory experiences your child may be experiencing.

- The noise of children chatting, forks and knives hitting together, straws slurping and children crunching.
- The smell of the various foods being eaten around them.
- The unstable feeling of sitting on a chair which may not have a back or their legs swinging off the chair and not flat on the ground.
- The sight of lots of people walking past them.

For some that may be ok, but for others that might be more difficult. As we have said before, we are all different and we perceive our sensory environment in different ways.

We introduced "A SECRET" by Lucy Jane Miller in our video "meeting your child's needs". The first step when considering S for sensation, is to closely observe your child's reactions and ask yourself which sensory system is being over stimulated? Investigate by thinking of one sensory system at a time. We will look at each one and give you some questions to ask yourself and practical suggestions for things to try.

Look for consistencies in their sensory response as this will allow you to manipulate the sensation element that is causing alarm.

It may take a few attempts when you try to use strategies. If there is no change, go back and look at the other elements in A SECRET. You may need to try a combination of strategies and elements to help meet your child's needs by reducing/replacing the feedback with a more positive sensory experience.

Now let's think about each sensory system.



- Are they sensitive to packaging?
- Find it difficult to tolerate foods they like cut in different shapes, presented in a different way?
- Become upset when food isn't the right colour?
- Like their food to be on a particular plate?

What things could you try to help?

- Remove food from branded packets and use clear bags when able.
- Work on familiar food and changing visual properties. Start with something they like such as toast and show them how this can slightly change by cutting in half.
- Be creative and create a picture with their food. Make it fun! Is there something they like? Do they like dinosaurs? Do they like horses? Make it interactive.



Smell is a sensory system which is closely linked to our taste. Let's look at the signs to look out for in your child.

- Covers their nose?
- Screws up their face?
- Doesn't like being around food when it is cooking?
- Won't eat in the kitchen where food was prepared?
- Gags with smells?

What could we try to support our child who is finding the smells difficult to tolerate.

- Open windows when cooking.
- Light a candle that they like the smell of.
- Allow them to choose a scent they like and dab on a handkerchief. Allow them to smell that and overcome the smell they don't like.
- Cover food with a napkin and have small "peeps".
- Cook when the child is at school if possible.
- Allow them to eat in a different room to where it was cooked.
- To build up tolerance build up time spent with smells, being in the kitchen with cooking etc. Build this up over time, starting with very small periods of time.



The signs your child is having difficulty with body awareness. It might be: -

- Finding it difficult to know where their mouth is when eating?
- Messy eater – might not be aware food over their face?

What can you try that would help?

- Use a mirror when eating.
- Use heavier cutlery.
- Complete body awareness tasks before having their food.
- Play Oral motor games.
- Make sure your child has supportive seating giving adequate feedback. Make sure there are not dangly legs, that their feet are on a step or firmly on the floor. Make sure their knees are at a 90-degree angle.



Let's look at how we would know their vestibular system was impacting on their eating.

- Finds it difficult to sit at the table for a long period of time?
- Will often eat running around?
- Fidgety on the chair, Legs dangling, folded underneath them or kicking, needing that movement?

What are the things you could try?

- Do a movement activity before sitting. Can they be outside playing? Can they go on a trampoline?
- Ensure feet are supported when sitting. This gives more feedback.
- TheraBand can be used around the bottom of the chair. This allows them to kick their feet off the resistance back and forward.
- Wobble Cushions – if child has good core stability. This allows them to have more movement whilst they are sitting at the table.
- Use a weighted lap buddy whilst they are sitting.



Now let's look at hearing.

- Becoming irritated or distracted by background noises or others eating?
- Covering Ears or cringing with noises?
- Not eating crunchy foods or trying to eat them slowly and softly?
- Dislikes eating in louder environments?

The things we can try.

- Background music can help cover up some less preferred noises.
- Move to a quieter area to eat.
- Remember bigger rooms create more echo and noise so try to soften this with soft furnishings.



Now let's look at the taste sense.

- Spitting food out after tasting it or wiping their tongue?
- Drinking to take the taste away?
- Only objects to food once it is in their mouth?
- Covers everything in the same sauce?
- Not interested in food unless they strong flavours such as spice?

What can you try?

- Using graded exposure approach at start to touch the food, lick the food of their finger, put flavour on their lip, then their tongue. Eating the food is often the last stage.
- Dipping and licking the food without the pressure of eating. Is there something they like they could dip into something new?
- Allow the child to spit something out and don't force them to eat this.
- Write down the foods your child eats and common properties. What don't they like and think how you can introduce this.? Is it crunchy, salty, sweet, sour, spicy foods?
- Then look at food chaining. We will go on to speak about that a little bit later.



Now we have our sense, interoception. Interoception is about the body signals we receive so: -

- Do they know when they are hungry?
- Do they know when they are thirsty?
- Unable to tell that they are full?

Things that might help are: -

- Have consistent snack and mealtimes.

- Model and describe how you are feeling for e.g., “my stomach is grumbling I am hungry”.
- Ask them to draw or describe how they are feeling at the time they say they are hungry.



Touch

- Does your child have a limited texture diet?
- Do they explore food with their hands first or refuse to touch food or get messy?
- Do they overfill their mouths with food?
- Have a dislike for certain temperatures?

Things to try: -

- Encourage Touch exploration using food play and messy play.
- Encourage children to be part of food preparation.
- Get children to help at the supermarket handling food and pack the trolley.



Routines

These are important when helping children with restricted eating. Helping children know when they are eating; when it's part of their day. Make this much more predictable and that can reduce some levels of anxiety.

When you are eating, sit with children and model eating. Eating is a learned behaviour so model this at the table. Even if you aren't hungry eat a snack.

