

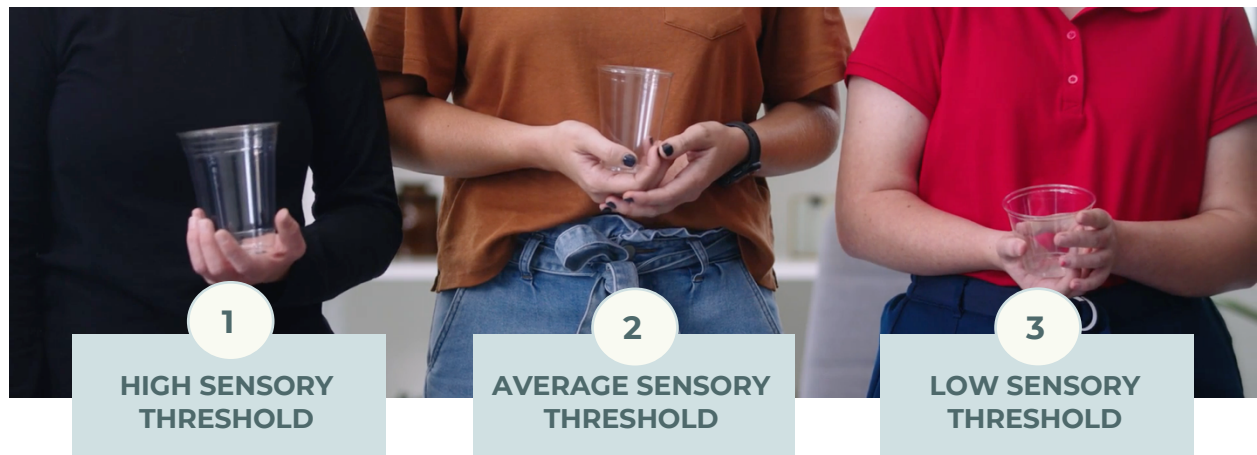
Recognizing Energy Levels

@peoplelikeusdoc

SENSORY THRESHOLDS

Our brains are constantly receiving input. This includes input from the five main senses, as well as our vestibular and proprioceptive systems. All that fancy wording just to say - there's a reason you can't focus in a loud restaurant, yet get so much done in your ideal work environment.

Too much sensory input can make us feel overstimulated, but too little can make us feel under-stimulated. When considering the varying needs of your students, imagine each student is holding a cup. The size of the cup represents how much sensory information it takes to fill that person up.



For individuals who have a low threshold for sensory stimulation (*i.e.*, Cup 3), a seemingly small sensory experience can go a long way. Someone with a low sensory threshold can come across as anxious, upset, or nervous.

For sensory-seeking individuals (*i.e.*, Cup 1), large amounts of sensory information may still not fill them up. This person can come across as restless, hyper, or energetic.

A high sensory threshold (*i.e.*, Cup 1) can also present with a flat affect. Here, it takes a lot of stimulation to “wake up” the senses. This person may come across as lethargic or difficult to engage.

SENSORY PROCESSING CHALLENGES

When instructing people with exceptionalities, it's important to understand that many of your students likely experience sensory processing challenges. When a student's sensory processing is not functioning as it should, that student will experience *unseen* challenges. This can result in discomfort, frustration, and unwanted behaviors, due to the brain's very high or very low threshold for sensory input.

If you notice the following behaviors, consider that there may be underlying causes due to sensory processing difficulties. Tune into the student's energy level and increase engagement by leading interventions (or adjusting your activity) to counteract the student's energy level.

Anxious, Upset, Nervous

For individuals who have a low threshold for sensory stimulation, a seemingly small sensory experience can go a long way.

BEHAVIORS

Covering ears with hands

Easily startled

Avoids physical touch

Becomes visibly upset when experiencing change in routine

Bothered by different textures, bright light, loud noises, and large groups

Seems hyper aware of their body and environmental stimuli



GROUNDING ACTIVITIES

Sensory breaks when needed in a designated quiet area

Forewarn participants that the schedule may change throughout the rehearsal to prepare them for possible transitions

Bear hug or other deep pressure (i.e., weighted blanket, weighted vest)

Breathing exercises for a calming effect

Restless, Hyper, Energetic

For sensory-seeking individuals, large amounts of sensory information may still not fill them up. Think of ways to engage this performer's proprioceptive system.

