Sensory personalities

**Intro**

Welcome to Sense by Meg Faure, the podcast that's brought to you by Parent Sense, the app that takes the guesswork out of parenting. If you're a new parent, then you are in good company. Your host, Meg Faure is a well-known OT Infant specialist and the author of eight parenting books. Each week, we're going to spend time with new mums and dads, just like you to chat about the week's wins, the challenge, and the questions of the moment. Subscribe to the podcast, download the Parent Sense App and catch Meg here every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life. And now, meet your host.

Bailey: Hello and welcome to everyone joining us for this episode of Parent Sense Podcast with Meg Faure. I'm Bailey Georgie, artist, a fellow mom, a podcaster, and I'm here with Meg for today's topic, Sensory personalities. Now, Meg, you are well known for all things sensory, starting way back with the baby sense books to the company and throughout the whole sense series of books. I really think that it's safe to say you've been advocating for parenting with since for a while now, how are you?

Meg: I'm very well, thanks to you, Bailey. Good to be back with you

Bailey: And you. What I'm really looking forward to is hearing more about what sensory personalities are about and why they matter. And with you listening now, you are in for a complete shift in how you parent, because Meg is going to reveal what she calls the secret to successful parenting. I am all ears. Just a reminder that if you have press and questions that you want answered on this podcast, you are welcome to ask Meg. So look out for the posts on Meg's Facebook and Instagram pages. Drop us your questions in the comments, and don't be shy. There are no topic store limits. We are here to support you and Meg has promised to get through as many questions as she can in these sessions. So that said, Meg, are you ready?

Meg: Ready. Good to go.

Bailey: We've already mentioned that a lot of your work is around sensory personalities that features in your books in the Parent Sense App. You've given lots of talks and lectures about the subject, but for those parents who are new to sensory personalities, what are they and why do they matter?

Meg: Yeah. So personalities of any type are really the way that we interact with the world. It defines how we engage, with the world in general. When it comes to sensory personalities, we all take in sensory information through our eight senses. A lot of people think we've got five senses, but in addition to the five senses that we knew about when we were in grade four at school, there's also three hidden senses, which is the sense of vestibular or movement. There's the sense of pro-perception, which is your body and space. And then there's the sense of inter-reception which is the signals you get from your muscles and from your body organs. So that's your heartbeat, your breathing, your feeling full, that type of thing, needing to go to the toilet. So those are all the type of things that you get in from your body.

Now, as the sensory information comes into our brains, and this happens for absolutely everybody at every given moment. As this sensory information comes into our brain, we have this incredible ability in our brain to filter out what is not needed. And this is very important Bailey, because if you were taking in absolutely everything that's going on around you at every moment, you would actually be in a state of overstimulation a lot of the time. So for instance, as you and our listeners are sitting there now, they have not even remembered or noticed, acknowledged that they're wearing clothes on their back anymore. And that's because when they got dressed this morning, they might have noticed themselves putting on the field of the clothes and then after that, the brain habituated it and it disappeared completely. Now that ability to filter sensory information is absolutely critically important because otherwise, we exist in a state of over stimulation.

Now what happens for us all, and this is not just for our children, but for you and I, and for absolutely all of us, is that we have varying levels of this filter or this threshold for sensory information. And so some of us have a very high threshold for sensory information. In other words, a lot can be going on around us without us even notice it. And others of us have got a very low filter for sensory information and in that case, we notice absolutely everything. It's kind of like your pain threshold. So some of us listening or you and I might have, one of us might have had a cesarean section and one of us natural birth and whether or not we chose to have pain relief with the natural birth often has something to do with what our natural pain threshold is. So it just like pain thresholds, but at sensory thresholds.

