

# Sensory awareness

Understanding children's sensory behaviours and how to support them

This resource supports schools and settings to deliver **The Ordinarily Available**.



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# How to use this guide

This guidance is for education providers, SENCOs, parents and carers and other people involved in supporting children and young people, within their everyday life settings. It is designed to equip the reader with knowledge and understanding of how our senses impact on our ability to live.

## As you read this guidance the basic things to keep in mind are:

- we are all sensory beings. How we make sense of the world around us is through our senses
- our senses work together to give us the information we need to live and keep us safe
- every person's sensory system is unique. We all have preferences for certain sensory experiences, whilst others can be challenging
- children's sensory systems are developing. It is through sensory experiences and opportunity that development takes place
- development occurs at different rates for different people

- an organised sensory system underpins our ability to participate in all aspects of daily life
- our sensory preferences may require that we adjust tasks, activities, and settings, in order to function. If we are not able to function despite these adjustments, it may be necessary to seek specialist support

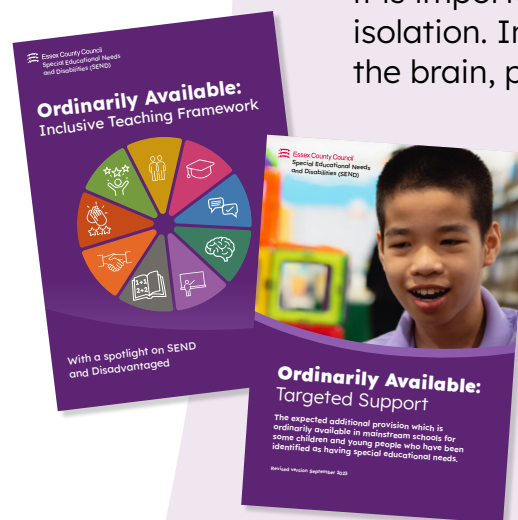


Early years settings, schools and further education colleges will be referred to throughout as education providers. Children and young people will be referred to as CYP.

This guidance is split into different interactive clickable chapters for each sense, to help you to understand, however it is important to remember that our senses do not work in isolation. Information from all of the senses is received by the brain, processed, and used to coordinate our responses.

This resource has been produced with the Essex Occupational Therapy teams, sharing their specialist knowledge to support early years settings, schools, further education colleges and families.

## This resource underpins The Ordinarily Available.





# An introduction to the senses

There are eight senses, which are:



You can find out more about each sense by clicking on each segment title.

## What do our senses do?

- our senses are constantly collecting information from our environment which is sent to the brain to help us to understand what is going on around us
- our senses also provide information to our brain about ourselves, our physical state, our positioning and how we feel
- this information helps us to plan our interaction with our environment and participation in daily life
- our brains are constantly receiving information from our sensory receptors, and we cannot turn it off, but most of us can learn to filter it

## What is a receptor?

It is the part of the body that receives the sensory information from the environment and sends it through our nervous system through to the brain.



Video: [YouTube - Our senses](#)



## Chapter one: **Vision (visual) sense**

### **Where is the receptor?**

The eye.

### **What does it do?**

It gives information about; distance, edges, boundaries, colours and shapes.

### **How do we use it?**

We use the information to see what is in our environment and to plan our responses.

### **What could impact on how we interpret this information?**

Past experiences, memories, learning, emotional state and visual perceptual skills.



## Chapter two: **Hearing (auditory) sense**

Sound processing is the interpretation of the sound that we hear, rather than our hearing ability.

### **Where is the receptor?**

The ear.

### **What does it do?**

It gives information about; language, tone, pitch, rhythm, sequences, volume and location of sound.

### **How do we use it?**

We use the information to hear what is in our environment and to plan our responses.

### **What could impact on how we interpret this information?**

Past experiences, memories, learning, emotional state and sound processing skills.



**Video: [YouTube - How many questions can you answer?](#)**



**Visit the [National Autism Society website](#)**



## Chapter three: **Touch (tactile) sense**

### **Where is the receptor?**

The skin.

### **What does it do?**

It gives information about; types of touch (light, deep, hard, soft, sharp, dull, vibration and duration) temperature, pain and comfort.

### **How do we use it?**

By feeling we use the information to build up an understanding of the properties of objects and materials, and to discriminate between these (i.e., to tell the difference between a soft blanket and rough sandpaper).

### **What could impact on how we interpret this information?**

Past experiences, memories, learning, emotional state and sound processing skills.





## Chapters four and five: **Smell and taste (olfactory and gustatory) sense**

### **Where are the receptors?**

The nasal cavity and the 2,000 to 5,000 taste buds in the tongue.

### **What do they do?**

It gives information about taste and flavours (i.e. salty, sour, bitter, sweet), smells and fragrances.

### **How do we use them?**

To protect ourselves, we may smell something before putting it in our mouths or if something tastes bitter, we may spit it out, as we naturally associate a bitter taste as harmful.

### **What could impact on how we interpret this information?**

Past experiences, memories, learning, emotional state and taste and smell processing skills. The brain has an instant connection with the receptors of the nose, therefore processes smell more quickly, which is why we have strong memorable associations of smells.



## Chapter six: **Balance (and movement) sense**

### **Where is the receptor?**

In the inner ears.

### **What does it do?**

It gives information about linear (backwards and forwards) and rotational (circular) movement.

### **How do we use it?**

As it supports development of good muscle tone, it to keep us upright. It helps us balance and helps us to make sense of gravity when we are moving, no matter the direction or speed. It provides us with information about the movement and rotation of the head and works closely with our body position sense.

### **What could impact on how we interpret this information?**

Opportunities to experience movement against gravity (i.e., jump, run, spin, rock, hop, walk, sit, stand, crawl, kneel), memories, learning, emotional state and balance processing skills.



## Chapter seven: **Body position and movement (proprioception) sense**

### **Where is the receptor?**

In the joints, muscles, tendons and ligaments, including those in the jaw and mouth.

### **What does it do?**

It gives information about where the body is in space and how much force we are using through our muscles.

### **How do we use it?**

It is mainly unconscious but developed through experience of the body moving through space. It gives us an awareness of where our body parts are and the force we are using, even when we cannot see them (i.e., when driving we do not look at our hands on the gear stick or our feet on the pedals).

### **What could impact on how we interpret this information?**

Opportunities to experience movement (i.e., push, pull, stretch, pick, lift, press, squeeze, clap, kick, run, jump, stamp and slam), learning, emotional state and body position and movement processing skills.



## Chapter eight: **Internal awareness (interoception) sense**

The sensory system that gives us info regarding our body - emotions connections. Awareness of thirst, hunger, bladder, and bowel fullness, pain and discomfort, heart rate etc.

Interoception awareness includes:

- **Noticing** signals (stomach growling)
- **Connecting** signals to its meaning (I am hungry)
- **Reacting** to address the need (eating something)

### **Where is the receptor?**

The internal organs and connective tissue inside the body.

### **What does it do?**

It gives information about the state of the organs, the pressure, pain they may be experiencing and the body emotion connections (the feeling of an empty stomach that tells us that we are hungry).

### **How do we use it?**

Initially we notice the signals (stomach growling) then we connect the signals with its meaning (I am hungry), then we react to respond to the needs (eating food).

### **What could impact on how we interpret this information?**

Opportunities to recognise the link between the body signals.



**Video: Interoception:  
The new topic in autism**



**Visit the Kelly Mahler website**

# What is sensory modulation?



# What is sensory modulation?

Sensory processing is the ability to register, process and integrate sensory stimuli received from the environment and our bodies in order to organise and produce a meaningful behavioural response.

Our brain receives a continuous flow of information all the time, from our own bodies and the outside world and we know it is a lot of information that we receive second by second. So how do we know what pay attention to and what to ignore?

Filtering out information is called sensory modulation, and this is when the brain filters out sensations while at the same time attends to those that are relevant. Our ability to do this is critical for daily activities and doing the things we need or want to do.

When there are problems with sensory modulation an individual has difficulty responding and adapting to sensory input, we see behaviour that is out of context relative to the degree, nature, or intensity of the sensory intake. For example, the child who reacts like they have been punched when someone or something lightly brushes against them. The child who covers their ears and reacts as if in pain when fire alarms go off unexpectedly.

**But the difficulties experienced can be more subtle than this.** An individual with difficulty modulating sensory intake may have their attention continually diverted to ongoing changes in the environment. This can be a child (or adult) who sits staring into space or seems slow to start things. We become distracted and give our attention to all sensory input, this alters our arousal state to a point where it is no longer in a calm alert state – the optimal state for doing things.



Video: [YouTube - How our brains process sensory information](#)



Video: [YouTube - What you may see in everyday tasks](#)

# Scenario: Throwing and catching at the park – a typical sensory response



**Vision:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Internal awareness:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Taste:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Body position:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Balance:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Touch:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Smell:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Hearing:** [click here to learn more](#)



## When I am at the park...



### I can see:

Trees, other children, the person I am playing with, a ball, the grass, the sky, the clouds, and a gardener.

Once I engage in the activity, my sensory awareness can see the size of the ball and the distance between me and my friend, so I am filtering out the trees.



### I can hear:

The lawn mower, the wind in the trees, my friend calling my name, other children laughing and playing.

Once I engage in the activity, my sensory awareness, I can hear my name being called, by my friend, so I am filtering out the sound of the lawnmower.



### I can touch:

The grass under my bare feet.

Once I engage in the activity, my sensory awareness is alert to the feeling of my hands on the ball when it gets to me but I filter out the grass sensation under my feet.



### I can smell:

The flowers, the cut grass, and the barbeque at the park.

My sensory awareness is not affecting my participation in this activity, so I am filtering out the smell of the barbeque.



### I can taste:

The sweet I had on the way to the park.

My sensory awareness is not affecting my participation in this activity, so I am filtering out the taste of the sweet I had earlier.



### I can balance:

On uneven grass patches.

Once I engage in the activity, my sensory awareness is alert to the surface I am standing on and accommodate changes to allow me to catch the ball.



