

Webinar 3 Sensory Processing: Sensory Safe Environments

Webinar by Children & young People's OT Services



AIMS OF THE SESSION

By the end of the webinar:

- Be able to complete a sensory audit of your environment
- Be able to implement environmental changes to support children with sensory processing differences
- Know the next steps for help

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‘The corridors and halls of any mainstream school are a constant tumult of noises echoing, fluorescent lights, bells ringing, people bumping into each other...the result is that we often spend most of our day perilously close to sensory overload’ (Sainsbury, 2000).

Take a moment to watch a small section of the video. How easy do you think it would be to learn, eat, dress, form friendships if this was how you interpreted your environment?

[Autism and sensory sensitivity - YouTube](#)

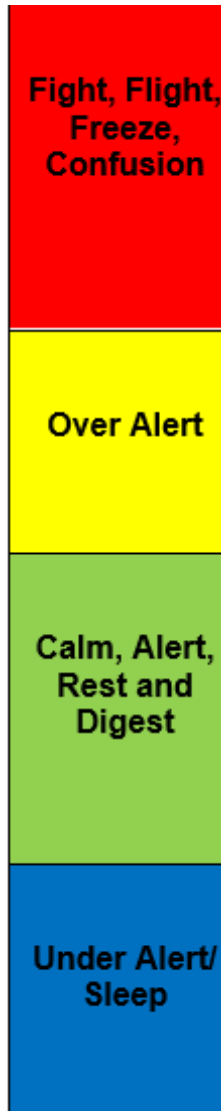
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- Children who find themselves in the “**over alert**” or “**flight/fight/Freeze**” regulation zones are in a state of danger. They are perceiving the environment as a danger or a threat. They will be pre occupied with keeping themselves “safe” and will be unable to attend/participate in tasks.
- As adults we need adjust some elements of their environment to support their sensory needs. These adjustments will be permanent and ongoing. Small adjustments can have a big impact
- Without the correct environmental adjustments, sensory strategy plans or therapeutic interventions will not be successful – they have to happen together.

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What is a sensory audit?

This sensory audit is to help staff to assess and create an environment that enables the participation of pupils with autism. It does not cover all aspects, but gives ideas on the ways in which a setting might be altered if pupils experience sensory processing difficulties and find it hard or very anxiety-provoking to tolerate certain sensations or situations.

Double click on the icon  for a copy of the audit or download from the weblink below. Please be aware that although this audit mentions Autism you can have sensory processing difficulties without Autism.

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www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

**national autism standards**

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Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms

Devised by Ian Attfield, Amy Fowler and Val Jones

This sensory audit is to help staff to assess and create an environment that enables the participation of pupils with autism. It does not cover all aspects, but gives ideas on the ways in which a setting might be altered if pupils experience sensory processing difficulties and find it hard or very anxiety-provoking to tolerate certain sensations or situations.

Visual

| Good Practice and Evidence to look for | Current Situation | Possible action (if needed) |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Classroom illumination is suitable for pupils with autism. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Fluorescent lights are regularly checked and changed. (Flickering lights can be very disturbing.)The effects of light coming into the room through blinds and creating distracting patterns are minimisedLight reflecting on objects such as metal or shiny surfaces in the classroom is minimised. | | |
| The classroom is orderly and not cluttered so that pupils can make sense of the environment. <ul style="list-style-type: none">The impact of wall displays is considered. (Busy and cluttered wall displays can be distracting).Designated areas for specific activities to give clarity to the classroom. | | |



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Good Practice and Evidence to look for

Classroom illumination is suitable for pupils with autism.

- Fluorescent lights are regularly checked and changed. (Flickering lights can be very disturbing.)
- The effects of light coming into the room through blinds and creating distracting patterns are minimised
- Light reflecting on objects such as metal or shiny surfaces in the classroom is minimised.

The classroom is orderly and not cluttered so that pupils can make sense of the environment.

- The impact of wall displays is considered. (Busy and cluttered wall displays can be distracting).
- Designated areas for specific activities to give clarity to the classroom organisation.
- Pupils have the opportunity to work at a workstation to focus their attention, if necessary

Prior to completing the audit please complete the sensory behaviour checklist to identify which sensory systems you need to pay specific attention to.

As we go through the audit please reflect on some of your classroom spaces.

As we go through the audit we will also reflect on what this means to spaces at home such as bedrooms.

