Senses Beneath the Surface

a parent guide to sensory struggles and the GAS pedal

Too loud. Too scratchy. Too much.

“She screams when I brush her hair.” “He covers his ears at every birthday party.” “We cut the tags out of everything, and socks are still a battle.” Or the opposite: the kid who crashes into everything, spins, climbs, and never seems to get enough.

These kids are not being dramatic or difficult. Their nervous system is processing the world differently, and often it is stuck on high alert. This guide explains that layer in plain language and gives you simple ways to help at home.

01

Sensory processing is a nervous system job

Every sound, texture, light, and movement your child takes in gets filtered by their nervous system. A calm system turns the volume down on what does not matter. A system stuck in fight-or-flight turns the volume up on everything.

GAS	BRAKE
Fight-or-flight. Everything feels too loud, too close, too much.	Rest-and-digest. Filters the noise. Feels safe in their body.

When a child’s foot is stuck on the **GAS**, a tag can feel like sandpaper and a hand dryer like an alarm. Some kids avoid input. Others seek it out to feel organized. Both can be a nervous system working hard to regulate, and regulation can change.

02

What sensory struggles can look like

Sounds	Covers ears, panics at hand dryers, vacuums, or parties. Overwhelmed in loud or busy places.
Touch & clothes	Tags, seams, and socks are a daily fight. Hates hair brushing, teeth brushing, or nail trims. Avoids messy play.
Food	Very picky eating. Gags on certain textures. Eats the same few “safe” foods.
Movement	Seeks it: crashes, spins, climbs, jumps, never still. Or avoids it: fearful on swings, slides, or uneven ground.
Calm & sleep	Melts down after busy days. Hard to settle at bedtime. Easily startled.

Every item here can have other causes, and some need support of their own. Please keep your pediatrician and your child’s OT in the loop. What we add is one more question: **how is this child’s nervous system regulating?**

03

How a foot gets stuck

We group the stressors that load a young nervous system into what we call the Three T’s:

Traumas
PHYSICAL

A hard birth, falls, sports, long hours sitting.

Thoughts
EMOTIONAL

Family stress, big changes, worry.

Toxins
CHEMICAL

Diet, environmental exposures, repeated rounds of medication.

Often it is several stacked up early: a stressful pregnancy, a hard birth or NICU stay, colic, reflux, ear infections. We call that the **Perfect Storm**. None of this is anyone’s fault. Stress adds up, and a young system can get tuned to stay on alert.

04

Seven ways to help a sensory kid at home

These are not a treatment. They lower the load on a system that is already working hard and help the brake engage.

1. **Give a heads-up**
   Tell them before loud or busy moments: “The hand dryer will be loud. You can cover your ears.”
2. **Use heavy work**
   Carrying groceries, pushing a laundry basket, wall push-ups, or a bear hug can calm and organize the body.
3. **Offer deep pressure**
   A firm hug, a weighted blanket on their lap, or a “burrito” roll in a blanket can settle a busy system.
4. **Make a calm corner**
   A small, quiet spot with soft light, a pillow, and noise-reducing headphones they can choose to use.
5. **Keep clothes easy**
   Soft, tagless, seamless clothes and letting them choose can take one battle off the table.
6. **Add movement breaks**
   Swinging, jumping, or a quick walk before tasks that need calm, like homework or a haircut.
7. **Protect sleep**
   Consistent bedtime, dim lights, and screens away at least an hour before bed.

05

What we actually do

We don’t diagnose or treat sensory processing disorder.

We measure how your child’s nervous system is regulating. Then we use gentle, specific adjustments to help it shift out of GAS and into BRAKE.

How we measure. An INSiGHT scan is painless and quick, and we go at your child’s pace. It looks at nervous system patterns along the spine (neurothermal), muscle tension (sEMG), and how flexibly the body shifts between GAS and BRAKE (HRV).

Alongside your child’s team. We work with your pediatrician, OT, and therapists, not instead of them.

06

Is your child’s foot stuck on the gas?

Does your child…

- ○ Cover their ears or panic at loud sounds
- ○ Fight tags, seams, socks, or certain clothes
- ○ Hate hair brushing, teeth brushing, or nail trims
- ○ Eat only a few “safe” foods or gag on textures
- ○ Crash, spin, climb, or seek constant movement
- ○ Get overwhelmed and melt down after busy days
- ○ Have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- ○ Have a history of a hard birth, NICU stay, colic, reflux, or ear infections

If you checked more than a few, a scan can show you what is happening underneath.

> *“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.” Psalm 4:8*

Your child isn’t too much. Let’s find out what’s underneath.

The next step is a New Patient Experience: about an hour with one of our doctors, a full neurological exam, and INSiGHT scans, at your child’s pace. Kids are always welcome.

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This guide is for education only. It is not medical advice and does not diagnose, treat, or cure any condition, including sensory processing disorder or autism. Chiropractic care at our practice focuses on nervous system function. Please talk with your child’s pediatrician or OT about any symptom, diagnosis, or therapy.