



## Sensory processing signs of difficulty - Olfactory (smell)

You will have heard about our 8 sensory systems: hearing, sight, taste, smell, touch, vestibular, proprioception and interoception. You will have also heard about how we process our sensory information; we receive and organise sensation from the environment, then we process that information and make an effective meaningful response.

Now we can consider what it may look and feel like if we have a difference in our Olfactory sensory system.

### Olfactory systems are responsible for smelling:

The sensory receptors in our nose pick up information about the odours around us. They pass that information along a channel of nerves to the brain. The power of smell can be underestimated. It is strongly linked to emotion and memory and therefore can trigger unexpected reactions.

### Processing Olfactory sensory information



You will remember that we used cups to describe how we register sensory information.

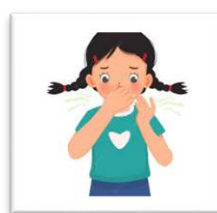
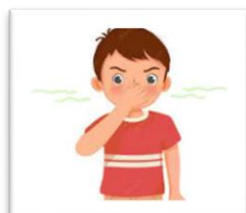
When we have a little cup it does not take much information before we notice it - your little cup fills up very quickly! We call this over responsive.

When we have a big cup it takes a lot more information for us to notice - it takes more to fill up our cup. We call this under responsive.



Remember that this is not always a problem, and that our ability to register, process and integrate our sensory information can sometimes feel difficult - when we are tired, unwell or overwhelmed it can feel like our cup fills up quickly.

### **Signs of Difficulty:**

Over Responsive 	Under Responsive 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dislikes strong smells</li><li>• Notices smells others may not</li><li>• Over reacts to new smells</li><li>• Anxious around certain smells</li><li>• Holds nose in response to certain scents</li><li>• Gags at the smell of certain foods</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under-reacts to strong, good or bad smells</li><li>• Seeks out strong smells</li><li>• Smells unusual items like paper or certain materials</li><li>• Doesn't notice "dangerous" smells, for example, chemicals, gas, etc.</li></ul>



Strategies to support:

Over Responsive 	Under Responsive 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Respect your child's smell sensitivities</li><li>• Use mildly scented or unscented cleaners, laundry detergents, hand soaps, etc.</li><li>• Try providing other smell experiences such as offering a smelling box or station of different smells and scents.</li><li>• A tissue/hankie/cotton ball with a preferred smell on. The child can then sniff this when confronted with unpleasant smells. This can help mask non-preferred smells.</li><li>• Avoid mixing scents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use scented play-doh, markers, stickers, etc to increase awareness</li><li>• Cook and bake together. Use fragrant ingredients so your child experiences a variety of aromas</li><li>• Teach the child alternative skills to avoid ingesting harmful foods and substances i.e., expiry dates, visual checks and danger labels</li></ul>