Now, these different kind of levels at which we filter sensory information, then feed into what we call the sensory personalities and there are four sensory personalities. On the one end of the continuum are the sensory personalities who have a low threshold for sensory information. In other words, they notice everything that's going in their world. And so logically what will happen to them is there in general are much more sensitive human beings. And so they divided into two sensory personalities, the sensitive and the slow to warm up. So a sensitive baby or sensitive toddler, they notice what's going on, they're much more finicky, they tend to be poor feeders because they didn't love breastfeeding in the early days because breastfeeding is a very sensory experience. And then if they do take to breastfeeding, they don't move easily onto a bottle and if they settle on one bottle nipple, they won't move onto another one. And then when solids are introduced, they really are quite finicky about it, they don't like lumps, they don't like certain flavors, they don't like certain temperatures and smell and so on. So our sensitive little one, and that's just an illustration on the feeding side, but our sensitive little ones tend to be more tricky. They don't like certain sucks, they don't like these cloths, they really are, you know, and if something happens in their world, they're battled to self-regulate and come back to calm state. So our sensitive babies and toddlers tend to be more difficult to parent. And if a mom is listening to this podcast, who's had a sensitive baby, it might be the first time that she's realized that it actually wasn't all her fault.

Bailey: Oh.

Meg: Because often when you are a mom of a sensitive baby, like, it just feels like you're doing it all wrong because they're just finicky and irritable all the time.

 So the second sensory personality is also has a low threshold. And so they're also sensitive, but they are what we call slow to warm up. And so they will eventually warm up to what's going on in the world. Initially, all of their default position is sensitive. And then as soon as they've started to get used to something, then they warm up. So slow to warm baby, I call them Velcro babies as well because they cling to you like Velcro. If you're going out with them, they want to be on you, mommy. They want to hold onto you. If you get to a birthday party, they taken everything for about the first hour and just as you're getting ready to go at two hours, they suddenly warm up and decide they want to have fun. So they also are very controlling, like they like things to be exactly so, like the carrots mustn't touch the potato on the plate or you know, their clothes must go on in a certain order or if they've just woken up in the morning, you can't dress them initially because they need time to warm up and wake up.

Bailey: I feel like you are literally describing my one son. Everything.

Meg: Okay. There you go.

Bailey: Yeah.

Meg: And which one is that, your first or your second?

Bailey: My first.

Meg: Your first. Yeah, it has to be done his way.

Bailey: Everything needs to be in his control and yes, if something touches on the plate, even though he's going to eat at the same time, it has to be separated. Also, can't get him dressed straight away, needs to have the lift, suck on first. I mean, I may be being a bit ridiculous with that, but very much about having control of things and slow to warm up.

Meg: And you see that control so important for them because the way that they see it is that if they can control it, it makes it predictable and means something's predictable. They have given their brain pre-warning for what's coming.

Bailey: Makes sense.

Meg: Yeah. So they crave predictability and they don't like being thrown out of kill. So an example would be, you know, when you go on holiday and Bailey, I know you move countries and often with little ones like that, the move, the new place where you go, they're going to go to sleep on holiday. All of that's a massive upheaval. So they tend to take time to warm up again when they're going into new situation.

Bailey: Totally.

Meg: Okay.

Bailey: This helps so much because then it does, like you said, it takes the pressure of feeling like you're a bad mom or you've done something wrong. It's good to know this.

Meg: And you know, Bailey. I mean, you said it just now that I have said that this is the secret to parenting. It truly is because the insight you gain into your child's behavior, when you understand this sensory personality is actually life changing for them and for you. And one of the things, with you slow to warm up babies is that very often when they have warmed up, they actually look like a social butterfly because they are gregarious, they are life and soul of the party, but it's got to be on their terms in a place that they're happy with.

Bailey: Well, I mean, I was just going to say that George, for me, my eldest, he flipped between slow to warm up on things and then being a complete social butterfly on other things.

Meg: Yeah. And that's exactly why, because when they're in their comfort zone or when they're in control, they'll go social butterfly. The other thing that happens for them, which is very interesting is that when they have language, things get easier. You know, prior to language, under three years old, they can be very, very tricky because they can't express that need for control. Whereas as soon as they've got language, they can then express it and that becomes the gateway for these are the ones that they can actually control their world and they do become a lot easier. So those are the first two sensory personalities are slow to warm-up and our sensitive baby. And then on the other side of the continuum, you've got our little ones with very high thresholds. In other words, lots can go on for them and they hardly notice. And the two sensory personalities, there are our settled baby and our social butterfly.

