



Today's world is filled with unlimited amounts of stimulation, including sights, sounds, technology and information. This makes it challenging for parents to navigate the chaos and make decisions that are in the best interest of a child's development. It's important for parents to take an active role in fostering appropriate development in their kids. Here's what you need to know, along with some techniques to help children "cut out the noise."

Sensory Processing Development

Our sensory processing systems are constantly being bombarded by environmental inputs. Adults have acquired the ability to filter out unneeded incoming information. Children who are over-stimulated lack the ability to cope with environmental demands or achieve internal regulation, and may exhibit challenging behaviors as a result. These could include irritability, frequent crying, difficulty with changes in routine or difficulty with attention because children are unable to self-regulate their emotional output. It is important to identify what may be causing the child to feel over-stimulated and what area of sensory input is most difficult for them to process: visual, auditory, touch, vestibular/proprioceptive and/or smell. Parents can help children learn to identify when they are over-stimulated by using phrases such as "too much," "too fast," or "too high." When a child becomes over stimulated, the parent can work with them to implement calming strategies.

There are several environmental changes and activities that can promote calmness. Sometimes it can be as simple as dimming the lights or turning them off. Help the child to find a quiet safe place like a pretend tent/fort or a spot under a desk/table. Lavender and vanilla are calming scents and effective for both adults and children. Chewing gum or chewing on a teething toy can be comforting and promote attention. Headphones, earplugs and earmuffs are helpful for the child who is auditory sensitive. Wearing a billed hat, sitting at a desk facing a wall or being at the front of a classroom can help children who are visually stimulated. Rocking is also calming and promotes self-regulation. It can be done in a chair or while lying over a therapy ball. Cutting out itchy tags and allowing kids to wear comfortable clothes

can decrease distractions and irritability for those with tactile sensitivities. Deep joint and touch pressure can be very effective for both tactile and proprioceptive sensitivities. This can be achieved through wall or chair push-ups, hugging yourself, using a weighted lap blanket or "steamrolling" the child with a therapy ball as he/she lies on the floor. Most importantly, remember to take a deep breath, exhale slowly and teach your child to do the same.

Speech and Language Development

Research has shown that the first three years of life are the most critical for developing and maturing speech and language. Babies and toddlers are asking for communication and attention when they coo, cry and talk. It's important for parents to respond to their "cry" for communication, interact with their kids and be a model to imitate and learn from. But how do you know if your child is on the right developmental track? Communication varies from child to child. Some 1-year-olds are using their first words and others are barely vocalizing. Many parents will start to worry if their child turns 2 and is still not using language to communicate. One of the most important things to look for in your child is whether or not they are interested in you. Do they coo? Do they smile? Do they listen to you talk? Children can wait until they are 2 and sometimes even 3 to use words to communicate. Usually by age 3, you will see your toddler use more language and follow directions better.

If your child doesn't show interest in you or is screaming instead of using sounds appropriate for their environment, then it's possible they can't hear you well or they are feeling over-stimulated. The best environment for babies and toddlers is calm and free of loud noises from television or electronic devices. Believe it or not, even our voices can trigger a frown or a cry from our child. Some children respond better to soft, gentle speech versus loud, rapid speech. If you are concerned about your child's development, please contact your doctor and discuss these concerns. 📞

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