Encourage children to be part of the food preparation – use a recipe. Make it less new and more predictable. They can explore different ingredients, they can see what's in their food, they can touch it, they can smell it, they can use all of their senses – **but they don't have to eat the finished product.**



What about offering them choice? What would they like to choose? Keep things of similar properties, give them a choice to try something new and remember, don't sit at the table for no longer than 20-30 minutes.

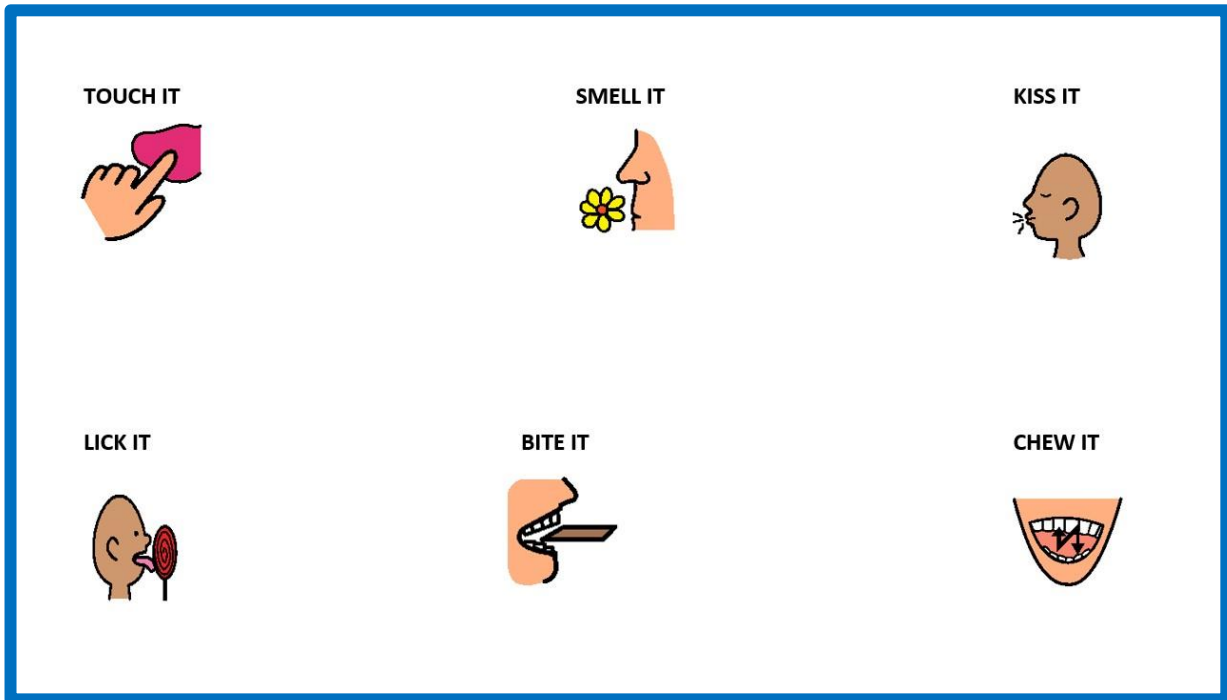


Remember foods meant to be fun! The aim is for mealtimes to be as stress free as possible. The focus should be on patience and to let your child feel in control of what will and won't be eaten. Pressure and arguments usually only make children more resistant to new foods.

Make sure mealtimes are fun and not confrontational, if your child struggles with the social 'chit chat' of mealtimes, try putting on some music or an audio book.

Remember, try and keep the pressure off. The goal isn't eating when you are exploring new foods, just play, and if your child happens to eat something new – bonus!





When we are exploring new foods, here are a few ideas of things you could try.

- Can they touch it?
- Can they smell it?
- Can they kiss it?
- Can they lick it?
- Can they bite it?
- Can they chew it?

Eating is the last stage of the process!



SOS Feeding Approach

Here are the 32 steps to eating!

With your child, look at tolerating foods then move onto interacting with food, smelling food, touching food, tasting food, then eating food.

Remember!

- Everyone has different sensory responses to stimuli. By thinking of your child's sensory systems and observing how they react to small changes, you can gain a better understanding why your child may be feeling, thinking or behaving differently to sensory feedback.
- There will likely be times when your strategy doesn't work so have a toolbox full of strategies to dip into as needed.

- Give time for strategies to work. Through consistently implementing the strategies they respond well to you will help them to find a more positive sensory experience and meet their sensory needs.

Thank you for watching. We have hopefully suggested some strategies throughout this video you may wish to try.

We have a pyramid problem solving tool on our website that you can download which may be useful for you. This problem-solving tool helps us to think about the behaviour and the possible underlying sensory causes. By putting the problem at the very top of the triangle then starting to think about each of the sensory systems below, you may be able to identify if there is a sensory reason for the problem. At the bottom of the pyramid, you list the strategies you wish to try.

In this example for toothbrushing, using the problem of tantrums when it's time to brush teeth, we have given examples of the sensory systems that might be receiving too much feedback and strategies you can use to change that, such as trying alternative toothpaste and a vibrating toothbrush.

For more ideas to help with restrictive eating, please look at our restrictive eating section of our website.



How To Contact Us...




Prior to contacting the service, we suggest you explore our resources online and on Facebook;

 www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot

 @CYPOTNHSBorders
www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders

Advice and support can be sought from the service by contacting the team directly using our Enquiry Line or via our Enquiry Email Inbox.

 01896 826033 (voicemail)

 Paediatric.OTEnquiries@borders.scot.nhs.uk

We will aim to contact you within 5 working days to discuss your enquiry

If you have tried our suggestions for a while and feel you want to talk through strategies or need support to help implement these, please contact us.