So our settled baby and I had one of them, oh my gosh, are there a joy? Because they are born easy, they just sleep through early, they feed well, and they’re very, very laid back babies. If they're sitting on the mat at six months old, they're not going to call you in to take care of them, they're quite happy to sit and watch the world go by. They love being on your lap cause they love to watch what's happening, but they're quite as just as happy to be in a pram or on the floor watching the world go by as well.

And I often say to moms, who've got settled babies. I don't tell everybody you've got a settled baby and how well you're doing.

Bailey: Because it doesn't happen.

Meg: It was just going to go. I have a settled baby. And then you said that my second is settled. So okay. Don't worry. We will pretend that he is not. Yes. It's you and I, so we can say it, but you know what? I think for some moms just always hear about these moms, whose baby’s slept through - these babies.

Bailey: Yeah.

Meg: They eat easily, they're just always happy, they're gregarious and then they kind of think, gosh, I mean that moms got it all sorted. So the settled baby is great. They're often interesting, we have slightly delayed motor milestones because they don't have the need to conquer the world and to move. So they're so happy on their butt, watching the world go by that their miles don't tend to be a little bit slower. They might talk a little later, they might crawl a little later. Just because the world is easy for them, they don't need to do those things.

Bailey: That's so true; it's crazy. This is kind of like the child version of a love language. Once you understand someone's love language, it changes the whole relationship. And I suppose once you understand their sensory personalities, it can change the way that you parent. It's so true, Meg; I love this.

Meg: It absolutely changes the way you parent. And it also gives you empathy because you understand what's going on. And in fact, in one of my books, I actually wrote a section on how to adjust your interactions so that you can make sure that your baby develops optimally within the context of their sensory personality. And even in weaning sense, there is a whole chapter on weaning according to sensory personalities. So sensory personalities are very important.

 So our fourth and final sensory personality is the social butterfly and these are the ones actually have a very high threshold for information. So they're similar to our settled babies. But when they start to notice that the world is interesting, that people are interesting, that movement is interesting, sound are interesting, they then start to seek out everything and they become very, very busy, gregarious, social little ones. So they want more interaction, they want more stimulation, they can't stand to be bored, they want to be the life and soul of every party. You know? And so they're very gregarious little ones.

My first born was one and I can remember, and I always say this to moms that if you've got a social butterfly, you can't walk through the shops without everybody stopping to talk to you because they make eye contact with everyone. They invite everyone in and they really are very, they're very, very gregarious. They're actually exhausting. So for the who listening, who's got a social butterfly, come five o'clock in the afternoon, you are begging for sleep time because they're so busy. So those are your four sensory personalities. And in every aspect of parenting, we can actually adjust what we do in order to take into consideration those sensory personalities.

Bailey: So I mean, I find myself nodding to all of those things and definitely seeing, especially with my first, I find myself nodding to aspects in both the slow to warm-up and then the social butterfly. Can you have a child who displays characteristics of more than one sensory personality?

Meg: Yeah, definitely. So as I mentioned just now, you've often get your slow to warm-up, overlapping with a social butterfly. And the reason is that once a slow to warm up has actually warmed up, they just look like the life and soul of a party. So those two often look like they are overlapping. You can get a social butterfly who sometimes looks sensitive. And the reason for that is that your social butterfly, they don't have an off switch. They like that Energizer bunny that goes, goes, goes, goes, goes. And then suddenly they collapse. They get over stimulated and they start to cry and then they can become very irritable with absolutely anything that happens after that. So they just don't have an off switch and that's part of parenting. A social butterfly is to start to recognize that off, switch for them and help them to know when they've reached a point where they actually need to defrag, calm down, have a time out or whatever it is. So they do overlap.