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Good Practice and Evidence to look for

Sounds from classroom equipment are kept to a minimum.

- Televisions, videos, audio systems, lights and computers are switched off when not in use to avoid a mains hum.

There are strategies in place to reduce noise when rooms are in use.

- Classrooms are carpeted to lessen noise created by the movement of people, chairs and desks.
- The acoustics of the gym, dining hall and hall are checked and modified to lessen echo
- Hallways are carpeted to lessen the noise created by movement through the corridors.

Sounds from outside the classroom do not cause problems within classrooms.

- Windows are suitably soundproofed so that the noise of passing traffic is not a nuisance

There are agreed strategies in place when noise becomes too much for individual pupils.

There is a quiet room available which provides a calm place for pupils to relax.

Good Practice and Evidence to look for

Pupils are warned if a loud noise or bell is going to sound.

- Strategies are put in place to support pupils who find loud noises or fire bells very difficult to tolerate.



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Smell

Pointer

Smells within the classroom are kept to a minimum.

- The smell of paints, glue, clay and cleaning fluids is minimal.
 - Staff are aware that the smell of perfumes and deodorants may be distressing.
 - Staff are aware that pupils may react to the smell of others.
-

Smells from outside the classroom are monitored and reduced, where possible

- Alternative toileting arrangements are allowed (e.g. possible use of staff or disabled toilets).
- The smell of cooking from the cafeteria or food technology rooms is reduced.

Please also note the days your classrooms are cleaned – do the cleaning products smell?

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Touch and feel

Pointer

Uncomfortable clothing (seams, inflexible or itchy fabrics) is avoided, where possible, unless there are safety issues

- Variations of the school uniform offer enough flexibility to enable pupils to be able to wear clothing they find comfortable.
- Willingness of the school to adapt the school uniform (e.g. wear a sweatshirt, a necktie loosely or one that pins on).

Alternative arrangements are made for pupils who find writing to be physically painful or difficult.

- Willingness of the school to allow some work or homework to be typed.
- Possible use of an 'Alpha Smart', iPad or laptop for written work

Seating is comfortable.

- Padding is used to make hard chairs more comfortable.
- Pupils are allowed to sit on carpet squares if the floor is not carpeted.

Consider the environments where unexpected touch is going to occur such as in the playground, sitting on the carpet or waiting in a line. The possibility of unexpected touch is often a cause of anxiety.

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General sensory issues

Good Practice and Evidence to look for

Pupils are encouraged to let others know if they are finding a sensory aspect of the environment distressing.

- Pupils know that they can speak to someone about concerns.
- Pupils have a designated person or mentor to talk to.

Pupils are relaxed when moving through corridors. (Pupils can become anxious in busy corridors due to noise, dislike of crowds and worry about being touched).

- Pupils are allowed to leave the classroom slightly earlier or later than peers to avoid noisy corridors/crowds.

Classroom organisation takes into account the individual needs of pupils.

- Classroom organisation and individual seating plan takes into consideration individual sensory concerns (e.g. A pupil with a fascination with light reflection does not sit by the window).
- Pupils who become anxious by the close proximity of others are allowed ample space around their seat

Good Practice and Evidence to look for

Dinner halls and queuing systems do not cause distress (due to the noise levels, smells and crowds).

- Pupils are allowed to enter the dinner hall before or after peers to avoid queuing and crowds.
- An adult or buddy may escort a pupil to and within the dinner hall

A system of support is available for pupils experiencing sensory overload.

- Learning breaks are allowed when necessary
- There is a designated place and a clear system/routine for pupils to follow if they feel they need to withdraw due to sensory overload to 'chill out.'

Reflect on what actions your school or home setting would need to make.

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Communication of sensory needs

All staff at school and adults at home need to be aware of the child's individual sensory needs and sensory support strategy plans.

This needs to be accessible and shared with everyone working with the student so they are able to identify behaviour and support co regulation.

All adults working with the child need to attend training about working with children with sensory processing needs and understand how to implement strategies in the plan. Training can be via the webinars offered by Buckinghamshire NHS OT service or by another provider.

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My Sensory Regulation Strategies

Name: _____

School: _____

Class: _____

DOB: _____

Date: _____

These are my "Feel Good Activities" that help me feel safe and calm? Make sure I get to do these throughout the day to support me to stay regulated.

