

FAQ for Occupational Therapy and Sensory Processing Disorder

What does the Children's Occupational Therapy Service do?

Our specialist Occupational Therapists provide assessments, interventions and support for children and young people who, because of physical difficulties, struggle to complete everyday tasks, occupations or fully participate in school or home life.

Problems processing sensory information may be one factor which contributes to a child having difficulties with day-to-day tasks. In these situations, Sirona therapists will consider sensory issues as part of a wider assessment process.

What is RCOT?

RCOT stands for the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. This is the organisation which acts as the professional body for Occupational Therapists in the UK. The RCOT guidance about supporting those with sensory processing needs has been set out for all Occupational Therapists.

What is sensory processing?

Sensory processing describes the way people see, hear, feel, or notice different sensations and how they process this information to react to or respond to everyday experiences. Visit our [leaflet library](#) for more information and films on sensory processing.

What is sensory processing disorder?

Sensory Processing Disorder is a term proposed in 2007 by a group of Occupational Therapists (Miller et al, 2007). This team wanted to have sensory processing disorder included in the diagnostic manuals used by doctors (DSM-5) as a standalone disorder. This was not approved so it is not yet a diagnostic term recognised or used in the National Health Service (NHS).

What terms can we use?

The NHS does not recognise the term sensory processing disorder, but it does recognise the significant impact that sensory differences can have on child's ability to participate in many everyday activities. **Sensory differences** or **sensory difficulties** or **sensory needs** are collective terms used to describe the sensory needs a child or young person may present with.

What is person-centred therapy?

Person-centred therapy describes how all Occupational Therapy recommendations and interventions, including sensory based interventions, should be focused on the unique needs of the child or young person. RCOT guidance states: "Person-centred goals/outcomes must be established prior to intervention which should clearly relate to occupational engagement, performance and/or participation."

What do Occupational Therapists consider in relation to sensory difficulties?

Sensory issues will be considered in the context of the child or young person's home or educational setting. Recommendations or interventions will focus on enabling the child or young person to engage with learning, self-care and social activities and achieve their goals in these areas. Where possible, the therapy should be embedded into the everyday routines, activities and purposes of a child or young person's life.

What sensory interventions are used by Sirona and other NHS therapists?

There are recommended interventions and strategies which use sensory processing theory to help families and education staff to understand a young person's needs and help them to manage or cope with overwhelming or complex sensory input. This intervention may also include use of play activities which challenge and aid the development of resilience, tolerance and change in sensory systems.

What is sensory processing or sensory integration therapy?

Sensory integration therapy can refer to a number of different things. One is an intervention which involves the young person going to weekly therapy play sessions often taking place in a soft play setting with equipment like swings and gym balls. This approach is not currently recommended by RCOT or used by the NHS due to the lack of evidence on its effectiveness to change underlying conditions. Some families however report this approach is helpful.

Why isn't sensory processing disorder used as a diagnostic term?

Medical advisors compiling the DSM-5 diagnostic manual believed there was insufficient information and research to include sensory processing disorder as a diagnosis in its own right. Evidence shows sensory processing differences as a symptom pattern seen in many other developmental disorders.

Future situation about the diagnosis of sensory processing disorder.

Research into this area is ongoing and the position on sensory processing disorder may change in the future. Sirona's current position is to avoid the use of the term sensory processing disorder but instead use the term sensory processing difficulties.

Are Sirona's Occupational Therapists qualified to address issues related to sensory processing difficulties?

All of Sirona's Occupational Therapists have relevant experience and a degree in Occupational Therapy. This training includes sensory processing theory and interventions to help children and young people address their concerns and achieve their goals.

Our therapists also complete post graduate training in neurodevelopmental theory and practice. A masters level qualification is not essential or mandatory. All staff receive regular supervision, in-house training and consultation from specialist leads

What support does Sirona offer?

For young people who have a movement or motor skill difficulty, they will be offered assessment and advice for their families and school.

Sirona care & health offers a weekly advice line which families or professionals can call to speak to an Occupational Therapist about sensory needs. Advice will be provided and, if necessary, a referral for further assessment will be made.

Online training resources and information handouts are available on our [website](#) to equip families and school staff to manage and support children and young people who exhibit sensory needs.

Our helpline is open every Thursday morning on 07971 035385. Please ring between 8am and 9.30am to secure a call back later on the same day.