### In my body position:

I am standing upright with my arms at my sides.

Once I engage in the activity, I open my arms wide for the big ball coming my way and I step to the side when it drifts in the wind.



### My internal awareness is telling me:

I may need to go to the toilet soon.

My sensory awareness is not affecting my participation in this activity, so I am filtering out the sensation of a full bladder.



**As I continue to play, my sensory awareness may change as the sensory input changes, or the intensity of a sensation changes:**



### **Vision**

I can see a lot more smoke through the trees and I start to look in that direction.



### **Hearing**

I can hear raised voices of adults in the distance.



### **Smell**

I can smell something is burning.



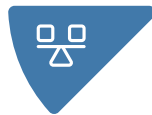
### **Touch**

I can feel the grass under my bare feet.



### **Taste**

I can taste a funny taste in my mouth.



### **Balance**

I am trying to balance for the uneven grass patches.



### **Body position**

I am standing upright with my arms at my sides or up to catch the ball.



### **Internal awareness**

I feel I need the toilet now.



### **The changing sensory environment now affects my participation in the throwing and catching game:**

- I want to know what the smell and smoke and raised voices is about – this is an appropriate safety response
- I want to investigate where the toilet is at the park so I can use it – this is an appropriate self-management response
- I am not looking at my friend and did not hear him call my name, so I missed the ball, and it is now rolling down the hill – this game is no longer the priority, so my sensory awareness is no longer exclusively aimed at supporting my participation

Changes in the internal or external sensory environment can affect our participation as it could distract us, or it becomes a greater priority, and we need to pay attention to it.

**Filtering of information is critical for daily activities and part of what most people do on a day-to-day basis to keep safe, learn, take care of themselves and enjoy participate in things that they want to do.**

# Throwing and catching in the park: sensory response difficulties



**Vision:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Internal awareness:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Taste:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Body position:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Balance:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Touch:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Smell:** [click here to learn more](#)



**Hearing:** [click here to learn more](#)



## Throwing and catching in the park: sensory response difficulties



### Vision

I am unable to filter out the unnecessary visual information so I get distracted each time another child runs past, a dog walks past or another ball rolls towards us.



### Hearing

I am unable to filter out the unnecessary sounds so distracted by the noises in the environment or agitated by the sound of the lawnmower coming closer. If I am unable to filter the noise out then I may become distressed by it and can no longer play the game.



### Touch

I am unable to filter out or adjust to the feel of the grass under my feet so I can't pay attention to my friend throwing the ball. The ball then falls to the floor and gets wet from the grass and I don't like touching it so I might become distressed and no longer able to play the game.



### Smell

I am unable to filter out the unnecessary smells such as the BBQ, flowers, cut grass and get distracted by or distressed by them.



### Taste

I am unable to filter out the unnecessary tastes, such as the sweet had on the way to the park so I might get distracted by it or may become distressed that it has gone and I want more.



### Balance

I can feel the uneven surface beneath my feet but I am unable to get used to it so I might stumble, miss-step and misjudge the ball and not be able to catch it. I might become frustrated with this and I might lose the motivation and confidence to play the game.



### Body position

I can't feel where my body is in space so I might struggle to get my body in the right position to be able to catch the ball. I might then miss the ball, become frustrated with this and I might lose the motivation and confidence to play the game.



### Internal awareness

I am so engrossed in playing the game that I don't pick up on my internal signals and don't realise I need the toilet until I am bursting and have real urgency to go.

# What happens when the internal and external inputs become too much to manage?



Video: [YouTube - Example of a sensory overload](#)

If you are unable to effectively modulate you are likely to become overloaded and dysregulated. This then presents as the fight-flight-freeze response. However, it is not just sensory overload that can lead to this response, other demands can also contribute to or cause a fight-flight-freeze response.



## Fight

When overloaded, the child may hit out, kick, shout, scream and respond physically and confrontationally to the situation.

## Flight

When overloaded, the child may run away and flee to get away from the situation.



## Freeze

When overloaded, the child may not be able to move or act in response to a situation, this can include being unable to speak or communicate.

**These demands include:**

## Sensory

The information on [page 18](#) breaks down how different sensory demands can impact on how a child responds to a situation.

## Social

Having to speak in front of the class, having to make chit-chat with unfamiliar people, being forced to greet someone or make eye contact.

## Task

Having to do something difficult or that I am not sure how to do, doing something unfamiliar or attempting something where I am not sure what the outcome will be, having to transition between activities

## Environmental

Having to be in busy spaces such as a classroom or playground, being in or around large groups of people, having to cope with change, having to deal with bright lights or loud noises or being asked to sit still, busy wall displays, having to work within a routine that doesn't suit the child.

## Past experiences

Remembering an unpleasant experience that happened last time in this setting or when interacting with this person.

The fight-flight-freeze response (survival mode) includes physiological reactions:

- increased heart rate
- feeling flushed
- sweating
- changes in breathing
- changes in vision

## Meltdowns and shut downs

When in survival mode behaviours may present as a meltdown or a shutdown. These are both extreme responses to an overwhelming situation when people feel out of control.

### Meltdowns

What you might see if someone is having a meltdown:

- shouting
- crying
- hitting out
- screaming
- biting
- running away
- self-injurious behaviour such as head banging and frantic rocking

### Shut downs

What you might see if someone is in shut down:

- person closing down
- withdrawing
- being unable to communicate in their usual way
- unable to follow instructions
- unable to ask for help. It is a neurological response to an overwhelming situation

### Shut downs often look different to meltdowns but are experienced by the person as extreme distress.

People do not have meltdowns on purpose or in response to not getting their own way. A shut down is not someone ignoring you or being rude. They are both a behavioural response to being overwhelmed.

### During a meltdown and shutdown, the person is unlikely to be able to:

- communicate or reason with you
- use their usual regulatory strategies
- think through the consequences of their reaction or behaviour
- make considered choices

### How you can help if someone is in a meltdown or shut down:

- make sure they are in a space they cannot hurt themselves
- give the person time and space they need to come out of the meltdown/ shut down
- reduce any sensory stimuli in the environment e.g. lower the lights, reduce noise
- avoid talking a lot-too many words may increase or maintain the extreme stress level
- keep calm – keep your movements slow, low and calm voice, use as few words as possible
- when the height of the meltdown/ shut down is over offer a safe snack and a drink, offer a distraction, engage them in communicating about something they like, offer a sensory support

## Coke bottle effect - the analogy

Think of a bottle of Coca-Cola.

Coca-Cola is a really fizzy liquid and when it is shaken, the pressure builds up inside the bottle. Once the pressure is built up, and the lid is then removed, the highly pressurised fizzy liquid explodes out of the top of the bottle.

We can use this analogy to help us understand how some children bottle things up during the day, but then have meltdowns when they return home. When a child is not able to be their authentic self this can lead to a build up of suppressed energy.

If a child spends the day suppressing stims, suppressing sensory needs, communicating in a way that is not natural for them, trying to learn but also trying to navigate a social world that is difficult to understand – this is like them being shook up all day with the lid on the bottle.

When they finally get home, they feel safe, and they are able to release the lid which leads to all the feelings about the challenges they have had all day erupting out and we see this as 'behaviour.'



## Regulation

Regulation is the term we use for having the level of energy required for participation in whatever activity it is we want or need to do.

Being regulated on sports day means having the energy to participate in the races and cheer on your team mates, whereas well regulated during a maths lesson means being able to focus on the learning and recording your work.

Some people are able to regulate themselves; this is **Self-regulation** and means the person is able to adjust their energy, emotions, behaviours and attention to be able to engage with and manage the demands of different activities and environments.

Not all people are able self-regulate right away and require more support. **Co-regulation** is where the people require support and demonstration from those around them in order to learn what they need to self regulate. They may need help and support several times to develop strategies and be able to use these independently.

**Dysregulation** is a disruption of self-regulation which occurs when a child's stress levels are so high that various systems for thinking and recovery are compromised. The signs of dysregulation can show up in a child's behaviour, mood, attention or physical well-being.



## Staying in the middle lane

Most people can regulate themselves by doing something that increases or decreases their energy so that they can stay balanced, or in the middle lane. The middle lane is our well regulated state where our energy matches the activity we are participating in.



Most people can regulate by doing something that increases or decreases their energy so that they can stay in the middle lane. The middle lane is our well regulated state where our energy matches the activity we are participating in.

**This does not mean calm and still! The middle lane for sports day will look different to the middle lane for a maths lesson.**

When we go 'too high' we may need to do something to decrease our energy to return to the middle lane – during sports day we may get over excited and need to take a drink from our sports bottle or a few deep breaths to get back to being able to run our race or cheer for our team mates.

When we go 'too low' we may need to do something to increase our energy to return to the middle lane – during maths this might be taking a movement break with some jumping/ running or changing position to standing up to maintain focus.





## Supporting children to stay in the middle lane

The strategies a child needs to stay in the middle lane may look different, even if they are engaged in the same activity.

Lets think about what we might see in the classroom:

**Jay** is a high energy person who loves running around, jumping, climbing and is very active. During break times at school, Jay can participate in their preferred high energy activities however in the classroom this high level of energy may effect their ability to focus and concentrate. Adults can support Jay to stay in the middle lane by helping them transition to a calmer state by using heavy work strategies and allowing fidget toys, a wobble cushion and regular movement breaks using calming activities to help maintain a focussed energy state for learning. If we asked Jay to sit still in class, they may bottle all of their energy up and it can overflow at home OR they might put all their focus into sitting still which means that they are unable to pay attention to the learning.



**Quinn** is a low energy person who prefers calm activities, often leans on the desk or appears slouchy and day dreams a lot. During break times, Quinn can choose low energy activities however in the classroom the low energy may effect their ability to focus and concentrate. Adults can support Quinn to stay in the middle lane by engaging in higher energy activities such as jumping and running as they transition from playground to classroom, use colour and sound in learning materials to support maintenance of attention as well as movement breaks to using alerting activities to keep a focussed state for learning.

