SENSORY PROCESSING & SLEEP

how does sensory processing affect sleep?

In order to sleep, you must be able to remain still or have very little movement, achieve a posture of lying down, and become gradually less responsive to sensory input as you fall asleep. It's actually more complex than you think. If the neurobiological system is not working properly (or is not yet fully developed), it can be difficult to calm the nervous system and create the motor plan needed to maintain a certain position and regulate arousal.

what are some things to look for?

You may notice a child getting overstimulated and become more "sensory-seeking." A child may begin jumping, running, sucking on fingers or other objects, climbing on everything, etc - they are trying to regulate themselves! At this age, these things can help but many need assistance from a caregiver to fully calm their nervous system and bring them back into a regulated state to calm down fully.

what senses can I focus on?

touch (tactile): releases dopamine to wash away adrenaline

proprioception: releases serotonin and helps one feel safe

vestibular: rotational movement (spinning) is alerting, linear movement (swaying) is calming

using sensory tools to calm your child

Sensory bins and ball pits can be great tools for tactile pressure. Massage with deep compression at the joints can be more gentle proprioception whereas jumping on a trampoline, running, push-ups, and pushing boxes can be more "intense" proprioception, some involving "heavy work." Swinging, rocking, or swaying can help calm the vestibular system.

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