Action figures and spider mand
Puzzles
Counting
Riding my bike

Make me feel safe and secure in my environment by:

Letting me have my ear defenders and chewelry on my desk so I can use them when I need them.
Letting me sit with my back to the windows.

Below is my timetable of vestibular and proprioceptive activities to help support my regulation. It is important I get this input throughout the day to keep me regulated.

- When I wake up, I will jump on my trampoline before going downstairs
- I have cereal without milk
- I drink my morning milk through a straw
- I walk to school
- I stop at the park on the way to school and I go 10 minutes of monkey bars and climbing.
- On arrival at school to engage in sensory circuits
- After morning break, I need to do some press ups as the break time is too short for me to regulate.
- Snack time/lunch select crunchy foods and encourage to drink through a straw
- After Snack time I need to go my specialist yoga
- At lunch time I am allowed on the bikes for 10 minutes before I go back into class
- After school I go to swimming, judo and football.
- When I get home, I go in the garden and jump on my trampoline or ride my bike.

I find transitions difficult and need proprioception to prepare for this, especially if I am transitioning into lessons I do not like such as lunch or PE. Let me have a bounce on my gym ball for 10 minutes while I am finishing my work before transitions and send me out first or last. Remember to use my visual timetable and sand timer to support with transitions. I need these with me when I move around the school (such as in forest school).

I need to have a chewelry with me at all times so I can chew if needed.

After about 15 minutes of sitting I can get distracted – after 10 minutes I need a stretch or the opportunity to either stand at my table to learn or sit on my gym ball.

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Use Strategies in my Regulation Chart if you see me become dysregulated. We may have to do these activities together and co regulate until I can do them by myself.

| | How do I know I am in this zone? | How others might know I am in this zone? | What strategies to do when I am in this zone? |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Fight, Flight, Freeze, Confusion | I am confused and muddled | I will hit, kick and bite teacher's and my friends. I will throw furniture around. I will climb under the table | I need to climb into my body sock in the sensory room. I may need to push against the wall or a gym ball. Keep Language minimal. Watch I am starting to regulate again. Riding my bike outside. Swinging on the swings |
| Over Alert | My tummy goes fuzzy | I start to get up from my seat. I start to talk loudly. I start to clench my fists and squish up my face. I will refuse to transition such as refuse to go to PE or into the lunch hall. | TheraBand stretches. Encourage to use chewelry. Take out for ride on the bike. Let me have a stretch. Let me sit on my gym ball. Marching on the spot. Deep breathing. |
| Calm, Alert, Rest and Digest | I feel happy and my friends like me | I am able to sit and listen to the teacher. I am able to play with my friends. I laugh, smile, joke and chat. | After about 15 minutes of sitting I can get distracted – after 10 minutes I need a stretch or the opportunity to either stand at my table to learn or sit on my gym ball. |
| Under Alert/ Sleep | I yawn | I am able to fall asleep | Let me push against you while you are squashing me. |

Please keep adding or adapting as this will change over time and different environments. Please access our website for additional strategies and recommendations or to book an appointment with us to discuss your programme in more detail.

www.buckinghamshire.nhs.uk/cyp/therapy/occupational-therapy/



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Spaces for flight in the class and at home

When children are experiencing sensory dysregulation and entering the **“Flight/fight/Freeze”** zone we need to provide them with appropriate spaces for flight. This is so they can spend some time away from the sensory experiences causes them distress so they can regulate/co regulate. These spaces will look different for different children in different settings. They should be spaces which reduce sensory stimuli and provide the child with regulating activities to do while they are in the space.



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Availability of sensory equipment

Make sure any sensory equipment needed is available for the child to use easily when needed – not locked in a draw or away in a cupboard. Some people use a bag, box or bucket to organise equipment for the child. What do you use?



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People in the environment

Parents, guardians and education staff need to be aware of their own sensory thresholds and preferences.

What do you think will happen if these do not match? Consider the below scenarios and discuss the emotional and physical impact on both the adult and the child.

1. A parent who seeks out hugs for comfort with a child who does not like to be touched.
2. A teaching assistant who is a sensory seeker is asked to prepare a lesson for a child who is sensory defensive and suffers from sensory overload. Because the teaching assistant is a sensory seeker they plan a lesson full of songs, movements, lots of vision and colour. She talks loudly and fast with lots of enthusiasm. Do you think the child will engage with this lesson?
3. A teacher needs to give an instruction to a noisy the class. Instead of stopping the class to listen they talk loudly over the busy classroom. A child who is sensitive to sound comes crying saying that the teacher has been shouting at him all day and he doesn't want to go back.

