

Alerting Strategies for the “Under-Responder”

Throughout each day we all receive continual sensory input from our environment. For some children, their brains interpret the sensory input as “too much” and they may have a behavioral over-reaction. To others, the input may be deemed “just right” and does not interfere with their ability to participate in daily activities. But for some children, they need a higher level of sensory information in order for their brains to even “register” the incoming information and thereby use this sensory information to appropriately guide a motor or behavioral response. Following are suggestions for a child that appears to be an “under-responder”:

- Think “more is more”. Provide opportunities for multi-sensory experiences. Think of activities that are fast moving, loud, and visually stimulating all at the same time. Aim for overall sensory-rich input that calls in several or all of the senses: Vision, Auditory, Taste, Olfactory, Touch, and the important “hidden senses” Proprioception (a sense of body awareness) and Vestibular (a sense of movement and balance).
- High, fast, intense swinging. Stop and start the swing and change up the speeds—avoid rhythmical swinging as that has a more calming effect.
- Dancing, tumbling, jumping, running, and skipping activities. Make use of local playgrounds!
- Pillow fights and safe jumping into a crash mat made up of pillows and couch cushions.
- Fast rocking in a rocking chair or spinning on a chair or merry-go-round.
- Loud music, up-tempo music, and bright lights are alerting.
- Jumping on a trampoline. Mini trampolines can even be used indoors and can be purchased with or without a hand bar.
- Bouncing on a therapy ball or riding a hippity-hop.
- Cold, tart, sour, carbonated beverages can be alerting. You can also provide ice chips to crunch on.
- Crunchy foods and spicy foods tend to be alerting. Spicy chips, carrots, and pretzels are examples.
- When speaking to your child, use high verbal input and increased facial expression/affect as well as gestures.
- Decorate your child’s room with bright colors and contrasting colors. Keep it well lit during the day.
- Water play such as with the garden hose, sprinklers, pool play, water table, and water balloons.

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Sensory Strategies for the “Under-Responder” (cont. from front)

- Toys that have multiple sensory experiences such as musical toys, cause/effect toys, and light up toys.
- Tactile play such as searching for “hidden treasure” in a bin of dried rice, macaroni, or pinto beans. You can hide small items such as marbles or coins and have your child use their hands to search and find the items. This can also be done with vision occluded by using a bandanna to cover their eyes.
- Light, unexpected touch is alerting. You can make this into a game by having your child close their eyes and then when you touch them, they point to where they were touched.