And the other ones that also overlap are your settled and your social butterfly because your settled baby, they've got this very high threshold, but if they start to realize that something is fun, they can move into seeking information and then they become sensory seekers or social butterflies as well. So the answers, yes, you do get overlap. But what I always say to moms, if you want to identify what your baby sensory personality is, think about a time when they were in a state of stress. In other words, a new situation they've just started playgroup. What happens there? Are they very clingy and on you? Do they run in immediately engage with everyone or do they kind of stand at the side, just watching what's going on? They're not anxious, like you're slow to warm up, but they're just watching. That would be a settled baby or with a sensitive of baby, they just start crying and can't be calm. So when you put them into a so called stressful situation or a bit of a challenge, that's when your default personality comes out.

Bailey: So you've mentioned that you have a settled baby. What are your kids other sensory personalities?

Meg: Yeah. So it's really interesting. So my first born is a social butterfly. He has to have stimulation in order to stay calm and to feel like he's in his zone. What's interesting is my husband is as well. So they love kite surfing going faster. He was very accident prone as a young child because he was always doing something. I mean, there was a joke around in our family friend group where it looked like James was being abused because we were always at the ER with having stitches and you know,

Bailey: Shame.

Meg: So he was definitely a social butterfly and actually exhausting. What's interesting though with him is that, and you know, this is a big thing is as a parent moving all the way through, even through the teen years is that you need to find the thing that helps children to feel regulated. And with your social butterfly, one of the things that works really well is per perception and specifically movement and heavy work. So something like gyms and weights and in James's case, he rode. Anything that has high physical exertion and really forces your body into high levels of per perception actually are very regulating. And so that means that instead of looking hyperactive or maybe having ADHD or anything like that, you end up with a more regulated brand, but you've used your sensory systems in this case per perception, to help your brain to regulate.

Fascinating, very interesting. So James was a social butterfly. My second born just like yours was a settled baby and she was a blessing. I do also call settled babies, con babies, because they con you into having another one.

Bailey: Well, I will say that my last is a settled and I almost thought, oh, we could do this again. And I'm like, nope, nope.

Meg: You don’t know what you're going to get the next done. So, oh, that's so funny. And then my third is a slow to warm up and what's really interesting about her is she has always marched to her own tune and she doesn't like to be in trouble. So she really keeps things very sane around her. She likes boundaries, limitations, and she imposes them on herself. She was my Caesar baby. So she came out a different way because she was, yeah, she was marching to her own tune. And often their first words are no. And whenever you present something new, it's no, but they take time and once they've warmed up, then they go for it and I completely get her because that's what I am as well. So, I need to think through things first and I need to control things in order to feel really comfortable.

Bailey: Okay. So we are taking these sensory personalities, we're putting them onto our children, but then what is your sensory personality? And then how did you adjust that for your little ones?

Meg: Yeah. So I'm definitely a slow to warm-up. And I think it's a wonderful thing if parents do know what they are. And from today, a lot of people would've been able to recognize what they are because you are able to adjust. So a couple of things around the different sensory personalities. So I'm a slow to warm up, I like control, I like order, I don't like disorder. So you can imagine that when I had a social butterfly husband and child, it could be really disorganizing for me.

Bailey: Yeah.

Meg: And so I would pull back into more control and they would of course go in the opposite direction. So it's recognizing that. It's also recognizing that your social butterfly actually needs, that they have a need for speed in order to feel regulated. So instead of being controlling rather to put in times of the day, there is lots of sensory stimulation or social stimulation. So it's adjusting what I need in order to make sure my kids get the best out of me and I get the best out of them. There's certain personalities that mix really well, like for instance, your social butterfly and you are settled, which is my first and second children. Oh my gosh, work brilliantly because your settled baby loves to actually see what's going on And they also then start to seek a little bit more stimulation because they see the excitement through the eyes of their older sibling or their younger sibling, who is the social butterfly.

So likewise as parents, a social butterfly would be really be great for a settled baby, because your settle baby who could have slow developmental milestones will actually be well stimulated by a mom or dad who is a social butterfly. So these matches between our personalities are important. And the fortunate thing is that in our marriages, we often are attracted to the opposite. So where I wasn't a social butterfly for James, his dad was. And so they actually could feed off each other and that often happens in a partnership in a marriage where one is one and one is the other and it's a good match for the kids.

