

A Day in the Life of a Teenager with Sensory Integration Difficulties



This is Rose, a 16-year-old young person with difficulties with sensory integration and sensory processing. Due to her challenges with processing sensory information, she has difficulty making friends and her behaviour is often misunderstood by her family members, teachers and other individuals she comes into contact with. To see how difficulties with sensory processing and integration can affect teenagers in everyday life, take a look at a typical day in Rose's life.



6:00 am

The alarm clock goes off and it's time for Rose to get out of bed. However, she is exhausted again and does not feel like waking up. She had a difficult time falling asleep again and found her pillow too uncomfortable and lumpy. An ambulance also drove past in the early morning hours and disturbed her sleep after she finally got comfortable.

Sensory Integration Challenge:
Over responsivity to tactile and auditory sensory input



7:00 am

Rose is in the kitchen getting her breakfast and also sorting out her packed lunch for school. She isn't hungry yet so she doesn't feel like doing this right now but her mother is insisting that it is important that she eats something healthy before school.

Sensory Integration Challenge:
Altered Interoception - inability to recognise hunger



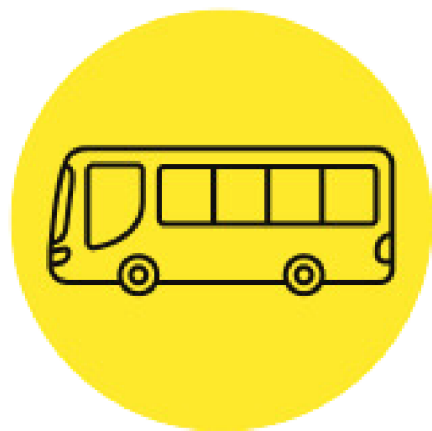
8:00 am

Rose is ready for school but not feeling very comfortable. Her jumper is scratching her but unfortunately she misplaced her favourite hoodie at school. As she has already lost three school hoodies this year, her parents have said that she has to make do with the usual school jumper until the end of the school year. To make matters worse, her period has started and Rose finds the feeling of sanitary pads very uncomfortable. She has heard from friends that period pants might be more comfortable but hasn't tried them yet as they are very expensive.

Sensory Integration Challenge:
Sensitivity to textures, poor organisational skills

Rose's difficulties with sensory processing and integration may include the following:

- Being under or over-sensitive to sounds, textures, flavours, smells or other sensory input
- Having difficulty carrying out new activities
- Having difficulty with bumping into things and knowing where your body is in space
- Seeking or avoiding certain types of movement
- Having difficulty with emotional regulation
- Having difficulty making sense of internal signals from your body like hunger or thirst



9:15 am

Rose just arrived at school. She is half an hour late and is feeling very stressed. She got on the wrong bus by accident and then had to get off and change buses. After misreading the map, she went in the wrong direction and then had to get off and ask for help again. Her teacher was supportive but Rose's day got off to a bad start as she missed important instructions at the start of the school day.

Sensory Integration
Challenge: Difficulties with spatial awareness and directions



1:00 pm

It is lunchtime and Rose's friends have gathered in the school cafeteria. It is always packed and Rose finds lunchtime stressful due to the noise and busy environment. She has such a difficult time keeping herself calm that sometimes she goes to the school library instead for a quiet space. This means that she is often on her own and doesn't have many friends as they all prefer to hang out together in the cafeteria.

Sensory Integration
Challenge: Sensitivity to noise



5:00 pm

The school day has finally ended and Rose is attending a yoga class for the first time today. Her school counsellor recommended that she attends this class to help her with her anxiety. Rose hopes that she gets a spot near the front of the class or in front of a mirror to help her copy the moves correctly.

Sensory Integration
Challenge: Difficulties with praxis (motor planning), emotional regulation



7:00 pm

Rose is finally home and is hoping that her mother stocked up on her favourite shower gel and body lotion. She prefers unscented bath products and is also particular about the containers these come in. She still has to finish some school work too as she did not manage to complete everything she needed to do at school. Rose is also hoping that she will have a better night's sleep tonight.

Sensory Integration
Challenge: Sensitivity to smells and textures



The teenage years are already stressful for young people with many changes and transitions. For young people with sensory processing and integration differences, this time can feel extra challenging as they are trying to make sense of and deal with physiological changes and extra responsibilities.

In addition, being a teenager with sensory processing and integration differences can be isolating to many young people who don't feel comfortable with the type of activities their peers enjoy.