

## **Sensory Integration and Self-Regulation**

### **Helping Children Feel Calm, Focused, and in Control**

#### **What is Self-Regulation?**

Self-regulation is a child's ability to manage their emotions, behavior, and attention. It helps them stay calm when upset, focus during class, follow routines, and respond appropriately to different situations. For many children, developing these skills takes time—but for some, it's more challenging.

One of the biggest influences on self-regulation is how a child processes sensory information.

#### **The Link Between Sensory Integration and Regulation**

Sensory integration is the brain's ability to organize and make sense of what we see, hear, feel, smell, taste, and how we move. When this process works well, it supports a child's ability to stay calm, alert, and engaged. When it doesn't, everyday things like noise, movement, or touch can feel overwhelming—or, on the opposite end, not stimulating enough.

This can lead to behaviours like:

- Meltdowns or shutdowns
- Avoiding certain textures or sounds
- Constant movement or restlessness
- Difficulty focusing or following instructions

These behaviours are not just “acting out” — they may be signs that a child is struggling to regulate their sensory world.

#### **How Sensory Integration Therapy Helps**

Occupational Therapists trained in Ayres Sensory Integration® (ASI) create safe, playful environments where children can explore and respond to sensory input in a way that builds their regulation skills. Sessions are tailored according to each child's sensory needs and may include activities using swings, tunnels, textured materials, and movement games.

Over time, children become better able to:

- Tune in to what their body needs (e.g. movement, calm)
- Cope with challenging sensations
- Transition more easily between tasks
- Focus and stay emotionally balanced

## How Parents Can Support Regulation at Home

- Create calm routines: Predictable schedules reduce anxiety and help children feel in control.
- Use movement breaks: Jumping, stretching, or bouncing can help reset the body and brain.
- Set up a sensory corner: A cozy spot with cushions, fidget toys, or calming lights can be a safe retreat.
- Watch for sensory cues: Learn what triggers your child's dysregulation and what helps soothe them.
- Model calm: Your own calm presence helps your child feel safe and regulated.

## Every Child is Unique

No two children have the same sensory needs. Some may need more input to stay alert; others may need less to stay calm. Sensory integration therapy helps uncover your child's unique profile—and supports them in building the foundation for lifelong self-regulation.