

SENSORY

Description

What is sensory processing?

Our brain receives information from all our senses, which we use to interact with the world around us. This may be through our thoughts, feelings, behaviour. We all process sensory information which, for most people, develops as we grow and mature. But if you're neurodivergent (like if you're autistic, have ADHD, or just experience the world differently), your brain might process that stuff in a unique way.

What Sensory Differences Look Like

Sensory experiences can vary widely. You might:

- Be **extra sensitive** to things like loud noises, bright lights, or scratchy clothes
- Seem **less aware** of sensations, leading them to seek out strong input (e.g., jumping, hugging tightly)
- React strongly to certain smells or tastes
- Struggle with crowded or unpredictable environments
- Have meltdowns or shut down when overwhelmed

Why It Happens

These responses are linked to how the brain processes sensory input. For neurodivergent young people, the brain may:

- Interpret sensory signals more intensely or less clearly
- Struggle to filter out background noise or distractions
- React differently depending on stress, fatigue, or emotional state

Sensory Processing Information

<https://youtu.be/h2XoaEKDvLw>

The 5 Senses

<https://youtu.be/FIP7-imYKXY>

The special senses

<https://youtu.be/hy6-CBZvT1s>

National Autistic Society (sensory overload) with the description of how presenting behaviours can often be because of an unmet sensory need.

This anxiety can then lead to a fight or flight response:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPknwW8mPAM>

Video about Proprioception:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oquc160D1dw>

IMPACT

How does sensory processing affect people?

Examples of behaviours you might notice if your child is oversensitive or under sensitive to sensory input see below table.

If a child experiences any of the following, and this results in a big impact on their life this may be an indication that they have sensory processing difficulties:

- Difficulties concentrating in school
- Cannot sit still and fidgets a lot
- Struggles with food textures, tastes or smells and has a limited diet
- Has difficulty wearing certain textures or dislikes tags and seams
- Experiences regular meltdowns
- Struggles to manage their emotions

How we process sensory information affects how we participate in everyday tasks and activities. For your child, this can mean problems with paying attention in class or problems coping with things like getting their hair cut etc.

Sensory system	If your child is under responsive, you might see:	If your child is over responsive, you might see:
Sight	Need lots of visual stimulation, e.g., like bright environments, watching lights and reflective surfaces.	Dislikes bright light – might want to wear a cap or have their hood up, become overwhelmed by too many lights and colours.
Smell	Seems unaware of strong smells, may seek out strong smells e.g., smearing.	Notice smells that other people don't which causes stress and interferes with ability to focus, bothered by typical household scents, perfume, aftershave etc.
Hearing	Talking loudly, enjoying loud noise, not picking up on usual auditory cues, e.g., they don't realise if you say their name.	Avoid loud noise, cover ears, anxious before loud noises occur, distracted by background noises.
Taste	Eats/mouths non food items, craves strong tasting foods e.g., spicy, salty.	Dislikes strong tastes, likes consistent temperature of foods, gags on certain tastes, struggle to try new food, fussy or picky eater.
Touch	May appear heavy handed, enjoys messy play and a variety of textures, touches things constantly, walking on their toes.	Seeks hugs/touch only on their terms, can appear to overreact to another's touch, bothered by certain types of clothing or clothing labels, walking on their toes.
Proprioception - (knowing where your body is in in the space without looking at it)	Frequent bumps, trips and falls, may appear poorly coordinated, leans on furniture or other people, overreliance on vision for movement (e.g. looks at feet when going down stairs).	
Vestibular -(helps with balance and spatial orientation)	Has difficulty sitting still and seeks movement, runs rather than walks, enjoys spinning and being upside down.	Struggles with motion, e.g. in the car, escalators, becomes dizzy easily, struggles in busy places watching a lot of movement.
Interoception - (interpreting sensations that come from inside your body)	May not notice when hurt or unwell, may not recognise feelings of hunger or fullness, poor awareness of needing to go to the toilet, may not recognise if feeling too hot or too cold.	May frequently report being in pain or is very sensitive to pain, may have a strong hunger impulse and struggle to wait for food if hungry, may struggle to cope when too hot or cold.

STRATEGIES

Different strategies work for different individuals. It is important to work together with your child or young person to try different strategies over time.

Please don't expect big changes overnight. It can take several months for sensory strategies to be used effectively.