**In these activities we can see that Jay's middle lane for learning is different to Quinn's – Jay needs calming sensory input and access to some movement to focus whereas Quinn needs alerting sensory input and prompts from an adult to maintain focussed on the lesson.**

## Developing self-regulation through co-regulation

Some children require more support from adults around them to develop self-regulation skills.

Co-regulation is where adults support children by showing and demonstrating different ideas and strategies that they can use to help remain in the middle lane. We do this by noticing their cues and responding by offering strategies before they become dysregulated and enter a fight-flight-freeze state.

Example – in a noisy class, a child is becoming agitated, the teacher offers ear defenders to the child by showing them and giving a prompt to put them on and sharing the benefits of wearing them. This is different to the ear defenders just being on the table or in their tray as implementing using them requires the child to be able to recognise that they need them and initiate using them, which they might not be able to do if their stress response is triggered.

We need to model through co-regulation to the children we are supporting over and over again, go at their pace not ours and allow them time and opportunity to develop self-regulation skills. There are many strategies that can be used to support co-regulation and self-regulation to enable the child to be balanced and stay in the middle lane.





# Looking for clues

Reaction to sensory experiences, behaviour, environment, diaries, arousal levels, task or activity and strategy.



You can find out more about each sense by clicking on each segment title.



## A quick guide to calming and alerting sensory input

	Vision	Hearing	Touch	Smell	Taste	Balance and movement	Internal awareness
<b>Calming sensory input</b>	Soft and constant lighting; pastel colours; toys with minimal lights; reduced clutter; warm glow lights; lava lamps	Quiet and calm voices; consistent rhythms and noise levels; white noise	Deep, firm pressure; hugs; warm bath and wrapping in a big towel or wrapping a blanket firmly round them; fidget toys; soft tactile object	Sweet smells, such as vanilla, cinnamon or lavender	Sweet flavours such as vanilla, milk chocolate	Slow rhythmic movement e.g., rocking in a chair; rhythmical bouncing on a trampoline or therapy ball; slow swinging backwards and forwards; sucking through a straw, eating chewy or crunchy snacks	Warmth, such as heat pad or hot water bottle; ensuring eating regular filling meals to keep satisfied, warm drinks such as milk, malt drink or hot chocolate
<b>Alerting sensory input</b>	Bright lights; toys with flashing lights; bright colours; screens (e.g. tablets, games console)	Loud music with a fast beat; unexpected noise; screaming and high pitched sounds	Vibration; messy play e.g., cold, and gloopy; misting cold water from a spray; cold air; tickling and light touch	Strong or pungent smells such as citrus, mint, perfumes, aftershave, air fresheners	Sour, salty, spicy, or bitter tastes	Fast and unpredictable movement; bouncing on a ball or trampoline; swinging fast; spinning; roundabout	Drinking very cold drinks, crunching/ suck ice, very hot or very cold foods



## Vision (visual) sense

### Low tolerance - hypersensitive - avoidant

#### Clues that the child may have a 'small cup' for vision

- avoids lights (sunlight/ bright lights/ flashing lights/ fluorescent lights)
- wants curtains drawn
- do not want to go outside when sun is out/ hoody over head when outside
- busy settings like supermarkets, shopping centres, classroom walls
- busy pages and patterns

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Pre-warn the child ahead of changes in lighting or when going to busy environment i.e., going outside in the sunshine or going to the supermarket.

##### Preparation

Engaging in organising and calming movement-based activities (stretching or push-pull activities like wall or chair push-ups) ahead of going into visually busy settings.

##### Environment

Access busy environments in quieter times e.g., early supermarket visit or going to the lunch hall first.

##### Sensory supports

- sunglasses/ hats/ umbrella
- desk screen to minimise visual stimuli from around the classroom

##### Adult approach

- consider the amount of visual information on the white board/ paper
- consider the wall displays
- position the child in consistent light setting in class, facing minimal visual stimuli
- can bright white lights be replaced with warm glow lights
- when accessing busy settings can we gradually build up the time spent in these e.g., when visiting the shops, initially start with a small shop and a short visit and build on this within the child's tolerance



## Vision (visual) sense

### High tolerance - hyposensitive - seeking

#### Clues that the child may have a 'big cup' for vision

- seek out lights (sunlight/ bright lights/ flashing lights)
- preference for visual information
- enjoys bright patterns and and busy backgrounds
- enjoys exploring coloured lights and light effects
- flicks fingers/ toys nears eyes

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Let them know when opportunities for visual exploration present themselves or is not appropriate to support them with managing social expectations e.g., when light up toys can be used and when they need to be packed away.

##### Preparation

Engaging in organising and calming movement-based activities (stretching or push-pull activities like wall or chair push-ups).

##### Environment

Ensure the environment has sufficient light.

##### Adult approach

If the child seeks more light, respect their preference and accommodate this where possible.

##### Sensory supports

- table lamp if the environmental lighting is insufficient
- resources are visually interesting (use colours, highlighters, and pictures)
- resources such as light up toys or lights available for use during sensory breaks



## Hearing (auditory) sense

### Low tolerance - hypersensitive - avoidant

#### Clues that the child may have a 'small cup' for sound

- loud or unexpected noises (e.g., hair dryer, hand dryers, vacuum cleaner, fire alarm, sirens, motorbikes, dog barking, babies crying, raised voices)
- noisy places
- white noises
- people eating or breathing loudly
- can be noisy to block out other noise (humming or singing)

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Adult letting child know when trigger sounds are expected, such as a fire drill, Hoover or dog barking.

##### Preparation

Engaging in calming movement-based activities ahead of expecting a trigger sound, such as stretching or push-pull activities for example, wall or chair push-ups.

##### Environment

- consider potential trigger noises in the environment and where the child is in relation to the noise
- gradual approach to time spent in the setting for example initially being in the classroom at quiet times for short periods

##### Adult approach

- offering options so the child feels safe to want to participate, for example, "we have to dry your hair so your head doesn't get cold, would you like to use a hair dryer or a towel"
- be mindful that some triggers may make the environment unpleasant rather than fun and that you may need to leave early for example the cinema

##### Sensory supports

- using own music/headphones to block out trigger noises
- ear defenders/ Flares/ Loops to muffle trigger noises/ sound





## Hearing (auditory) sense

### High tolerance - hyposensitive - seeking

#### Clues that the child may have a 'big cup' for sound

- turning the volume up
- not noticing sounds
- not noticing being spoken to
- not responding to name being called
- making and enjoying own noises
- needing time and repetition to process sounds/ instructions

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

- of the need to listen out for a sound/ instruction
- of quiet times coming up

##### Preparation

Engaging in alerting movement-based activities (star jumps; wall and chair press ups; the daily mile) ahead of times when needing to listen or concentrate.

##### Environment

Additional visual supports to reinforce verbal instructions.

##### Adult approach

- touch prompt alongside calling name or giving instructions
- additional alerting sounds to draw attention for example the call and repeat clap in class
- ensure there are regular times throughout the day for noisy play

##### Sensory supports

- listening to own music with headphones when expected to be quiet
- musical instruments as a leisure activity



## Touch (tactile) sense

### Low tolerance - hypersensitive - avoidant

#### Clues that the child may have a 'small cup' for touch

- certain fabrics/ clothing/ labels/ seams
- being touched (especially lightly)
- crowded places
- standing in line
- hair brushing/ washing/ cutting
- nail clipping
- messy/ water play

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Pre-warn the child ahead of touch experiences e.g., let them know when to expect the brush touching their head before it reaches their hair.

##### Preparation

Engaging in organising and calming movement-based activities (stretching or push-pull activities like wall or chair push-ups) ahead of times likely to include lots of touch experiences e.g., getting dressed or having a bath.

##### Environment

Reduce other sensory demands during activities when the child is having to already tolerate lots of touch experiences e.g., a quiet corner to change for PE rather than in the middle of a busy classroom.



## Touch (tactile) sense

### Adult approach

- understanding that light and wet touch are more alerting or challenging than deep and dry touch experiences, e.g., drying the dishes may be easier to tolerate than washing up
- be mindful of the child's personal space particularly when supporting their participation in challenging activities e.g., using strategies such as visuals/ modelling or small step breakdown during painting activities rather than hand over hand support
- being flexible with expectations of school uniform to accommodate sensory preferences e.g., wearing a black sweatshirt in place of a black woollen jumper

- offering choice to support the child's engagement with the task
- when having to tolerate unavoidable sensory experiences like clipping nails, use distraction (e.g., watching favourite television programme) to distract from the touch demands of this activity

### Sensory supports

Adapting clothing e.g., cutting out labels or wearing preferred fabrics



## Touch (tactile) sense

### High tolerance - hyposensitive - seeking

#### Clues that the child may have a 'big cup' for touch

- seeking physical affection or closeness
- touching surfaces/fabrics
- getting great joy from messy play
- not recognising when their face is covered in food
- wanting their blankets and cuddly toys
- not recognising pain when they have injured themselves

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Let them know when opportunities for touch exploration present themselves or is not appropriate to support them with managing social expectations e.g., when/ who is it ok to touch or request touch from.

##### Preparation

Engaging in organising and calming movement-based activities (stretching or push-pull activities like wall or chair push-ups) ahead of times likely to be presented with lots of touch experiences.

##### Environment

When the child is required to focus, offer touch feedback through external supports e.g., something to lean against such as a cupboard or wall during carpet time or immediate access to fidget toys during the times that the teacher is delivering the lesson.

##### Adult approach

- ensuring that the child's touch support e.g., favourite blanket is transported with them as they travel between environments
- accommodating the child's touch needs within the learning environment



## Touch (tactile) sense

### Sensory supports

- fidget box
- preferred blanket/ soft toy
- opportunities for equipment that provides tactile exploration or deep pressure like weighted blankets or body socks (please check safety regulations related to using weighted items)
- supportive seating that offers more contact with the body



## Smell and taste (olfactory and gustatory) sense

### Low tolerance - hypersensitive - avoidant

#### Clues that the child may have a 'small cup' for taste and smell

- unfamiliar food/ tastes/ smells
- eating with others
- foods being mixed/ touching on plate
- gagging/ vomiting at smell/ taste
- taste of toothpaste

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Consider the smells in the environment, e.g., restaurant, lunch hall.

