



SENSORY DIFFERENCE IN ASD - SMELL

The way we think, feel, and act is based on the way we perceive the world through our senses. Most people can name the five senses: vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The fact that smell comes last is not by chance: when asked which sense they could live without, most people say that they could sacrifice the sense of smell. But, even if we don't notice its influence, smell serves us a great deal. It makes us look for and appreciate food, it spots dangers like gas and spoiled food, it fuels emotions and memories, it strengthens relationships with family and partners.

Many children and adults on the autism spectrum show sensory irregularities, which manifest as sensitivities, under-responsiveness and/or sensory-seeking behaviors. This is also true for the sense of smell. While some people can detect the smell of disgusting foods from a distance, others will not react at all when entering a smelly place and some others will actively search for the smell of an object or a person they like.

Why it matters: Perceiving the world differently changes our whole experience, affecting daily life and social interactions. For children who are very sensitive to smells (to the point that they notice smells that others don't perceive) going out to a restaurant might be unbearable, or only certain foods might be tolerated. Children who don't react to odors might be disinterested in food, resulting in eating issues. Craving the comforting smells of caregivers or a toy can limit the ways children interact with others. Recognizing these issues will help researchers and clinicians target sensory problems, as well as related difficulties, such as social behavior.

What can be done: Interviews with parents, observations of the child, and standardized tests are used to evaluate how people on the spectrum perceive smells. The results of these assessments can be used by occupational therapists (OT) to create personalized activities aimed at helping the child to use and respond

to smell cues appropriately. To gain awareness about smell, families can play smell games at home. For this activity, simply pick two spice jars, like basil and cumin. Open them and cover the jar opening with a tissue secured with a rubber band. Ask a family member to close her eyes, and place one jar a t a time under her nose. You can choose to present the same jar both times, so that the person can smell the same odor twice, or you can present both jars one after the other. Then, ask whether the smells were the same. Repeat with a variety of spices. It will be fun to find out who has the best nose.

Related Articles:

- [SENSORY PROCESSING AND SENSORY INTEGRATION IN INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD](#)
- [OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD](#)
- [HOW DO I CHOOSE A TREATMENT?](#)
- [HOW TO CHOOSE A TREATMENT PROVIDER](#)

Additional Resources:

- [AMERICAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION](#)

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