We recommend you:

- try just a couple of strategies at a time
- choose what is a priority for you and your family
- implement strategies and changes gradually - this will make it easier for you to work out what is going to be helpful for your child, as well as being more manageable for you as a family
- give it plenty of time to make sure the strategy is or isn't working before moving on to another
- use the strategies you think will work best for you and your child consistently for 6 months.

What Can Help

There are lots of ways to make sensory stuff easier to handle:

- Use **noise-cancelling headphones** if sounds are too much
- Try **fidget toys** to feel calm
- Take **movement breaks** if you need to move around
- Wear clothes that feel good and avoid ones that don't
- Create a **chill-out space** where you can go when things get too much

How Families Can Support Sensory Needs

You can help your child feel more comfortable and confident by:

- Creating **calm, sensory-friendly spaces** at home or school
- Offering tools like **noise-cancelling headphones** or **fidget toys**
- Building **predictable routines** to reduce surprises
- Encouraging **movement breaks** or calming activities like yoga or deep breathing
- Working together to identify triggers and preferences

Tips for School and Community Settings

- Share your child's sensory profile with teachers and support staff
- Ask for accommodations like flexible seating or quiet zones
- Advocate for sensory-inclusive environments in public spaces
- Celebrate your child's unique ways of experiencing the world

You can ask for things that help you feel more comfortable, like:

- Sitting in a quieter spot
- Taking breaks when you need them
- Using tools that help you focus or feel calm
- Letting adults know what works for you

sensory needs activity levels and anxiety

<https://youtu.be/iDfEZI7aGpw>

Sensory needs and sleep

<https://youtu.be/9hXxEnMrUhE>

Sensory needs and toileting

<https://youtu.be/5y-a044jfYk>

Sensory needs, food restrictions and mealtimes

<https://youtu.be/YpTYtJ4sfZ0>

Sensory needs and dressing

https://youtu.be/Ks3FeM_1JfA

Self Care

<https://youtu.be/Pd4URVR99CU>

RESOURCES

There is a wide range of online information that you can access. You can choose the resources that are right for you, from the list of recommended sources below.

We encourage parent carers and professionals to follow the suggestions here and the strategy 'videos' available within the next tab first, before exploring further options.

Not all of these resources may be relevant for your child, depending on their age or developmental stage. Some resources may be relevant now, but some may provide you with ideas that will be more helpful in the future, as your child gets older.

Sensory Processing Resources list

This information includes cost-effective ideas for supporting children's sensory needs and the best places to buy them.

The National Autistic Society (NAS) has lots of resources to support children with sensory needs.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Joining in with Sensory Differences - This website has videos explaining sensory processing and the 8 senses. They also have ideas of things that you and your child can do to help if they are having difficulties.

The Falkirk Council children with disabilities team

Booklet written by Lesley Beath, paediatric occupational therapist. This booklet helps parents and carers to look at their own sensory preferences and sensitivities.

The Neurodiversity Hub – Parent Careers Cornwall website for useful information relating to Sensory Processing.

Sensory strategies and advice for babies (under 2)

- For children under two years old, NHS MerseyCare Foundation Trust have the following advice leaflet, to support parents with ideas to support sensory development. [Download the sensory strategies and advice for babies booklet.](#)

Free Online Courses

Early years child development training by Department of Education (for professionals)

This free online training provides an overview of child development and offers practical advice for supporting children in your setting, including reception years. Each training module on the site covers an important area of child development and has been written by early years experts, working with the Department for Education.

[Early years child development training : Home page](#)

Why take the training?

The training:

- is free
- is for childminders and nurseries
- combines theory with practical tips and ideas to use in your setting

- includes opportunities to reflect on your practice
- reinforces your understanding through learning check questions and tests
- links to additional resources
- offers the opportunity to download certificates of completion
- has been developed by expert practitioners

National Sensory Network (for parents and carers and professionals)

Explore these free courses and digital downloads for an introduction to sensory integration and processing. [Free Courses and Downloads](#)

The RISE (Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence) (for school staff)

a contract funded by the Department for Education (DfE), has a new e-learning course entitled 'Sensory Processing: What it is and why it matters'. The course is free and should take around 90 minutes to complete.

[Free e-learning course on Sensory Processing | Whole School SEND](#)