The Hidden Sensory Trigger Behind Your Child’s Big Reactions and Dysregulation Transcript

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What Sensory Processing Is

What if your child's meltdown isn't about behavior at all, but about their brain being overloaded by things you can't even see? Things like tags and shirts, fluorescent lights, the hum of the classroom, and the way their socks feel.

These are little things to a sensory-sensitive nervous system. They're stress signals. There are things that really cause kids to dysregulate. What is sensory processing?

It's something maybe you're super familiar with. Maybe it's new to you. You're saying, hey, Dr. Rowe, that list of things, my kid has all of them plus 10 more.

So what is it actually? Sensory processing is how their nervous system receives, filters, and responds to information from the environment, from their senses.

And your child's brain is constantly sorting sound, light, Touch, smell, movement, internal body signals like hunger, fatigue, temperature. Most brains filter this input automatically.

It's constantly modulating and moving through. We don't really notice them. I think you probably do notice that when you're overloaded, but our kids who have a full cup feel them more.

But some kids have nervous systems that… over-register input. Everything feels intense. Maybe they're not feeling it all. They under- register input, that's what that is called, so they don't feel it enough and they seek more of it.

These are some of those kids that can't get them off their swings or they are literally bouncing off the walls, have trouble filtering and organizing input and when filtering is inefficient, the brain works overtime and stress in that nervous system is going to build up.

awfully fast.

Over- and Under-Responsive Sensory Profiles

So what can sensory issues really look like in the real world? We can have overstimulated sensory hits and we can understand stimulated kids. Let's start with overstimated because often they are more likely to get support because they're on the go.

They cover their ears for normal noise like flushing the toilet or chewing or other things like that. Meltdowns in crowded spaces or things, like birthday parties or anything where there's more than just the typical one or two people.

Refuses certain clothes, they say they're itchy or tight or their tags bother them. Gags at smells or textures. This is really troublesome and can cause problems with restrictive eating and really lead to a lot of other issues because we need proper nutrients.

Of course, irritable after school, easily startled. Now this is for kids that don't have a trauma background. If you're easily startled, that means your sensory system is feeling things too strongly.

Under-stimulated, sensory-seeking kids look different. They crash into furniture, constantly moving or fidgeting, they chew on clothing or objects, and some of that chewing you can see for years.

rough play, they struggle to sit still or sit in classroom or at the dinner table and mixed profile, which is probably the most common to have both under and over stimulation and responsiveness to sensory.

Many kids swing between too much and too little input, especially kids with ADHD, autism or neurodivergent brains. anxiety, hands-panned as profiles. You know, kids that have emotional issues, mental health issues and then are neurodivergent, their brains are just wired to take in more information, not be able to get all in at the same time.

So the sensory system seems to be very impacted.

How Sensory Overload Leads to Meltdowns

What's the case? Sensory behavior is regulation behavior. That's surprising to a lot of people. We're going to go into that. If you're unsure of what brain pattern your child has and you are looking for more support, take our solution matcher.

Just head over to DrRoseanne.com forward slash help and it's going help you identify your children's brain and nervous system pattern and lead you to the path that's best for your Sensory triggers, why do they turn into meltdowns so much?

I grew up, I mean I had a kid with this and it's tough. And it often happened in the morning. It couldn't happen after school for me, and you're trying to get out and had a plan for it, it was tough.

Step one, sensory input builds during the day. So noise, light, social stress, clothing discomfort, hunger, transition, the nervous system keeps absorbing it.

And that is a problem. Number two, your stress cup starts filling. This is what happens with our sensory kids. So each sensory irritation adds another drop.

The child may look fine on the outside until suddenly they're not. What else do you see? One small trigger spills over. So wrong cop, homework request, sibling comment, explosion.

The meltdown isn't about the cop. It's about all those little things that have been setting your kid off all day, it's about that cumulative sensory overload.

And this is why, especially those with identified sensory processing issues, you're sort of perplexed why you have to constantly readjust your sensory system.

The great thing is, my OTs who follow me, I love you, your OTS, do such a great job of supporting nervous system regulation. through the senses and it does pay off.

You have to be consistent and a good OT is giving parents homework, not telling you that once a week they never tell you, that that one's a weeks going to do the job.

So here's what it feels like in the inside when you have sensory issues. When sensory stress builds, the amygdala is over activating, it's feeling everything.

So you have the sensory part of thing, and then you've the emotional explosion in the inside, everything is starting to annoy you and overwhelm. That stress hormone, the cortisol is jacking up.

Once cortisol kicks in, you're going to feel it in your body. Your cortisol's supposed to kick in when your kid's under a car and the mother picks up a card, that's when cortisol supposed kick it.

