



## Why the SenseAbility Course was Developed

At the Sound Learning Centre we work on a daily basis with children and adults with learning and developmental difficulties and from practical experience we know that many of these difficulties can be traced back to how the five senses and the vestibular and proprioceptive systems are working, how the automatic responses (the reflexes) have developed and how the brain processes sensory input. We know that many of these difficulties can be prevented or minimised by early recognition and remediation.

The SenseAbility course has been specially designed to provide education and health professionals, parents and carers with simple methods of evaluation and practical activities for use with children aged three to early teens.

## About the SenseAbility Course

Participants will gain a deeper understand of how the senses interact with each other and how they influence the learning and development process. The information is backed up by real life case studies of clients at the Centre and by activities that will be demonstrated and can be practised during the course. The various activities are designed to:

- Deepen the understanding of how the senses work and influence our behaviour and experience
- Show simple ways of how to evaluate the developmental stages of our children
- Demonstrate some of the developmental activities that can be implemented with our children

SenseAbility provides a comprehensive course guide and programme manual covering background information, developmental progress evaluation and practical activities for an effective school programme.

Throughout the course, time will be made available to answer and address any questions that participants may have. If there are further questions after attending the course, or when implementing the programme with a child, participants can make use of a free mentoring session with one of our trainers, either in person or by telephone.

We encourage SenseAbility participants to attend with a colleague or to partner up another course participant to ensure mutual support after the course.

## Course Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Understanding**  
Looking after ourselves; teaching, parenting, professional pressures, childhood development, reflexes, the senses, vestibular system, proprioception, the brain, sensory processing, differentiation, laterality, inter-hemispheric and sensory integration therapies
- **Evaluating**  
Hearing, vision, neuro-development
- **Implementing**  
Programme design and precautions for auditory, visual, neuro-development and multi-sensory activities
- **Support**  
Resources, contacts

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*“Helping children and adults with learning and sensory difficulties improve their performance”*



## Sensory Development

As professionals we have all been exposed to the concept of child development and developmental milestones, providing us with physical and behavioural signs of maturation of infants and children – for example: noticing, seeing, listening, rolling, crawling, walking and talking. This child developmental information is important since it enables teaching professionals to know what to expect of the child as well as becoming aware of lags in development that may benefit from professional help. However, it is important to always keep in mind that time frames are averages and a range of ages can be seen for each milestone. A child may achieve milestones earlier or later than the average but still be progressing normally. Children often develop more quickly in some areas than others.

The SenseAbility Course gives an alternative view on child development, stimulating a greater awareness of how early learning takes place.

It is important to understand the consequences of when a stage of development is not fully completed or even missed out. For example, we are all impressed with the baby that proudly walks before their first birthday and has no need or time for crawling. Crawling, however, provides great benefits for a child's later learning as it practices, for instance, better binocular vision and hand-eye co-ordination for later reading and writing and crucially brain development.

Childhood development includes a vast array of skills, such as:

- Gross motor: including using large muscles to sit, stand, walk, run etc., keeping balance and changing positions
- Fine motor: using hands to be able to eat, draw, dress, play, write and many other things
- Language: listening, understanding, formulating responses, using body language and gestures, speaking
- Cognitive: thinking skills, including learning, understanding and problem-solving, reasoning and remembering
- Social: interacting with others, having relationships with others, having relationships with family, friends and teachers, cooperating and responding to feelings of others

In order to understand how this takes place and how a child becomes able to do more complex things as they get older, we need to know how the interactions between the central nervous system and the senses develop.

## The Senses and Sensory Processing

There are five generally accepted senses that we become aware of at an early age: hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste. The conscious part of the brain is very aware of these senses and continuously checks the information obtained by them in order to make sense of, interact with, and learn from the environment. There are, however, other equally important sensory systems that are essential for normal bodily functioning. We may not be aware of these as the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) will ensure that the body keeps on functioning without any conscious involvement. For instance, we do not have to consciously control our heartbeat or our breathing. Two systems that have a great influence on our ability to learn and function effectively are the Vestibular and the Proprioceptive systems. Both of these and the five senses will all be discussed in more detail during the course.

Our senses are very good at gathering huge amounts of information from the world around us and all that information is constantly being transferred to our brain for processing. How we perceive the world around us and how we learn to react appropriately to the sensory information is the domain of sensory processing in the brain, an important element of the SenseAbility Course.

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