



Understanding our senses

Olfaction (smell)

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Our primitive sense is our sense of smell it helps to alert us to danger and changes in our environment.

We use a different part of our brain to process smell compared to our other senses. This 'limbic' part is where we process memories and emotions.

Because of this we respond emotionally to smells whether we realise it or not. For example when you walk into a room you are likely to notice how you respond to that room if it is smelling particularly unpleasant or if it smells really fresh and fragrant.

Smell is constant

We are continuously processing smells however our brain is very good at helping smells be 'dulled' down and ignored once we are familiar with them in a particular space. But as soon as something changes (someone walks past you or you smell someone cooking) you will be alerted to that change in smell.

The more familiar we are with smells the easier we find to ignore them. For example you might not notice the smell of your own home, whereas other people who come to visit will recognise your homely smell!

If someone is sensitive to smell imagine being alerted to every smell around us and not having the ability of 'forgetting' a smell so they are constantly smelling it as intensely as they did in the beginning.

During our day we have many smells on us shampoo, shower gel, washing detergent, perfume/aftershave, deodorant that's just before we go and eat or have a drink!

If we could smell all of these smells at the same time you can imagine how confusing it might be as you are constantly overwhelmed with a whole mix of smells.

"I'm very sensitive to smells. I need to get away from smells I don't like (which is a lot!)"

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Workshops, exhibitions and installations to create awareness of sensory processing difficulties.

Emotionally linked in how we respond

As we get older we don't obviously show how we respond or recognise smells. As a child we might cover our nose or say "that smells poo-ey" but we don't as an adult. We might simply walk straight out of the room or just try and forget the smell.

Therefore it can be really difficult for people with smell difficulties to know how to respond as they don't see how we notice and respond to smell!

Because of how we process smell we know that they are highly charged and linked with emotions and feelings.

This can mean the way we do recognise characteristics of smell processing difficulties can be through difficulties in emotional regulation or by physically removing themselves from spaces.

This information is based on our online training 'Understanding our senses' you can find these online via our website shop.

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