

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Awareness of olfactory input (smell)

The awareness of smells, or olfactory input, involves the detection and interpretation of chemicals odours in the air. Our sense of smell is one of our strongest senses, it easily distracts us and so is very influential on activity level. Smell is highly informative about how safe or noxious things are in our environment, which is why children tend to respond emotionally to smells. Children who demonstrate olfactory sensitivity may feel nauseous in response to smell, refuse foods with certain smells, or may be easily irritated by people's perfumes. Children who are olfactory seeking may routinely sniff their food before eating or attempt to eat non-food objects with particular smells.



Children who experience difficulties with their olfactory system may find the following strategies helpful in their day to day life:

- ☺ Identify the smells the child enjoys and dislikes by presenting them one by one to the child and keeping a list. Offer the child coffee beans to smell in between to eliminate the previous smell.
- ☺ Keep a flannel coated in a smell of the child's preference in a glad bag for them to sniff for when they come across unpleasant odours.
- ☺ Avoid wearing chemical based perfumes and colognes that mask natural smells.
- ☺ At dinner time, encourage your child to be a part of the cooking process and smell each of the ingredients individually and then smell again once they are combined in the dish.
- ☺ Engage the child in proprioception (deep pressure or movement) or vestibular (change of balance) activities to help reduce their anxiety related to smells.

Here are a number of activities that will improve the awareness of smells children have.

- ☺ Use of 'scratch & sniff' stickers as rewards
- ☺ Play with different scents of shaving cream on a garbage bag attached to a window, table or wall.
- ☺ Apply clear children's scented nailpolish to their fingertips to sniff throughout the day.
- ☺ Draw with scented pens and textas
- ☺ Make and use scented play dough



For more information or to explore your child's olfactory processing needs, book an appointment with an occupational therapist.