

## Sensory Awareness and Regulation in SLT Practice

### *Is sensory regulation within the scope of a speech-language therapist?*

Yes. Sensory awareness and regulation are within the scope of practice for speech-language therapists (SLTs) in Aotearoa New Zealand when they support communication, swallowing, or participation goals.

The NZSTA Scope of Practice (2012) explicitly lists "sensory awareness" among the areas SLTs work in, alongside communication and swallowing. SLTs may address sensory regulation when it affects a person's ability to:

- Engage in communication
- Participate in feeding and swallowing activities
- Access therapy environments.

### **Examples of practice include:**

- Supporting clients who are over- or under-responsive to sensory input that affects communication (e.g. sound sensitivity, tactile defensiveness)
- Addressing oral sensitivity during feeding and swallowing therapy
- Adapting therapy environments to enhance participation and engagement

SLTs may use sensory-informed strategies to help clients:

- Achieve a calm, alert state conducive to communication
- Transition between tasks or settings
- Engage meaningfully in therapy or daily routines.

However, SLTs must stay within their scope of competence and ensure any use of sensory strategies is clearly linked to communication, feeding/swallowing, or participation outcomes.

Interdisciplinary collaboration—particularly with occupational therapists—is important when working with clients with more complex sensory processing needs.

### *Ethical considerations from the NZSTA Principles and Rules of Ethics*

SLTs are guided by the NZSTA's ethical principles, which reinforce the importance of:

- Beneficence and non-maleficence: SLTs must aim to benefit clients and avoid harm, using every resource to ensure high-quality service (Principle 1).
- Professional competence: SLTs must provide services within their scope of practice and maintain current, evidence-informed knowledge (Principle 2).
- Professional integrity: SLTs must respect professional boundaries, act honestly, and collaborate constructively with others involved in a client's care (Principle 4).

Providing input on sensory regulation for a client not under your care may risk:

- Acting outside your designated role or therapeutic relationship.
- Failing to obtain informed consent.
- Undermining collaborative care.

Such actions may compromise ethical practice and the safety or clarity of care delivery.

### *Good practice for SLTs*

- Work within your training and competency, and seek supervision if unsure.
- Collaborate with occupational therapists where broader sensory needs exist.
- Use sensory regulation strategies only to support communication, swallowing, or participation goals relevant to your SLT role.
- Ensure you are the treating clinician or part of an agreed interdisciplinary team.
- Obtain informed consent and communicate clearly with other professionals.

### *Summary*

Sensory regulation is within the SLT scope of practice when clearly linked to the goals of communication, swallowing, or participation. NZSTA members must act competently,

ethically, and in collaboration with other professionals, following the Scope of Practice and the Principles and Rules of Ethics.

For further clarification, contact NZSTA at: [admin@speechtherapy.org.nz](mailto:admin@speechtherapy.org.nz)

***References:***

- NZSTA Scope of Practice 2012 (2025 version is being published shortly)
- Principles and Rules of Ethics 2020 (2025 version is in development)