##### Preparation

Engaging in calming movement-based activities (stretching or push-pull activities like wall or chair push-ups) ahead of entering a strong an environment with trigger smells or seeing trigger food.

##### Environment

Consider trigger smells or seeing trigger food and the child's position in relation to it e.g., sitting next to someone eating something that I cannot tolerate the smell or taste off may be harder to tolerate than if they are sitting at a different table on the other side of the room.



## Smell and taste (olfactory and gustatory) sense

### Adult approach

- offer opportunities to try food without expectations. Minimise the pressure by having a separate plate for trying new food and allowing food rejection
- preparing food together so the child knows what is in it and can handle and see the food even if not yet ready to taste it
- offering choice so the child can be involved in food decisions
- avoid dishing up large quantities
- eating together from shared dishing up bowls so the adult can model good eating habits and the child can help themselves together more
- recognise that some children can taste the difference between brands and may have a preference with this

### Sensory supports

- messy play with food (use with motivating toys i.e., digger/ characters) – starting with dry food/ materials (dry lentils/ flour/ dry oats/ cereals) and working towards more sticky/ wet materials (cooked pasta/ cookie dough/ cereals with milk)
- try different flavoured /flavourless/ non-foaming toothpastes
- accommodating brand specific food preferences to ensure the child eats



## Smell and taste (olfactory and gustatory) sense

### High tolerance - hyposensitive - seeking

#### Clues that the child may have a 'big cup' for taste and smell

- variety of/ strong tastes
- sniffing/ smelling everything
- adventurous with food

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Let them know when opportunities for taste and smell exploration present themselves or is not appropriate to support them with managing social expectations e.g., when going to a party there may not be enough to try one of everything.

##### Preparation

Engaging in organising and calming movement-based activities (stretching or push-pull activities like wall or chair push-ups) ahead of times likely to be presented with lots of taste and smell opportunities e.g., at a party or in the lunch hall.

##### Environment

Offering a variety of food with strong flavours and smells at mealtimes.

##### Adult approach

Ensuring the child has a lot of variety of flavours and smell throughout their day to minimise the risk of unsafe or inappropriate behaviours to seek out these sensory experiences.

##### Sensory supports

- adding flavour to food (citrus/ herbs/ spices)
- sensory box with different scents
- scented pencils/ pens/ paper





## Movement sense

### Low tolerance - hypersensitive - avoidant

#### Clues that the child may have a 'small cup' for movement

- avoid big movements
- avoids playground equipment such as climbing frames/ slide/ bike/ scooter
- nervous of challenging activities
- nervous of activities where feet leave the floor or when going backwards
- easily gets travel sick in car/ plane
- hesitant going up/ down staircases/ travellers/ escalators/ lifts

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Pre-warn the child ahead of novel/ challenging movement activities coming up i.e., PE, transition between lessons, going to the park, long drive.

##### Preparation

Engaging in organising and calming movement-based activities (stretching or push-pull activities like wall or chair push-ups) ahead of participation in movement.

##### Environment

- reduce other sensory demands during activities when the child is having to already tolerate lots of movement, i.e., consider transitioning when corridors are not busy; access the park during quieter times
- gradually build up the demands of the task at the child's pace, initially start on smaller/ lower equipment before gradually increasing movement demands



## Movement sense

### Adult approach

- consider all of the sensory, social, and emotional demands of the activity (alongside the movement demands) and minimise these where possible i.e., practising PE activities in small groups ahead of the lesson with children with similar abilities
- consider the child's strengths and what they may be more likely to succeed at when choosing between activities (if we know they will not be able to join in all the activities, choose the ones we know they will be successful in)
- offering the child, a choice between activities will encourage their participation and give them a sense of autonomy e.g., choice between the slide or the swings/ choosing to between participating in the running race or the throwing competition on sports day
- sometimes reasonable adjustments can be embarrassing for the child – be mindful of the impact adjustments can have on the child's emotional wellbeing

- offer plenty of opportunities without pressure to participate in the more challenging activities, e.g., when going to the park the child may initially choose to just access the activity, they feel confident in, gently encourage the child to explore other equipment, but do not demand participation
- breaking tasks down into smaller steps that can be practised e.g., getting on and off the first rung of the climbing frame until we feel comfortable to take the next step up
- give a positive response immediately after achieving a small step – your reaction needs to fit the child's specific needs e.g., clapping and cheering may be needed for one child whilst another may just need a word of praise

### Sensory supports

Reduce other sensory demands during activities when the child is having to tolerate lots of movement, e.g., when driving long distances, avoid trigger tastes and smells in the snacks.



## Movement sense

### High tolerance - hyposensitive - seeking

#### Clues that the child may have a 'large cup' for movement

- seeks movement
- always on the go
- cannot keep still
- chewing on clothing, pencils, fingers/ nails
- playground equipment (always wanting more swings/ slides/ climbing frames/ trees)
- sometimes the desire to move means they take safety risks.
- rocking on the chair

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Warn the child when there is going to be an expectation to stay seated/ at the table/ in one spot/ or focus on a task.

##### Preparation

Movement break - Engaging in big and extended organising and calming movement-based activities (lycra sock; resistance bands) ahead of times when expected to sit in a static position for longer i.e., before carpet time or assembly or long car journey or mealtimes.

##### Environment

- is sitting down at the table the only option - can children stand/ lay on the floor
- avoid obstacles on the floor or a very crowded space as children may need the space in which to move in between activities
- clear wall space areas so wall push-ups can be done



## Movement sense

### Adult approach

- consider the sensory demands in the setting – if there is a lot of sensory demands the child is likely to seek more movement to support their regulation
- consider the duration of the task – can the task be split to allow movement break in between
- structure movement breaks in between activities for the whole class – avoid moving from one task to another without an opportunity to move
- do not remove natural movement breaks in the day (such as break time) as punishment – this will just impact on the child’s regulation and likely lead to behaviours that needs further discipline
- accommodating the child’s movement needs within the learning environment – can they stand up/ can they move around or complete their work in various positions

### Sensory supports

- when the child is required to focus, equipment such as a wedge-shaped air cushion (for chair sitting) or a round shapes air cushion (for flat surface sitting) can give movement whilst remaining in the seat
- TheraBand around the legs of the chair to bounce feet around or flick with hands
- weighted equipment (weighted rucksack, weighted lap pad) may support through deep pressure to decrease the need for movement to regulate
- movement breaks – lots of opportunities on equipment/ to run/ to engage in a big moment using muscles
- sensory circuits/ gym trail
- obstacle courses
- Chewllery
- drinking thick liquids through a straw
- crunchy/ chewy foods/ snacks



[Video: Back to school – Supporting a student who loves to move](#)



[Visit the Sensory Spectacle website](#)



## Internal awareness

### Low tolerance - hypersensitive - avoidant

#### Clues that the child may have a 'small cup' for internal awareness

Decreased awareness of or increased preoccupation with:

- bladder full
- bowels full
- hungry
- thirsty
- heart racing
- tummy ache
- changes in breathing
- body Temperature
- may feel internal sensations earlier than others - go to the loo more often, feeling hungry soon after meals
- preoccupied with internal sensations - difficulty focusing on tasks as too aware of internal sensations
- may have exaggerated responses to internal feelings

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Offering support through ensuring the child feels confident about being able to meet their internal needs even when going to an unfamiliar place e.g., if the child is preoccupied with needing the toilet, prepare them for going into a new setting by telling them where the toilets are.

##### Preparation

Ensuring access to things that would meet the child's needs, if they get hungry quickly, ensuring that their food needs can be met by taking along snacks.



## Internal awareness

### Environment

- making sure toilets is easily accessible for a child who is intensely aware of their toileting needs
- consider the child's environmental preference for temperature and accommodate where possible

### Adult approach

- making reasonable adjustments to accommodate internal sensory awareness e.g., allowing a toilet break at the time of request rather than making them wait
- allowing for personal differences in internal awareness and sensitivity with this
- supporting the child to alleviate the discomfort e.g., having a snack outside of breaktimes
- routines/ timers/ alarms

### Sensory supports

- offering sensory breaks throughout the day where preferred sensory experiences can be explored
- breathing/ mindfulness/ relaxation
- desk screen to minimise visual stimuli from around the classroom



## Internal awareness

### High tolerance - hyposensitive - seeking

#### Clues that the child may have a 'big cup' for internal awareness

- unaware of internal sensations leading to physical needs being unmet e.g., the child does not realise when they are hungry and so does not eat enough throughout the day
- unaware of internal sensations leading to late development of independence with toileting

#### Strategies

##### Pre-warning

Including toileting and mealtime activities in the daily schedule.

##### Preparation

- recognising that toileting accidents may happen and having the materials at hand to address this in a dignified manner
- orientating the child to the sensory supports that is being used

##### Environment

- consider the health implications of the environment on the child who does not recognise body temperature e.g., they may not recognise or be willing to take off excess clothing, so can the temperature of the room be appropriately adjust
- using reminders in the environment to support healthy behaviours such as regular mealtimes and toilet breaks



## Internal awareness

### Adult approach

- modelling from adults – talking about how it feels when your bladder is full and showing what you do to manage this
- linking language with the experience:
  - helping your child to describe what they are feeling to support body awareness
  - helping your child link that feeling with the emotion i.e., feeling your heart racing because you are excited
  - helping your child identify things that would help them through co- regulation
- support the child to take the necessary action to alleviate their discomfort i.e., if they are dancing on the spot, support them to go to the toilet
- routines/ timers/ alarms – to make the timing for routine activities like mealtimes clear throughout the day

- using visuals (videos/ social narrative/ pictures) to support the child's understanding of what is going on internally and what actions they can take to manage this e.g., a story about using the toilet
- recognising that developing these skills may take time and a calm, no pressure approach will support children's learning

### Sensory supports

- breathing/ mindfulness/ relaxation
- watches that vibrate at certain times in the day
- timers that alert to routine tasks
- visual schedules and scheduling apps



# Helpful strategies

to support children with  
sensory processing  
differences



# Helpful strategies to support children with sensory processing differences

The classroom is a multi-sensory environment – it can be challenging at times for those without sensory processing differences!