When you are sensory issues and your nervous system is just regulated, Your cortisol is kicking up all the time.

Hidden Triggers and Daily Sensory Stressors

It doesn't feel very great. And then, of course, your thinking brain, prefrontal cortex is going offline. This is not a triple good thing. So from the outside, what you're seeing is the overreaction.

You're saying high drama. Oh, they're so dramatic. People say that. Seeing the defiance. But in that inside, my body feels unsafe because they are in this hyper alert state and everything feels too loud, too bright, to much.

That's the thing with sensory kids. Everything is too much because the nervous system is activated and their sensory system. And that tips over into the emotional part of it.

So I can't calm down. That's what they're going to say. And there's lots of triggers the parents might miss. Let's dive into that. Fluorescent lights, scratchy uniforms, or even new clothing.

Here's, what I found to be really helpful about the clothing, I used to try to make my kid, my max fit into it, and then I said, forget it! My friend said think of it like a uniform, just buying five of the same pants and five at the top.

And I was like, works for me. I just let it go. So I found something comfortable. I'm Italian, I buy 10. I like to have a lot of things and be stocked just in case the pandemic ever happens.

We're starting to see after school decompression crashes. You see hunger and noise sensitivity and transitions that are really hard for kids. Kids that were having these kinds of dysregulation episodes struggle with transitions.

They feel very overwhelmed sometimes by touch. Sometimes they require it. So you can see that. And then small sensory things like cleaners and perfume.

Sense it, smell can really dysregulate a kid. I am a huge fan of smell. Also can struggle with negative smells. True story in college, we went on a field trip to a sewage treatment plant.

I remain outside vomiting the entire time. Nobody else seemed to be bothered like I was. And then I could, I almost non-functional for 24 hours. It just couldn't get it out.

I don't think I'm using essential oils at the time, but I use essential oil especially. Peppermint, love me a good peppermin, very stimulating. But I've had lots of my neurodivergent kids love pepperman and other kids hate it.

So can be really a problem. Sleep deprivation. sleep deprivation is such a trigger. for dysregulation, sensory dysregation, emotional dys regulation, nervous system dys- regulation.

It's a problem. We need sleep. And often the trigger isn't the visible behavior, it's the invisible build up over time.

Why Regulation Comes Before Behavior

This matters for mental health because chronic sensory overload can look like anxiety, rage, defiance, school refusal, ADHD, mood swings, OCD behaviors.

If you're constantly, your nervous system and your sensory system, and you emotional system because they're all tied together, aren't relaxing, you are just more likely to have mental health problems.

I mean, the rate of mental problems in the neurodivergent population, I believe, but I don't have the research on this, is about 10 times the normal population.

And sensory is a part of that. So when a nervous system is constantly overloaded, emotional regulation becomes impossible. And so what helps? You know what I'm going to tell you?

Regulation first, number one, because that's the order. Before correcting behavior, you have to calm the nervous systems. You've got to lower your voice, slow the pace, dim the lights, decrease that stimulation, and really focus on getting your kid to regulate.

So important. You have to identify patterns. Ask, when do meltdowns happen? What sensory input came before? When are they least likely to melt? That's a really important one.

And what environmental triggers are there? Patterns are going to reveal the hidden trigger. Number three, we're going create sensory buffers. So you know your kid has sensory issues.

We've got to plan decompressions. After school, quiet time. Physical compression, like weighted blanket. My 21-year-old uses a weighted bracket. This is not age dependent.

Hugs, if welcome. Movement breaks. Magnesium baths. Calm PMF for nervous system settling. Predictable routines. We must try to implement these things as part of our routine before the meltdown.

And then reduce before you add. Sometimes helping means removing stimulation, not adding. tools, coping tools in particular. So that is really helpful.

I want you to think, my child isn't overreacting. Their nervous and sensory systems are overstimulated. They're not trying to give me a hard time. They're having a hard time.

I'm going to say that all the time because that's a reframed where you let go of the old patterning, the all parenting behaviors that you inherited. We got to start thinking differently.

And we're not, again, we are not lowering the bar. we helping our kids manage stress, but it can't happen without regulation first. So when you see the sensory layer underneath behavior, you can stop fighting the meltdown and start preventing it.

got to calm the sensory and nervous systems first, and then behavior starts to make sense. If you are new to me, please take SolutionMatcher. if you've already taken it, take it again, because we've made it more of a nervous system pattern interpretation.

And then you get great information and guidance about what you should do next. I'm so glad you're here. and if your child has sensory issues, you really want to focus on regulating the nervous system, providing sensory support, and just being as consistent as you can because especially with sensory tools these are things kids enjoy using and when they're regulated they will have be able to access those tools and make a lot of use out of them and that will just help keep their nervous system as regulated as possible.

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