



Using the SAND in School-Based

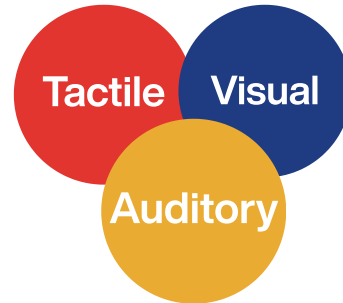
SAND Evaluations

To support sensory-related educational decision-making.

**SENSORY ASSESSMENT FOR
NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS**

What is the SAND?

- Semi-structured observation + caregiver interview in a standardized format
- Captures sensory hyperreactivity, hyporeactivity, and seeking behaviors
- Complements rating scales and other assessments
- Suitable for children ages 2-12 years



Use the SAND When...

✓ Sensory behaviors complicate the evaluation

- Sensory responses interfere with testing, instruction, or classroom participation
- Behaviors are inconsistent across settings

✓ Communication/language limits assessment options

- Non-verbal to minimally verbal students
- Students with limited expressive language
- Concerns about linguistic or cultural bias

✓ Caregiver/teacher-rating tools feel limited

- Parent and teacher report discrepancies
- Caregivers struggle to describe sensory behaviors
- Rating scales don't fully explain observed behaviors

✓ Referral question includes sensory symptoms

- ASD and/or other neurodevelopmental concerns
- Diagnostic clarification is needed

✓ Support for School-Based Decision Making is Needed

Standardized Observation

- Captures sensory responses as they occur
- Reduces reliance on subjective symptom report alone
- Supports defensible evaluation practices

Clarify Functional Impact

- Differentiates sensory behaviors from attention, behavior, or emotional factors
- Understand how sensory needs affect learning

Contributes Key Data for IEP Development to Inform:

- Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)
- Sensory needs in the classroom
- Classroom accommodations and strategies
- Related service considerations (e.g., OT collaboration)

Key Takeaways

When sensory symptoms influence a student's access to learning, observation matters. The SAND offers a standardized way to quickly observe and document sensory behaviors to support informed, educationally relevant decisions.

The SAND uses direct observation and a caregiver interview in a standardized format

Pair the SAND with other sensory reports for a complete picture of sensory functioning

Develop IEP goals, intervention strategies, and monitor progress in related services

SAND Case Vignette

Student: Liam **Age:** 8 years **Grade:** Second

Referral Concerns:

- Difficulty remaining engaged during classroom instruction
- Frequent avoidance of group activities
- Inconsistent performance during assessments
- Sensory concerns noted by staff

Background:

Teacher and parent rating scales suggested possible sensory sensitivities, but results were inconsistent across reporters. Liam was minimally verbal in structured settings, limiting insight into internal sensory experiences. Classroom behaviors (e.g., withdrawal, task refusal, agitation) could not be clearly attributed to sensory, attentional, or behavioral factors based on rating scales alone.

Eligibility Question:

Could sensory-related needs support a special education classification and related services?

Evaluation Procedures:

- Intellectual and academic testing
- Parent and teacher socioemotional and behavioral rating scales
- Sensory processing assessment
- Classroom observations

Summary of Results:

Liam demonstrated generally average to high average intellectual abilities with relative strengths in verbal comprehension and weaknesses in working memory and processing speed. Academic testing revealed broadly average academic abilities, suggesting no concerns related to a learning disability. Rating scales indicated moderate difficulties with inattention as well as emotional dysregulation at home and at school. Sensory processing testing with the SAND revealed significant hypersensitivity to tactile and auditory stimuli as well as some sensory seeking behaviors. Liam struggled with specific textures and loud noises. Parents and teachers also endorsed these symptoms.

Classroom observation confirmed Liam's auditory hypersensitivity. When the classroom was loud and busy, Liam had significant difficulty staying on task and was quick to anger. He was frequently tugging at his clothes that were clearly bothering him. Although some textures bothered him, he was frequently seeking out items with softer textures, which seemed to calm him.

How SAND Findings Supported IEP and Eligibility Decisions:

Clarifying Functional Impact - Data from the SAND helped distinguish sensory-driven behaviors from other challenges, including noncompliance, inattention, and emotional dysregulation. By differentiating sensory responses from attentional problems, the evaluation team could accurately describe functional limitations and link them to educational impact.

Informing IEP Development - SAND results contributed directly to:

- PLAAFP statements describing sensory-related barriers to learning
- Identification of specialized supports and accommodations (e.g., environmental modifications)
- Consideration of related services (e.g., occupational therapy)
- Clarifying goals and benchmarks addressing functional sensory needs in the educational setting