There are practical strategies that you can put in place in the classroom to support individuals with and without sensory processing differences.

Sensory supports work best when they are implemented everyday as part of a child's daily routine. There are many simple strategies that when implemented regularly will make a difference to the child's ability to participate in classroom activities.



## Planning sensory strategies

### Think proactively!

Thinking ahead of the time you might need a resource, or a strategy will mean you have it to hand when the child needs it. This could be having your box of fidget toys available on your desk to hand out, making sure a child's wobble cushion is on their chair at the start of class or ensuring there are options for flexible seating in your classroom.

### Observe the children you work with

Children with sensory differences are all unique and are likely to respond to sensory input in different ways. You can observe the children and notice their cues, take note of early warning signs, note how their behaviour might change and what their response is to different inputs. Once you know this about a child, you can then put something in place to support them before they become dysregulated, withdrawn or meltdown. Through your observations you can then create a set of strategies that you have put together based on your observations of their actions. If the child is able, you can do this jointly with the child – they may be able to tell you what helps to calm them down or increase their alertness.

### Think about the demand of the activity

Think about the energy state the child needs to be in – is it an activity that needs to be focussed i.e., work, high energy e.g., PE or lower energy e.g., quiet time.

### Adapt activities dependent on a child's sensory needs

For example, if the child does not like the feel of PVA glue on their, use glue stick, glue dots or tape so they can still join in.

### Strategies are not useful at the point of 'meltdown' or 'shutdown'

The child will not be in a position to engage with them however may be useful afterwards to help regulate – deep pressure, stretching, deep breathing, calming music, fiddle toys.

## Observing possible sensory processing difficulties

Observing the young person you are working with will really help you to be able to identify what is happening for them.

It will be able to help you see any patterns that might be forming e.g. The difficulty always presents at a certain time, or the child is reluctant to join in certain activities. On the following page there is an observation chart that you can use to document your observations.

Using what you have learnt from the previous pages about processing sensory information, write down what you see happening, what impact is it having on them joining in an activity, what strategies you might try to support them. Here is an example of how you may fill the chart in.

Sense	What do you see/observe?	What daily activities are affected?	Do they need a calming, alerting and/or adaptive strategy?
Vision	In the science room Ash is squinting and covering their eyes. During science lessons they are often withdrawn and do not get their work completed.	Participating in the science lesson. Getting all of the work done. Learning affected and not able to take in the information being taught.	<b>Calming</b> – lower the lights or turn some of the lights off. <b>Adaptive</b> – breaks from the classroom. <b>Adaptive</b> – written copies of work so they do not have to keep looking across the classroom.

There are more ideas for sensory strategies on the following pages. It is always a good idea to include the young person by asking them what adaptations they want or need to try to ensure that strategies meet their needs.

Use the grid on the following page or make your own to note down your observations. Using the information that you have learnt from this guide, have a think about what you are seeing and what may be happening for your child. Note down things

you try with children you are working with, you may need to try things more than once - expect trial and error and be confident that anything you do, is a great start in helping them.

**Remember to consider whether something needs to change – if it is not impacting on a child’s ability to participate then question whether a change needs to be made? Does it help with the child’s regulation? Can/should it be adapted rather than stopped?**

Sense	What do you see/observe?	What daily activities are affected?	Do they need a calming, alerting and/or adaptive strategy?
Vision			
Hearing			
Smell			
Taste			
Touch			
Movement			
Balance			

## Getting started with sensory strategies

On the following pages there are some ideas that you can use to get started with when offering support to children who have sensory processing differences.

These will give you ideas of how to begin however once you have worked with a child and made your observations you will be able to introduce things that are specific to each individual child. A small change can make a huge difference to an individual with sensory processing differences.

On the following pages you will find ideas for:



**movement breaks**



**flexible seating**



**heavy work**



**using fidget toys**



**gym trail and sensory circuits**



**snack and lunch time**



**making adjustments to school uniform**



**entering the classroom**



**quiet time**



**time out passes**



## Movement breaks

Movement breaks are often advised as a sensory tool to support a child's alertness and should be used to ensure a child is in the right energy state for their learning activity.

Movement breaks are an opportunity for a child to take time away from sitting at a desk or within a seated learning situation (e.g., carpet time) and to have some movement to support their regulation.

Movement breaks should be scheduled throughout the day in a way that best supports that child. For example, some children may need movement breaks regularly throughout the day, whereas others may need more movement breaks in the afternoon to support their focus and regulation.

### What does a movement break look like?

A movement break should consist of alerting movement followed by calming movement. This allows a burst of energy followed by something that will allow them transition back into focussed work

#### Alerting movement

- quick movements e.g., sprint
- jumping
- spinning
- running
- stamping
- climbing
- sliding
- dancing

#### Calming movement

- gentle rocking or swaying
- stretching
- yoga
- Pilates
- walking
- bear hugs/squishes
- stretching against a lycra band or lycra sock



## Heavy work

Heavy work describes any activity that pushes, pulls, or provides a force against our muscles which provides deep pressure and resistance against our muscles and joints.

Heavy work helps a child's brain and body feel organised and can help them stay in or get back to the middle lane. Activities can include pushing, pulling, lifting, or carrying heavy objects.

Heavy work can be incorporated as part of a movement break for child as part of their daily routine. As with movement breaks, heavy work needs to be scheduled throughout the day to support the child's regulation. This can be through classroom jobs, daily activities or specific tasks using different toys or equipment.

### Classroom jobs

- collecting or handing the books/ whiteboards out to the class
- collecting the PE equipment in e.g., mats, balls, cones
- hole punching or stapling papers together
- cleaning the board with a board rubber
- taking a book or pile of papers to the office
- move chairs or other classroom equipment from one place to another
- having TheraBand on the chair legs to push legs against

### Daily activities

- carrying a heavy backpack
- pushing a wheelbarrow or heavy trolley
- digging in the garden – garden activities in general tend to require a lot of heavy work
- carrying a heavy laundry basket
- wiping the tables
- drinking through a straw – the more effort needed to suck the better
- eating crunchy and chewy snacks or ice e.g., pretzels, baguettes, carrot sticks, ice poles, gummy sweets





## Heavy work

### Specific tasks & equipment

- wall push ups
- pulling a TheraBand between your arms
- stretching or push ups - with or without lycra band or body sock
- hamburger game - squish the child with a cushion like the filling of a hamburger (avoiding the head)
- using a Scooterboard to pull themselves along the floor
- yoga, Pilates or Stretching
- throwing heavy balls into the floor e.g., medicine ball
- crashing or jumping into a crashmat on the floor
- having TheraBand on the chair legs to push legs against

### Play

- Playdoh with rollers, cutters, and tools
- chunky chalk on outdoor floors e.g., pavement, playground, walls
- games such as Twister or 'The Floor is Lava'
- playground apparatus - e.g., swings, slides, climbing frame
- 'Assault Course' - place cushions, blankets on the floor for the child to step on, climb over, crawl under
- parachute games lifting the sides of the parachute up and down
- messy play - using tools such as a pegs, tweezers, bands, stamps in tuff trays with different materials in

# Gym Trails and Sensory Circuits

All of our senses can be supported through a sensory circuit/gym trail!





## Gym Trails and Sensory Circuits

Gym trails and sensory circuits are similar in their design but aim to support children with different skills.

Gym Trails aim to provide children with opportunity to develop gross and fine motor skills whereas Sensory Circuits aim to offer children the opportunity to have alerting and calming sensory inputs. Gym Trails and Sensory Circuits can be a great way for children to try different activities and for you to observe how they respond to them. You can then add the activities that work for them to their individual list of sensory supports.

### **Gym Trails and Sensory Circuits should consist of:**

- a warm-up activity – alerting movement and stretching to wake up the body and brain
- four to six activities at different stations working on a different skill or experiencing different sensory input
- a cool down – calming activity with an element of heavy work e.g., stretching
- you can combine elements of a gym trail and a sensory circuit to create a session that provides a child with lots of sensory and motor experiences. You can use the ideas in the table to develop a sensory circuit/ gym trail – you will see that many of the activities cross over to give the child lots of opportunity for sensory motor experiences.