Bailey: I think you have all of us now trying to figure out where we fit, where does our husband fit? How does it all fit in the family dynamic? This is brilliant. And is this why you call it the secret successful parenting?

Meg: Yeah, because it touches everything. Honestly, Bailey from temper tantrums through to starting school, through to introducing solids, through to getting a little one to sleep through the night, through to college, it touches absolutely everything. And when you really do understand your child's sensory personality, you do parent in a different way.

Bailey: Brilliant. This episode is brought to you by Parent Sense, your parenting app. As an avid user, I can safely say that Parent Sense is the all-in-one baby development app that helps moms and dads keep track of their baby's routines and really takes the guesswork out of parenting in the first year of a baby's life. Meg, tell us what makes parent sense so special.

Meg: So parent sense is my love child. I developed it because I felt the parents needed a little manual in their pockets and that's what it is. It gives parents routines for their baby’s day. They flexible routines for sleep and for feeding. And then it also gives them in a play activity for every single day, 365 for the first year of life, as well as recipes and meal plans. So it really, unlike most other apps, it covers absolutely every aspect of early parenting

Bailey: There. You heard it straight from the expert, download Parent Sense App now from your app store. Sign up for a lifetime subscription on the website parentsense.app and take 50% off when you use the discount code “parent pod at checkout”. Take advantage of this incredible offer. It's exclusive to podcast listeners. Download the app now and take the guesswork out of parenting. So one of the beautiful things about this podcast is that we get lots of questions from moms and dads and Meg, is here to answer as many as she can. One of the new moms who listens regularly ask this question, Meg and I think it's a great one. “I have a six-month-old and I tried to introduce solids at five months, but she just won't take any solids at all. She wakes over five times at night and I am at my wits end. Anything that could help?

Meg: Yeah. So when I hear that my immediate thought is that potentially, we've got to set a sensitive baby here. And the reason for that is that it's unusual that babies don't want to take any solids at that age. You know, your social butterfly and your settled baby will gregariously interact with solids. This baby does doesn't want any solids, but there was another clue there, and that's what this baby is waking up so often at night over five times is really significant. And it's unusual that a baby wakes that often at this, age, unless it's either got health issues or it's a sensitive baby. So what happens here is that a mom of a sensitive baby will often start to try and introduce solids somewhere between four and six expensive age, baby will refuse solids because it's a new texture. As I said at the beginning, “Our sensitive babies really don't do well with new texture flavors and so on.” And so they refuse it. And so the mum then gets into a habit of now offering more milk because the mom is worried that the baby's not getting enough nutrition. And so we end up in this vicious cycle where baby's having lots of milk and really not who self sooth cause they're so sensitive at night and waking up so frequently. So they have lots of milk at night and that kills their appetite during the day. And then because they're sensitive as well. They don't want solids either for that reason. And so we kind of have this vicious cycle of just babies not taking to any solids.

So a couple of things that I would have a look at here, the first thing is that I would think about looking at a type of foods that you're offering as your first foods for sensitive babies. And in the weaning sense book, we talk about offering much more bland foods and actually potentially even foods that are a bland color. So something like porridge is an example of, you know, rice porridge is an example of a bland flavor, bland colors. It's white, there's nothing going on there. It's like orange carrots.

Bailey: Right.

Meg: And so go with your more bland foods, would be the first and the second, you've got to pull back the milk. So at six months of age, you're actually only looking at four to five milk feeds in 24 hours. And if you stick to that and you offer bland foods, you probably will start to get it through. Also if she's sensitive, I would also start to have a look at really smooth foods at that age. So really making the foods very smooth as opposed to more textured, which you could offer to other babies.

Bailey: I really hope that helps. Here is another question. “My toddler of two years old has just started crèche and cries every day that I drop her off. It's been over a month, and it seems to be getting harder. I read that you're also a co-founder of Play Sense. What is it? And with my experience in this type of playgroup be any better?

