

A Day in the Life of a Preschooler with Sensory Processing and Integration Difficulties



This is Lara, a 4-year-old with difficulties with sensory processing and integration. She is a cautious child who is wary of new experiences and new people but thrives in environments where she feels comfortable and settled, with close friends and family. Due to her sensory integration challenges her behaviour is often misunderstood by others. To see how difficulties with sensory processing and integration can affect children in everyday life, take a look at a typical day in Lara's life.



7:30 am

It is breakfast time and Lara does not know if she is hungry or not so plays with her food instead. Mum has to prompt her to stay on task and reminds her that snack time will not be until much later in the morning so she has to eat her breakfast. Lara often gets irritated when she has not had enough to eat but she requires prompting to do this.

Whilst eating, Lara drops her spoon several times and knocks over her cup of milk, creating a big spillage all over the table.

Sensory Integration Challenge: Interoceptive awareness (not aware of when she is hungry and that her mood can relate to when she needs something to eat); Difficulty with fine motor coordination.

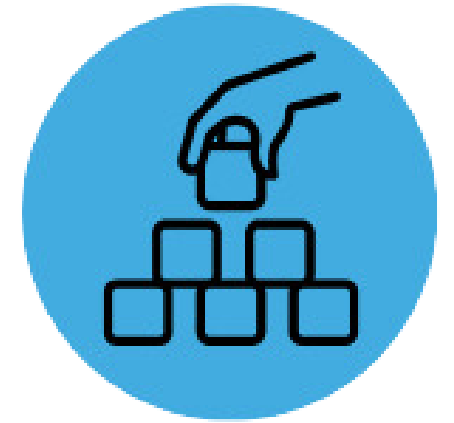


8:00 am

Mum is trying to help Lara get ready for preschool. The morning has been a struggle so far and Lara does not want to wear anything that her mother selects for her. As Lara was late in toilet training and still doesn't realise until the last minute that she needs the bathroom, clothes with elastics are easier but Lara does not always want to wear this. She prefers to dress the same as her older siblings.

She was already upset after brushing her teeth, which she strongly dislikes and is always a struggle for her (and her parents).

Sensory Integration Challenge: Interoceptive awareness (not always aware of when she needs the bathroom); Oral Sensory Sensitivity.

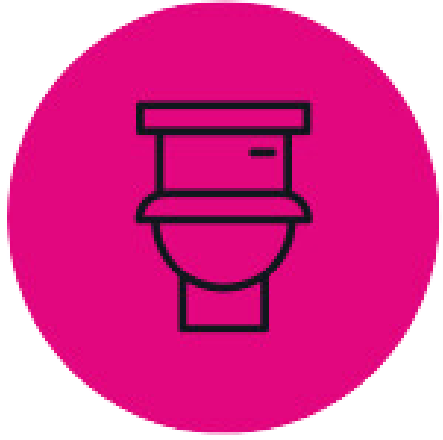


10:00 am

Lara's nursery has arranged a transition morning for everyone starting Reception in the next school year. Lara's new teacher has planned some games and activities for the children but Lara did not enjoy the morning.

She finds new spaces overwhelming and unpredictable. Due to her difficulties with motor planning and motor coordination, new games and activities are tricky, too, especially if they involve a lot of movement and coordination.

Sensory Integration Challenge: Motor planning difficulties (praxis).



1:30 pm

Because Lara had a busy morning and was distracted by all the events of the morning, she forgot to go to the bathroom, even though the nursery teacher reminded the children to go. She almost made it to the bathroom on time but got stuck with the button on her jeans and ended up having an accident. There was a spare pair of trousers at nursery but Lara did not like it as it didn't match her T-shirt. She was also embarrassed.

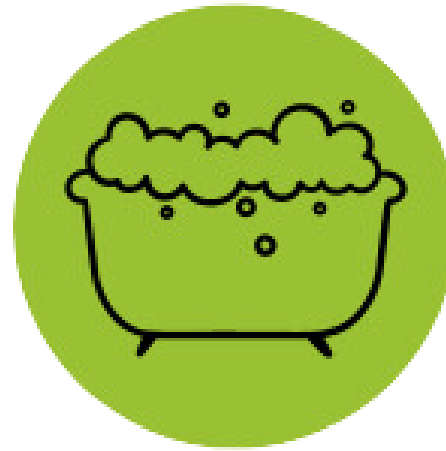
Sensory Integration Challenge:
Interoceptive awareness;
Difficulty with fine motor skills



5:00 pm

Mum has just picked Lara up from nursery and has to make a stop at the supermarket before going home as they needed milk and other essential items. When they park the car, she realises that Lara's ear defenders are not in the car as usual. Lara struggles with loud noises in shops, and whilst the family usually orders food online, it is still necessary to go to the supermarket from time to time. Whilst in the supermarket, Lara has a meltdown and in an attempt to leave quickly, Lara's mother forgot to purchase all of the items they needed.

Sensory Integration Challenge:
Sensitivity to loud noises.



6:30 pm

It's bath time. Lara's hair also needs washing, and she absolutely hates it as she doesn't like soap or water on her face. After a stressful experience for both Mum and Lara, they get ready for storytime. From experience, Mum knows to have Lara's favourite pyjamas ready and to make sure that all the lights are dimmed before storytime. Lara asks for her favourite deep pressure cuddle toy which always makes her feel better.

Sensory Integration Challenge:
Sensitivity to tactile input;
Sensory overload due to experiences earlier in the day.

Lara's difficulties with sensory processing and integration may include

- Being under or over-sensitive to sounds, textures, flavours, smells or other sensory input.
- Having difficulty carrying out new activities.
- Having difficulty with bumping into things and knowing where your body is in space.
- Seeking or avoiding certain types of movement.
- Having difficulty with emotional regulation.

Not knowing whether you are hungry or full and misunderstanding the cues from your body.



What can be perceived as a regular day for many children, has turned into a stressful day for Lara due to her challenges with sensory processing and integration. She goes to bed exhausted and frustrated.