## Gym Trails and Sensory Circuits

### Gym trail activities

- **gross motor** – climbing over, play games in kneeling, crawling under or over things, kicking a ball/ balloon, jumping games, musical statues, dancing
- **balance** – balance board, walking along a low beam/ bench, tip toe walking along a line on the floor, hopping, balloon keepy uppy whilst standing on one leg
- **bilateral integration** – two handed activities e.g., squeezing bottle with two hands, wringing wet towels, carrying items on a tray, marching with arm movement, placing items on each side of the child, and encouraging them to reach across the middle of their body
- **hand eye coordination** – throwing and catching, bouncing ball, bat, and ball, pouring liquids e.g., juice from a jug
- **daily living skills** – practice cutlery skills using playdough/ putty, button practice, shoelace practice, practice taking socks on and off, jumper on and off
- **fine motor** – pegs, paper crafts, using tweezers to pick up small items, ‘Operation’ the game, painting or colouring in, threading

### Sensory circuits

- **movement** – running, jumping, climbing, rolling over peanut ball, bouncing on a trampette, hopping, rocking, swinging, climbing, pushing, pulling, heavy work
- **touch** – messy play – using dry materials such as rice, pasta, cereals, oats as well as different textures such as slime, fluffy, sandy, etc., Felly boxes to guess what is inside, fidget toys, hand massage, nail care (on self)
- **visual** – games and toys with bright lights, disco ball/ disco lamp, watching lava lamps or bubble tubes, making things pour or sprinkle from height, making things blow or move using a fan e.g., ribbons
- **smell and taste** – have a variety of different tastes and smells – sweet, salty, sharp, bitter to try. Jellybean game for different tastes
- **hearing** – trial ear defenders, listen to different types of music through headphones, listen to different animal sounds
- **internal awareness** – mindfulness games, tense and release relaxation, Mindful chocolate eating game, naming bodily feelings and sensations



## Making adjustments to school uniform

We all have sensory preferences and dislikes that we accommodate for throughout our lifetimes. As adults we can freely choose what to wear on a daily basis according to our preferences. For example, some adults will always choose to wear a short-sleeved top over long sleeves, some adults avoid wearing jeans or shirts because they feel too stiff or restrictive. For children, having advocacy for their likes and dislikes around clothing can be difficult as adults often choose and buy their clothing and they attend schools, which often have a uniform policy. For some children, their sensitivity to certain types of materials or clothing can be uncomfortable, to the point of being painful in extreme cases. When a child, like any of us, is distracted by their clothing or is uncomfortable, it is difficult for them to focus on their work and their overall experience of education. Minor uniform adjustments often involve little or no cost with little or no disruption to school life and are an easy way to support a child's sensory needs within the education setting.

### **The most common uniform adjustments we see that can be helpful to pupils are:**

- wearing a different type of trouser/skirt/shirt/dress, made of a different material or with a different fit/shape, than that outlined by the school e.g., a plain black pair of jogging bottoms rather than school trousers
- not wearing garments with school embroidery
- being able to freely remove a blazer or wear an alternative
- wearing a white polo shirt, instead of a shirt with a collar
- wearing alternative footwear for example, black boots to give more support to ankle joints, shoes that allow for orthotic insoles, lace alternatives.
- wearing an elasticated or clip-on school tie
- Velcro adapted clothing
- changes to the physical education (PE) uniform



## Making adjustments to school uniform

### Things to try to make uniform more manageable:

- consider the way you launder the items, tumble drying often leaves garments feeling softer, as does ironing, using the family's laundry products can make a garment smell familiar and comforting.
- second-hand uniform can feel more comfortable and less 'new'
- introducing new uniform early and giving your child time to become familiar with it
- Velcro instead of buttons
- seamless clothing
- buying a larger size so it feels looser
- wearing a second skin underneath to reduce contact with disliked materials
- removing labels
- covering embroidery on the inside of jumpers/polo shirts.
- knee high socks instead of tights
- proprioceptive strategies/ calming work before attempting to get dressed.
- breaking dressing tasks down into sections including breaks



## Quiet time

Some children benefit from having the opportunity during the day to have a quiet space with some downtime to support their regulation. Having quiet time in a quiet space can provide calming input which allows them to regulate and re-set.

**Environment** – having a separate quiet corner or quiet zone in the classroom can be a safe space that children know that they can access if they need a break. Children who have neurodevelopmental conditions can find it helpful to have regular breaks throughout the day to help them reset and continue to be able to carry on with the demands of the day. This area should be sectioned off from or obviously separate from the classroom. It can be helpful to have another option in a library or quiet room away from the classroom for those children who become easily overwhelmed – this space should allow them opportunity to regulate before coming back into the classroom.



## Quiet time

### Resources – ideas for your quiet corner are as follows:

- floor cushions/ beanbags
- comfortable chair/ sofa
- fleecy blankets
- weighted cushions (never more than 10% of child's body weight)
- wobble cushions
- fidgets – tangles, poppits, spinners
- tactile comforts – smooth items, spikey items, soft items,
- books
- puzzles
- bubbles
- colouring pencils and pictures
- warm glow lights
- bubble/ fibreoptic lights
- ear defenders
- stretching – stretching engages our muscles and engages our sense of proprioception that has a calming effect on our brains
- breathing exercises
- having windmills, flags, or bubbles to blow to make breathing purposeful.
- pizza breathing; breathe to smell the pizza and out to cool down the pizza.
- mindfulness - try printing simple line drawings that children can follow with their finger to help them focus and calm their thoughts by bringing their attention to a simple repetitive activity – butterflies or infinity symbols can be nice for this.





## Flexible seating

Flexible seating is a term used to describe different types of seating to support people to be able to engage in different activities and manage the demands of the environment.

Being able to change position regularly throughout the day can support their regulation.

Flexible seating in the classroom might include the following:

- chairs at tables
- mats on the floor/ floor cushions
- bean bags
- sitting on wobble cushions
- soft seating
- options to stand whilst working
- sitting on gym/ peanut balls
- chairs which offer movement such as rocking



## Flexible seating

### Benefits of flexible seating

**Regular position change** – some people find that they are able to apply their attention better if they are able to change positions regularly throughout the day – moving between standing, sitting at a desk, or sitting on the floor cushion can help break activities up and increase focus and learning. When we change position, we also move our bodies which supports regulation as well.

**Movement whilst sitting** – some people find it easier to concentrate if they can access movement whilst they are sitting. For people who are movement seekers or are fidgety it can take a lot of energy and effort to sit still meaning that they then struggle to apply their focus to the activity e.g., learning. Allowing people that need to move, access to movement will enable them to focus more as they will be able to apply their attention to the activity rather than using their energy to focus on sitting still.

**Standing** – Having the option to stand to complete pieces of work can support concentration for some individuals. It is unlikely that someone will want to complete a whole days' worth of work in standing without the option to move around or spend some of the day sitting so it is important to have seated options as well and if a person chooses to stand at the beginning of the day, there is the option to move or sit at other times.

**Floor seating and positions** – Having bean bags, mats or cushions on the floor allows the child option to have a break or seek comfort for certain activities. Activities such as reading, research, drawing, colouring are ideas for this type of seating. Activities completed in kneeling, or 4-point kneeling can also be beneficial for developing and improving core-strength, shoulder, and hand strength as well.



## Using fidget toys

When in a setting that requires quiet focus, searching for sensory input can be seen as restlessness.

Fidget toys can help children regulate and increase focus and attention. Fidget toys often include a repetitive focused movement of the hands. This means that children can have subtle movement and touch input to enable them to keep focussed on the learning environment.

Some children report that using a fiddle toy can reduce their stress and anxiety. Fidget toys can be useful for redirection from other, more harmful behaviours, such as skin picking or finger chewing.

Though fidget aides are often advertised alongside toys, they should be used to aide regulation. Different fidget toys can be trialled to find the most helpful. Children may need the opportunity to get over the novelty of having a fidget toy before their true usefulness can be reviewed.

Fidget toys should be within reach of a child and can be left in helpful places such as in their pencil cases or on their waist band. An adult can support through co-regulation by identifying that a child is becoming fidgety or restless an offer a fidget toy to support focus and regulation.



## Snack and lunch time

Eating at school is a multi-sensory experience. Some children can find the dining hall overwhelming which can impact on their ability to be able to eat and drink here.

The noise in the dining hall can be overwhelming for many students. The noise is often amplified by hard surfaces making it difficult to process. The environment often has lots of people moving around unpredictably. This can be unsettling for some students and mean that they find it difficult to eat. Sitting in close proximity to other students can be overwhelming if touch unpredictably e.g., clashing elbows, brushing past to get to another seat, feeling the other person on the seat next to them. School dining halls often have a mix of different competing smells which for some children can be incredibly overwhelming and cause distress.

**Orientation and routine** – Some children can find it difficult to learn and understand the routine of the dining hall. This may present as looking lost, sitting at the wrong table, lining up in the wrong place, forgetting to return trays or take their lunch box back, leave or loose water bottles regularly

**What children eat and drink** – Children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as Autism or who experience anxiety around eating may have a limited diet. They may choose items off the school menu or bring food to school that is repetitive, similar textures or taste and may be atypical of a nutritious diet. It is important that children are encouraged to eat what they can at school so that they do not become dysregulated due to hunger or feel increased worry or stress about eating at school. It is also important that parents are encouraged to provide food that their children are more likely to eat. It is likely in these situations that parents want and are encouraging their children to eat a wider variety of foods at home but that this takes a long time – months and sometimes years – for children to feel safe to add a new food to their diet.



## Snack and lunch time

### How you can help

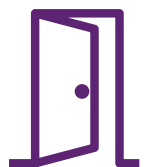
#### Support sensory differences

Support regulation through suggesting the use of sensory supports such as:

- ear defenders
- wobble cushion under feet to offer safe movement feedback whilst eating
- leaving an empty seat or sitting at the end of a table to avoid unwanted touch
- consider the lighting – is it bright?
- reduce as much visual stimuli as possible
- is there a quieter space to eat and drink?
- use visuals to support routine
- work with the child prior to going into the dining hall so they know what to expect
- use visual and verbal prompts to remind the child where things need to go
- support time management with timers so they know how long they have left to ensure they get some play time before going back to class
- if a child is struggling opening or packing their lunch items away, calmly show them what to do – you can use a Stop, Plan, Do approach

#### Support children who have a limited diet

- children who have a limited diet should be encouraged to eat what they can when at school
- communication between parents/ carers and school is essential to reduce stress around food and have a collaborative approach
- avoid notes home about the quality of a child's packed lunch – have a conversation about why they are bringing the items in that they are
- supporting eating of preferred foods at school can lead to less stress and less dysregulation from feeling hungry and help them feel safe



## Entering and leaving the setting

School comes with lots of different types of sensory information which is continuous throughout the day.

The environment and others within in it can be unpredictable and overwhelming for those with sensory differences. A child's arrival at their setting can determine their mood and engagement for the day and supporting a child's journey out of their setting can support their regulation throughout their evening at home.