BEHAVIORS

Squirmy or fidgety

Plays roughly with others and does not mind physical touch

Seems to always want to touch objects or others

Distracted demeanor

Does not respect typical boundaries of physical space



GROUNDING ACTIVITIES

Bring a fidget to class

Proprioceptive, or heavy body, work

Pushing and pulling activities

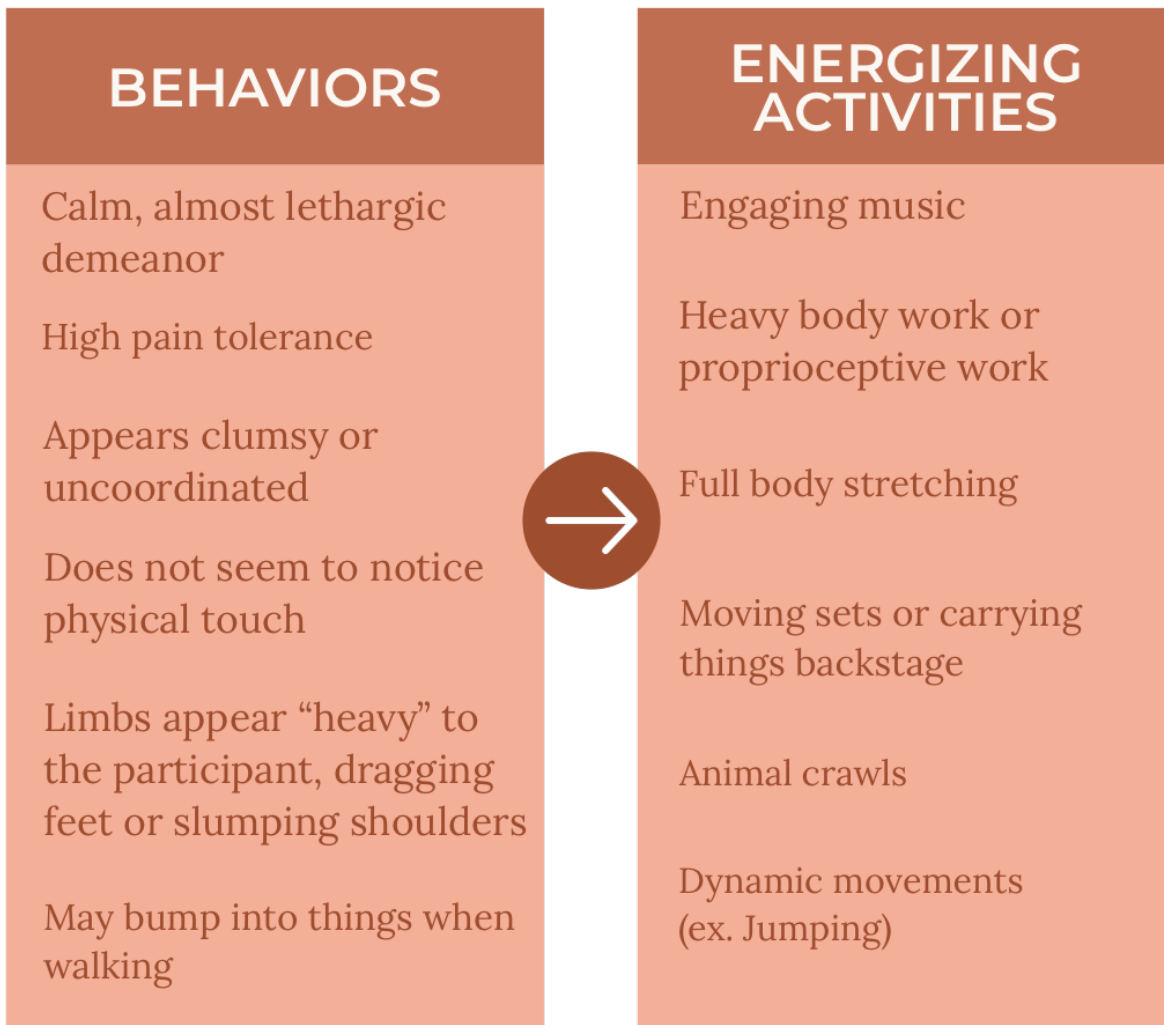
Ask for help moving sets or carrying things backstage; this type of heavy work is grounding for those seeking sensory input

Animal crawls

Yoga poses

Difficult to Engage, Lethargic

A high sensory threshold can also present with a flat affect. Here, it takes a lot of stimulation, or input, to “wake up” the senses.



For more information, check out the course *Teaching Strategies for Students with Disabilities*.