



Sensory Processing

Senses

- **Sight/** vision
- **Smell/** olfaction
- **Touch/**tactile
- **Taste/** gustation
- **Hearing/** auditory
- **Interoception** -feelings we experience inside our body e.g. hunger, thirst, hot, cold
- **Proprioception** -makes us aware of position and movement of the body
- **Vestibular** -tells us where our head is in space if we are upright or bent over.

Our lives are full of sensory experiences and we respond to sensory information.

Sometimes we seek sensory experiences that make us feel better e.g., a hug, listening to music. Sometimes we avoid sensory experiences that may be overwhelming to make us feel better e.g., bright lights or loud noises.

It is very common for children and young people (CYP) to have sensory sensitivities and provision must be made to incorporate these as a reasonable adjustment. This may be particular significant for CYP with autism.

Some CYP may be able to prepare themselves to tolerate certain experiences when highly motivated for example attending a concert but this may have a 'sensory cost' (see Spoon Theory Quick Guide).

Learners may show sensory seeking or sensory avoiding behaviours and may need to use calming or alerting strategies to support regulation.

Example calming strategies

- Weighted blankets or vests
- Gentle swinging or rocking
- Tucking legs up and squeezing
- Deep pressure massage
- Spending time in a small space/ dark space
- Ear defenders
- Use of sensory resources e.g., fidget toys, chew toys

Example alerting strategies

- Drinking a cold drink
- Eating crunchy or strongly flavoured food
- Jumping, stamping, running etc.
- Making over exaggerated facial expressions
- See also- movement breaks and sensory circuits
- Use of sensory resources e.g., wobble cushion.

What may hypersensitivity to sensory information look like?

	Sensory avoiding/ High sensitivity	Sensory seeking/ Low sensitivity
Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dislikes loud noises- shows distress/ covers ears - Is easily startled - Likes to 'chew' to damp down noise - Is anxious before expected loud noises - Hums to self constantly - Easily distracted by/ comments on environmental sounds others may not notice e.g., fans, traffic etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeks out loud activities e.g., musical instruments, loud volume on devices - Does not pick up on expected cues e.g., may not respond to name - Makes noises e.g., squealing - Difficulty following verbal instructions
Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dislikes bright/ fluorescent lights - Is distracted by visual information - Turns away or covers eyes when there are flashing lights - Avoids eye contact - Prefers dark environments - May hold objects close to eyes to focus on one detail at a time - Uses hands to identify objects/ navigate the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likes bright environments, reflective surfaces, spinning lights - Likes to watch things close to face e.g., flapping fingers, pouring sanding, holding objects very close
Taste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gags easily - Limited/ restricted diet - Prefers bland/ plain foods - Likes food to be a consistent temperature e.g., very hot or very cold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eats non-food items (aka pica) - Enjoys eating hard, crunchy foods - Enjoys strong flavours e.g., curry, pepper, chilli
Smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big reaction to new smells - Expresses strong dislike to smells others may not notice - Avoids certain environments due to smells e.g., toilets, kitchen etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smells objects, animals, other people - Under reacts to strong good or bad smells e.g., body odour

	Sensory avoiding/ High sensitivity	Sensory seeking/ Low sensitivity
Touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dislikes hugs or touch - Dislikes 'messy' substances e.g., glue, paint, food etc - Sensitive to certain clothing fabrics, textures or labels e.g., may remove clothing - Very sensitive to pain and temperature - Overreaction to unexpected touch - Difficulty with personal care activities e.g., brushing teeth, having hair brushed, having nails cut 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has difficulty responding to pain and temperature - Gets too close to others - May over grip or be heavy handed - Enjoys the feel of certain textures/ objects - May pick or scratch at skin regularly - Mouths objects - Seeks out firm pressure e.g., prefers tight clothes, likes tight hugs - Sucks or chews on finger/ hand
Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dislikes jumping and spinning - Dislikes busy environments - Becomes dizzy easily - Prefers to keep feet on the ground- afraid of heights, dislikes lifts or escalators - Difficulty travelling up and down stairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dislikes stillness - Often runs rather than walking - Fidgeting, tapping, rocking, jumping, clapping (This is called stimming/ stimulatory behaviour) - Enjoys rides at a fair/ theme park - Seeks out movement
Body Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dislikes others being too close - Avoids crowds - Creates boundaries e.g., always wants to be at back of line - Poor fine motor skills e.g., handwriting, buttons, laces - Appears clumsy / accident prone - Has poor muscle tone e.g., will hold head up with hand Poor spatial awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bump into/ trips over people and objects - Stand too close to others - Looks at feet when going down stairs - Tries to get into small spaces - Enjoys wrapping body tightly in blankets / squeezing into tight spots - May walk on tiptoes / heavy footed - Uses a tight grip and performs activities with strong force - May lean on other people, walls, furniture
Internal awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May have an overreaction to what is happening internally e.g., heart beating fast may be perceived as a heart attack <p>Feel the need to go to the toilet more often than others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not recognise feeling full after food - Does not recognise feeling hungry / thirsty - Difficulties regulating body temperature - Does not recognise the need to open bowels / pass urine Has a high pain threshold / does not recognise pain

Resources:

Sensory profile questionnaire (see ASCETS resources)

[a5 booklet \(falkirk.gov.uk\)](https://www.falkirk.gov.uk)-making sense of sensory behaviour

[Sensory Issues | Autism Speaks](#)

[Pica - eating non-edible items \(cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk\)](https://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk)

[ASSIST: Autism Sensory Strategies, Information, and Toolkit — PAAutism.org, an ASERT Autism Resource Guide](#)

[Sensory differences - a guide for all audiences \(autism.org.uk\)](https://www.autism.org.uk)

[SENSORY DYSFUNCTION SOLUTIONS.docx \(live.com\)](#)

[Teacher Handbook SEND - January 2024.pdf \(nasen.org.uk\)](https://www.nasen.org.uk) p49

[Joining in with Sensory Differences | NHS GGC](#)

[Interactive Child Development Questionnaires | NHS GGC](#)

<https://www.understood.org/articles/en/understanding-sensory-processing-issues>