### Arriving at their setting

- staggering the start of the school day can allow a pupil to go into the school building earlier, or later, than other pupils to avoid the noise and commotion of the playground and the school bell
- a pupil using an alternative entrance may also reduce the need for them to walk through busy entrances
- pupils having access to a quiet space or preferred/calming activity after entering school can give them time to regulate before starting their school day
- having a friend or familiar adult meet a child at the school entrance can offer reassurance
- if starting a new school or class, pictures and practice runs can help a child feel prepared. They can know ahead of time their routine, where to put their coat, lunch etc.
- trying to keep the mornings calm and unrushed with a regular routine can help a child approach the school day calmly and settled



## Entering and leaving the setting

### During the day

- allowing pupils to leave classrooms early when changing lessons, to avoid crowds and the hustle and bustle of corridors can be helpful for secondary school pupils.
- having a transition buddy can support pupils whilst they move between classes or when moving to and from break/lunch times

### Leaving school

- Leaving school slightly earlier than peers or via a different exit can help pupils avoid large crowds and lots of busy movement.
- Parents collecting a pupil from the same place each day and your child knowing who is collecting them each day can help reassure your child and reduce anxiety around home time.
- Some children may benefit from quiet time or a movement break with proprioceptive strategies before home time to support their regulation for the evening. Once they have returned home, having time to settle into the home routine is essential rather than placing demands on them immediately.



## Time out passes

Sometimes children need a break from the environment to be able to reset on their own terms – this can be particularly helpful to older children who may have learnt the skills to self-regulate but need the time and space to use their own strategies.

A Time Out Card is provided to the student and allows them to show it to their teacher to take a short break from class. Following the break the child returns to class to continue to the lesson. The break can be used for whatever the child needs – examples could include:

- using the toilet
- having a cold drink
- having a chewy or crunchy snack
- taking some time for deep breathing
- taking some to complete a meditation or mindfulness activity.
- taking a walk

Whilst Time Out passes are a great tool, they do rely on the student being able to use them responsibly. You can monitor how they are being used, check in with the student as to how helpful they are finding using it or create a plan which includes the options that they can choose when they use the pass e.g. – Go to a quiet room, do some wall press ups, walk along the corridor where the classroom is.

For some children, just knowing that they have permission to leave the classroom may mean that they are less anxious about attending the lesson and therefore able to stay in the class for the whole lesson or for a longer period of time. Don't be tempted to remove the time out pass as it isn't being used, check in with the child about how they use it and what the benefits are to them having it.



## Sensory diets

Sensory diet is a term used to describe a personalised plan of activities and adaptations that can support a person's sensory processing needs and help them remain well regulated throughout the day.

Sensory diets often include a variety of calming and alerting activities as well as some adaptations that can support a young person to be able to participate in their daily routines and activities that are meaningful to them. Depending on the person they can be prescriptive e.g. Have certain activities at certain times or more flexible e.g. The person knows what strategies help them, always have access to them, but they might only need them in certain situations.

On the next page you will find a 'Making Sense of my Senses' document. Using the observations you have made, the ideas and strategies from this guide as well as information from parents and the young person you can fill in this template to create a unique set of strategies to support the young person during their day.



## Making sense of my senses

On the following pages you will find a completed copy of the 'Making sense of my senses' document and a blank copy that you can print and fill in for individual children.

You will see on our completed copy that we have only included the senses that Ash needs support with. When you are completing this for children you work with you can leave in the senses they require support with and remove others. You can also use this template to include any other strategies that a child might need such as extra time to transition between activities, advanced warnings to changes in routine, communication style.

The image shows a completed 'Making sense of my senses' document template. The document is white with purple text and lines. It is divided into two main sections by a vertical line. The left section contains the following text: 'Making sense of my senses:', 'My sensory behaviour may look like:', 'I am sensitive to...', 'I seek...', 'I have preferences around...', 'When I am overwhelmed you might see me...', 'Written by:', and 'Date:'. The right section contains the text: 'Things that help me regulate:', 'Sound, touch, taste and smell, vision, movement, interoception. Any general strategies? Routine, communication, reduced demand, preparation.' At the bottom left of the document, there is a small note: 'The Making Sense of my Senses profile is a working document. Please update as needed either at home and/or at school so it is relevant and meaningful for those adults supporting'. At the bottom right, there is a small note: '(Template resource: 'Making sense of my senses')'.

## Making sense of my senses: Ash

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### My sensory behaviour may look like:

**I am sensitive to...** loud noises, seams in my socks, labels in my clothes, different textures in my food, stiff fabrics – I prefer soft and stretchy clothes, busy environments with lots of people in them.

**I seek...** Movement – when I am concentrating, I need to wiggle to keep my focus. Movement – at break time I love to run and use the equipment in the playground.

### I have preferences around...

- I like to have a ham sandwich, cookies, and ready salted crisps in my lunch bag. I will have this everyday – please don't ask me to try new foods at school, please don't comment on my lunch or ask my parents to put other options in
- I prefer ear buds to help manage the noise levels rather than ear defenders
- I can't stand the feel of the waistband on school trousers so wear grey tracksuit bottoms with the rest of my school uniform
- I find it easiest to learn through visuals – use of pictures, photographs, and written materials

### When I am overwhelmed you might see me...

I might stop doing the thing I am focussed on or playing with, I may find it hard to move between activities, I might refuse to do something I would normally do and not be able to tell you why, I may start to cry or shout.

---

**Written by:** Ash and Miss Taylor (class teacher)

**Date:** 20/01/2024

The Making Sense of my Senses profile is a working document. Please update as needed either at home and/or at school so it is relevant and meaningful for those adults supporting

## Things that help me regulate:

(Sound, touch, taste and smell, vision, movement, interoception. Any general strategies? Routine, communication, reduced demand, preparation.)

### Sound:

- always having access to my ear buds to use whenever I need to use them; this means that they need to be in my immediate vicinity and an adult might need to prompt me if I forget to use them

### Touch:

- wearing my tracksuit bottoms instead of school trousers means that I don't think about the feel of my clothes and means I can focus on other things

### Movement:

- Heavy Work helps me feel calm and stops my brain from feeling fizzy. I really like throwing a heavy ball to the ground, pushing a heavy trolley/ wheelbarrow, going inside my body sock, and stretching out, stomping in the playground, and rolling over my peanut ball
- Movement Break – I find it most helpful to have a movement break during seated focussed work activities. If the lesson is more active, then I get my movement through the class activity. I like to run and jump and then stretch in my body sock before going back to my focussed work
- Break Time – It is really important I have my break time to run and move about outdoors. Even if I haven't finished my work, I still need my break time for outdoor free movement

### Interoception:

- I need a prompt from an adult to remember to eat my lunch – I don't always feel hunger cues, especially if I have been sat for a long time and have lots of energy and I am excited to go outside. Please remind me in a calm and gentle way, to slow down, take 5 deep breaths and listen to what my tummy is telling me. Show me what I have for my lunch and remind me where I am going to sit and eat

## **Making sense of my senses:**

---

### **My sensory behaviour may look like:**

**I am sensitive to...**

**I seek...**

**I have preferences around...**

**When I am overwhelmed you might see me...**

---

**Written by:**

**Date:**

The Making Sense of my Senses profile is a working document.  
Please update as needed either at home and/or at school so  
it is relevant and meaningful for those adults supporting

## **Things that help me regulate:**

(Sound, touch, taste and smell, vision, movement, interoception.  
Any general strategies? Routine, communication, reduced  
demand, preparation.)

(Template resource: 'Making sense of my senses')

## Sensory equipment

There are lots of places, particularly online, that sell a variety of sensory toys and equipment.

If you want to purchase something for the classroom, think about the sensory principles in this guide and what sort of input/feedback each piece of equipment might provide. Having small selections of equipment at your disposal will mean that you can support their needs as well as try out what works for certain individuals and what does not.

## Tactile

### Sensory baskets

Use a basket, bowl, empty chocolate tub and fill with handheld items (child sized) with a variety of different textures – you can use everyday items such as sponges, different fabrics, brushes, combs, sticks, pinecones, beads, cutlery. The important thing is to include a variety of textures that they can explore. If your child tends to put things in their mouth, take this into consideration when picking your items and supervise as they explore the items to ensure safety.

### Fidget toys

Sometimes children find having fidget toys can help them to regulate and increase focus. If they enjoy exploring different textures, then having these in a variety of textures can be helpful.

### Vibrating toys

Vibration can be alerting for some children, and they may like this. You can use vibration with some deep touch to help prepare the body for a stimulus e.g., clothing, toothbrush. Sometimes children find the vibrating snake toy calming and interesting to feel and explore. Providers of sensory toys may also have a variety of vibrating toys which can be used in similar ways to the vibrating snake toy.

### Proprioception

Peanut Ball – similar to a gym ball but it is shaped like a peanut. This means it only rolls forwards and backwards which can make it safer when in use. Your child can roll over the ball, be squished under it (mind the head!), bounce on it or sit on it for movement feedback during focussed activities.

### **Weighted blanket or cushion**

These can be very calming as they give lots of deep pressure feedback when the person is underneath one or wraps one around their shoulders. You can use them to help a child calm before or during a focussed activity or aid them if they are feeling overwhelmed and need some help grounding themselves. Weighted cushions can be used on the child's lap the same as above.

**Important** – never sleep underneath a weighted blanket. A weighted blanket should never be above 10% bodyweight. Guidance on weighted blankets can be found on the [Royal College of Occupational Therapists website](#).

### **Wobble cushions**

The child can sit on the wobble cushion (sometimes called a move'n'sit cushion - wedge or a disco sit cushion - flat) and it will move around underneath them to provide movement feedback so that they can focus. The cushions are filled with air. They can also be used underneath the feet if a child tends to move their feet about or kick things. They tend to have a textured surface to provide some interesting tactile feedback as well.

### **Lycra body sock and bed sheet**

Great for providing proprioceptive feedback as the stretchy material provides proprioceptive feedback as the child moves their limbs. This means that they can feel grounded, and their brain is not constantly searching to feel where their body is in space.