Meg: Yeah. So again, as I spoke about earlier, your sensory personalities will define how readily your little one will engage with something like a new playgroup and your sensitive and slow to warm up little ones do tend to take a lot longer to settle in a playgroup. They just do. They sensitive to the sounds. They, you know, toddlers are huge and disorganized and unpredictable. So they never know when a toddler's going to bump into them. It's a new person they have to get used to who has to learn how to read their signals. So I would say you're probably looking at a warm up or sensitive baby here. What Place Sense actually is, is a playgroup program that happens in a home with only six children with a teacher. It's, a kind of a micro pod situation in homes. We train the teachers to understand sensory personalities.

So the reason that it would work better for this baby is that first of all, with your sensitive and your slow to warm up, the smaller the ratio of children to teachers, the better. So a ratio of four to one or six children to one teacher is much better than something like 12 children to one teacher. So my suggestion with this little one is, first of all, have a look at the sensory personality of the teacher. And does the teacher actually understand sensory personalities? If the teacher doesn't, articulate for her, what your little one sensory personality is that's slow to warm up or a sensitive little one. And if you can get into a Play Sense group, it really does make a difference because those teachers are trained to actually look at little one sensory personalities and understand their behavior in that

Bailey: Fantastic. Another mom has said that weaning her 11-month-old was going great, but lately she started resisting foods she used to love, what could be the problem?

Meg: Well, that's a great question. So that often happens with our social butterflies and it's such a funny thing because social butterflies wean in a very specific way. What they do is, you introduce the solids, and they are so excited. There is color, there's flavor, it's not milk anymore, they just love it and they dive straight in. They very often start to decrease the amount of milk they're drinking very rapidly then, which we don't really want them to do under six months of age, because milk is still the priority. So I always say to moms of social butterflies, like just try and feed them solids after a milk feed otherwise, they're just going to stop with the milk because milk is boring. When you've confronted with something like tasty carrots, as an example, which are orange and flavorful. So, and they tend to wean very easily in the early days and then at a certain time, and it's very common that they do it between nine and 11 months, they start to become pickier. And the reason for that is that they've had new solids and new flavors introduced, but they're now starting to get used to them and they want more flavor. And very often, the advice with babies’ food and, and when we make baby food is don't put any obviously salt in it, which we don't want to put in, but don't put high flavors, don't put curry, don't put chili, don't put all of that. But actually for these social butterflies, the more interesting and flavorful food is the better they'll feed.

So my recommendation to this mom who had a good wiener and at 11 months old is now not such a good weaning arena and is resisting foods, is actually to increase the level of flavor in the food. So start to offer more fragrant curries. We actually have lovely fragrant curries in the recipe book in weaning sense. So that's an example of being able to put in flavor that doesn't burn them, because it's not chilies.

Bailey: Right.

Meg: But it's got all those other wonderful flavors, lots of Eastern cooking, lots of lemon, lots of tart flavors, your more Mediterranean strong flavors with lemon and cheeses and so forth. So though they tend to do better with the high flavor than sticking to always bland foods. So I think that this mom's little one will still be a good feeder. She just has to change what she's offering.

Speaker 2 (26:45):

Bailey: Fantastic. Thank you so much for your wisdom and thank you. This really is going to change the way that we parent and also have empathy for our little ones when we see how they are on the sensory levels.

Meg: Absolutely. Well, I mean, for me, if this just makes a little bit of difference for that mom who is feeling at the end of her tether, because her baby's sensitive and she feels like she's failing or the mom or dad who are fighting every morning to get their child dressed because they're a slow to warm up, for me, that's the impact that I'd love to see out of this podcast.

Bailey: Fantastic. Well, I look forward to listening to the next one, next week.

Meg: Great. Thank you so much, Bailey. Cheers.

Bailey: Bye. Thanks to everyone who joined us. We will see you the same time next week until then, download Parent Sense App and take the guesswork out of parenting.