### **Chewies**

For children who like to chew, having food safe items that they can safely seek proprioceptive feedback through can be really helpful. Explore food safe items in similar textures to what you know they like to chew. You can also do this through crunchy and chewy snacks as well.

### **TheraBands or Resistance Bands**

These are stretchy, wide rubber bands that provide a resistive material that is great for strengthening exercises and proprioceptive activities. You can place them between the legs of the child's chair for them to bounce their feet against, place them between the legs near the seat for the child to fiddle with or keep one as a sensory tool to help add resistance to stretches. They come in different strengths and can be bought as bands or as a roll to cut yourself.

## Noise

### Ear defenders

Children who are over responsive to noise may find that ear defenders are helpful to their child to enable them to regulate the noise input. Try them out at home, it may take them a few tries to get used to them. If you wear them out, put them on in the car, or at home if using public transport so that the child is used to them and so that they have put them on in a more predictable environment and do not experience the noise input without them. Make sure to get ear defenders specifically for children.

### Noise-cancelling ear buds

Noise-cancelling ear bud options are now more readily available. They block out noise in a similar way to how ear defenders work. They can come with different noise levels e.g., total, or partial noise cancellation and are useful for blocking out some background and reducing the impact of loud noises. Different models, sizes and colours are available on the market.

## Light

### Light up toys and bubble tubes

These can be calming to watch and can be particularly effective if the room lights are low. It might be worth considering some calming movement in conjunction with a low light/ sensory light environment. Warm glow fairy lights or colour changing light strips can be a more cost-effective alternative to bubble tubes and light up toys.

## Vestibular

### Hammock

Rocking in a hammock can be very calming to a child who seeks out vestibular input. It may help them regulate enough that they can focus on a reading activity, iPad game, card game etc. If safe to do so, rocking on their tummy can be particularly calming.

### Rocking chair

Rocking back and forth in a rhythmic manner in a rocking chair can be very calming for a child who seeks vestibular input. It may help them regulate enough that they can focus on a reading activity, iPad game, card game etc. You can also use a rocking horse for a small child who is able to sit.

### Swing

Swings can be used as part of outdoor play. They can become quite alerting and exciting the quicker and higher a child swings so consider whether you want to use this is a calming or alerting activity.

### Trampoline

Can be used as part of outdoor play. You may consider a small trampoline or trampette under supervision indoors if you feel this would benefit your child. Trampolining allows the child to experience both proprioceptive and vestibular input and can be alerting and often very enjoyable for children!

## Adapting the classroom environment

Making adaptations to the classroom to support a child's sensory needs can enable them to remain in school, engage in their learning and reach their full potential.

Adaptations do not have to be large or expensive, they can be small and meaningful to the child to help them feel safe and secure when they are at school. Ideas in this guide such as having flexible seating, a quiet corner and opportunity to take breaks from the classroom can be the difference to a child. Other things to consider are:

- the number of displays and how busy the walls are – this can be overwhelming and distracting for some children a plain/ neutral walls can be best
- ensure visuals are visible – if you use a visual timetable for your class make sure it is easily visible or that the child has a copy of their own to follow
- consider soft close windows and doors to avoid loud bangs when these are opened or closed
- think about the temperature of the room – if you have a child with interoception challenges they may be more or less sensitive to room temperature
- if you know there is a fire drill, ensure you have a plan to support a noise sensitive child
- if you use a bell or a whistle to signify the end of breaks, consider the impact this may have on a noise sensitive child. They may worry about the whistle or bell coming and the worry of this can also cause dysregulation

These are just a few ideas to get you thinking about the sensory properties of your classroom. You could use a sensory classroom audit tool such as this one from the [Autism Education Trust website](#).



## Whole school approach to regulation

As we said at the very start of this guide, we are all sensory beings who process sensory information, 24 hours a day, often without even knowing it.

Our sensory systems support our regulation and adding regulatory support in throughout the day can help all learners in the classroom. Some of the strategies we have suggested within this document could be used as a whole class approach. This supports inclusion and it is likely the other children will benefit as well!

Things you can put in place for the whole class:

- **self-advocacy** – this means supporting children to acknowledge and understand their own needs. This can be simple things such as letting children use the toilet when they need to or have a snack or drink when they need to. This promotes interoception awareness and the recognition of toileting, thirst, and hunger cues
- **movement** – most children would benefit from having some movement before, or even during, a focussed lesson. You can use the principles of a movement break before and during lessons to promote focus and learning. Doing this frequently throughout the day offers lots of opportunities for movement and may improve focus on learning
- **stretching and yoga** – yoga and stretching can be a great way to transition out of exciting physically alerting activities such as break time, lunch time, music classes or PE classes. It can help reset our nervous system into a calm alert state to transition into focussed learning and away from exciting physical and sensory lessons
- **deep breathing** – offering your class a moment to take some deep breaths with you to help the class as a whole regulate. The class may have become a little rowdy, or excited and a few seconds of deep breathing can help them feel in control again. You can ask them to pretend they are slowly blowing on a hot slice of pizza or blowing out candles on a cake.
- **double empathy** – try to teach the class about differences. This may include teaching neurotypical children about neurodivergent children rather than trying to ask neurodivergent children to fit in with typical expectations. You can inform children how sometimes we need to make changes to the way we do things so that everyone can join in and have fun.
- **processing time** – as adults we often ask many questions or expect children to answer us quickly. This does not always give them chance to think, process and formulate an answer to what we might be asking or saying. When you ask a question, or expect a response, take a pause yourself before you speak again. Take note of the child's expression - are they thinking, are they taking a moment to process, do they look stuck. Once you have allowed a pause, ask if they need help working out the answer or if they need a little more time. Allowing them the space and time to work something out promotes independent learning and empowers the child increasing the feeling of security in the classroom.



# Further information

On the following pages you will find suggestions for further information on topics that are related to Sensory Processing that you may find beneficial as wider reading.

## Supporting Your Neurodiverse Child

Essex Family Forum along with local charities and health and social care organisations have created this incredibly informative support document that you can signpost parents to or read as professionals for more understanding.



## Essex Autism Portal

Essex Autism Portal offers training and support to education staff across the whole of Essex.

## Essex SENDIASS

Essex SENDIASS supports parents with queries around education and support available.

## Essex Local Offer

Essex Local Offer is a directory of services that will let families know what help is available in the local area.

## **Charitable Support for Families**

Families might identify sensory equipment might help their child but not be able to afford it. Below are a list of charities that may be able to support families:

- [newlifecharity.co.uk](http://newlifecharity.co.uk)
- [www.caudwellchildren.com](http://www.caudwellchildren.com)
- [www.familyfund.org.uk](http://www.familyfund.org.uk)
- [www.wellchild.org.uk](http://www.wellchild.org.uk)

## **Neurodiversity**

Neurodiversity is a term that encompasses a wide range of presentations that may not be seen as Neurotypical. Below are some further resources that can help you learn about neurodivergent people and how you can help:

- [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)
- [www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk](http://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk)
- [autisticgirlsnetwork.org](http://autisticgirlsnetwork.org)
- [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk)
- [dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)
- [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia/about-dyslexia](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia/about-dyslexia)

## Sleep

Parents often report that their children have poor sleep. You can signpost them to the following organisations for help with sleep:

- [thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children](https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children)
- [cerebra.org.uk/get-advice-support/sleep-advice-service](https://cerebra.org.uk/get-advice-support/sleep-advice-service)
- [teensleephub.org.uk](https://teensleephub.org.uk)

## Toileting

Parents often report that their children difficulty with toileting. You can signpost them to the following organisations for help with this:

- [eric.org.uk](https://eric.org.uk)

## Periods

People with sensory differences who also have periods may find it more challenging to understand and manage their menstrual cycle. The following book and links are helpful advice to support this:

- The Autism Friendly Guide to Periods (2019) Robyn Steward
- [autisticgirlsnetwork.org/periods-autism](https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/periods-autism)

## Sensory

The following book titles provide ideas for further reading on sensory processing that compliment what you have read and learnt in this document:

- The out-of-sync child: Recognising and coping with sensory integration dysfunction (1998), Carol Stock-Kranowitz
- Too loud, too bright, too fast, too tight (2003), Sharon Heller
- Raising a sensory smart child: The definitive handbook for helping your child with sensory issues (2009), Lindsey Biel
- Sensational kids (2006), Lucy Jane Miler
- Success with Sensory Supports (2023), Kim Griffin

## LGBTQIA+

Neurodivergent people are more likely to identify as LGBTQIA+. They may be questioning or feel sure of their identity. The follow links and book titles are for you or the young person themselves to access:

- [autisticgirlsnetwork.org/lgbqtia](https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/lgbqtia)
- The Awesome Autistic Guide for Trans Teens (2022) Yenn Purkiss and Sam Rose
- Queerly Autistic – The Ultimate guide for LGBTQIA+ Teens on the spectrum (2021) Erin Ekins

## Masking

Some children present with an internalised presentation of Autism – this is often, but not exclusively, girls. This group of people may suppress or internalise their authentic selves when at school which can lead to mental ill health, emotion based school avoidance or burnout. Understanding this enables you to support people with this type of presentation:

- [autisticgirlsnetwork.org/keeping-it-all-inside.pdf](https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/keeping-it-all-inside.pdf)
- Taking Off the Mask: Practical Exercises to Help Understand and Minimise the Effects of Autistic Camouflaging (2022) Hannah Louise Belcher

The information offered in the ‘further information’ section of this document is suggestions for further reading and are not endorsed or recommended by NHS or Essex County Council.

This information is issued by:  
Essex County Council  
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities  
(SEND)

Contact us:  
**[senstrategy@essex.gov.uk](mailto:senstrategy@essex.gov.uk)**

SEND Strategy and Innovation Team  
Essex County Council  
County Hall, Chelmsford  
Essex, CM1 1QH

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 **[facebook.com/essexcountycouncil](https://facebook.com/essexcountycouncil)**

The information contained in  
this document can be translated,  
and/or made available in alternative  
formats, on request.

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