[illegible]

Reasonable adjustments

Just like reasonable adjustments may be given to a child with a physical need reasonable adjustments need to be given to children with sensory needs even if they do not have an EHCP.

Reasonable adjustments mean alterations to the timetable, activities and physical environment.

- Changing where a child is seated
- Allowing to transition at quiet times
- Allowing an alternative school uniform
- Eating in a classroom rather than in the lunch hall
- Extra time for eating, dressing
- Using an alternative toilet
- Longer break times
- Alternative timetable to allow for rest or learning in different environments

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Where possible involve the whole class – they all need it!

Below are some ideas to include the whole class in movement and proprioceptive opportunities. They all need it!

- [The REAL reason children fidget — and what we can do about it | Angela Hanscom | TEDxPortsmouth – YouTube](#)
- [Flexible Seating at Poplar Tree Elementary School – YouTube](#)
- [Shake Your Sillies Out 🎵 Brain Breaks Songs for Kids 🎵 Kids Action Songs by The Learning Station - YouTube](#)

Loss of sensory opportunities in the classroom



We will sometimes hear that children have managed in the early years but engagement and behaviour becomes more difficult as they get older.

Reflect on the free play and sensory based activities available to children in the early years. How would this support children with sensory processing differences?

How do the opportunities change as they progress through the school? Reflect on how we could provide sensory opportunities for these older children.



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Remember our tolerance for sensory stimuli will change

Your tolerance for sensory stimuli may change throughout the day or differ from day to day.

If you have had a long, busy, stressful, anxious, angry day then your tolerance for sensory input may change. It may be because they have had a bad night sleep, missed breakfast, your favourite T shirt you planned to wear was dirty or have been irritated by a sibling.

This is true of the children we work with as well!

Communication between home and school is essential so sensory strategies can be adjusted accordingly.

Be aware of the sensory impact over the whole day and the impact on home life, especially for children who mask at school.

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Fatigue

Children with sensory processing differences will fatigue cognitively and physically quicker than their peers due to the additional energy it takes to filter, process and manage the sensory demands.

Dealing with the impact of adrenaline from being in a heightened sense of danger can be very tiring.

Children with poor coordination or poor muscle tone will physically be working harder than their peers.

They may require rest periods in the day, and particular consideration as to the order of lessons

[Why Autism & ADHD cause Tiredness \(Neurodivergent Fatigue\) #shortvideo #autism #adhd - YouTube](#)

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Masking

Masking is when children are suppressing what is happening inside and presenting an “ok” picture to the rest of the world

This could include trying not to stim when they really need/want to – preventing their ability to regulate.

Why do you think people would want to hide their stims when it is an essential coping mechanism and without stimming it could lead to meltdown or burnout?

Children who mask at school will normally go home and let their emotions/behaviours out there. Children appear they are coping at school but at home they may be emotional, withdrawn, obstructive or violent towards family members. We often hear of two different children – one at school and one at home.

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BE AWARE OF SENSORY IMPACT OVER THE WHOLE DAY

Be aware of the sensory impact over the whole day and the impact on home life, especially for children who mask at school.

Children arriving at school is not the start to their sensory day!

- Eating breakfast
- Getting washed
- Brushing teeth
- Getting dressed
- Travelling to school

All need to be completed against the clock!

Take some time at the start of the school day for regulation activities to calm and prepare the nervous system for learning. Sensory circuits (webinar 2) are a good structured way to do this.

For children who mask or are easily dysregulated by school parents should allow a period of regulation on return home – even if it looks like they do not need it. Book an advice line to discuss your child's specific needs.

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NEXT STEPS

- Invitation to attend any outstanding sensory webinars
- Complete Sensory Behaviour Checklist, Sensory Regulation Strategy Plan and your environmental audit as best you can and bring to a virtual advice line.
- Settings: Please complete booking form for virtual advice line on the website
- Parents/Guardians please call 01296 838 8000
- We encourage joint virtual advice sessions with parents/guardians and settings together – TEAMS link can be sent to both
- Virtual advice sessions can be accessed as often as needed for continual support or to update goals/advice. Just ask to be booked on with the same therapist.
- Following virtual advice sessions next steps can be discussed.

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FURTHER INFORMATION



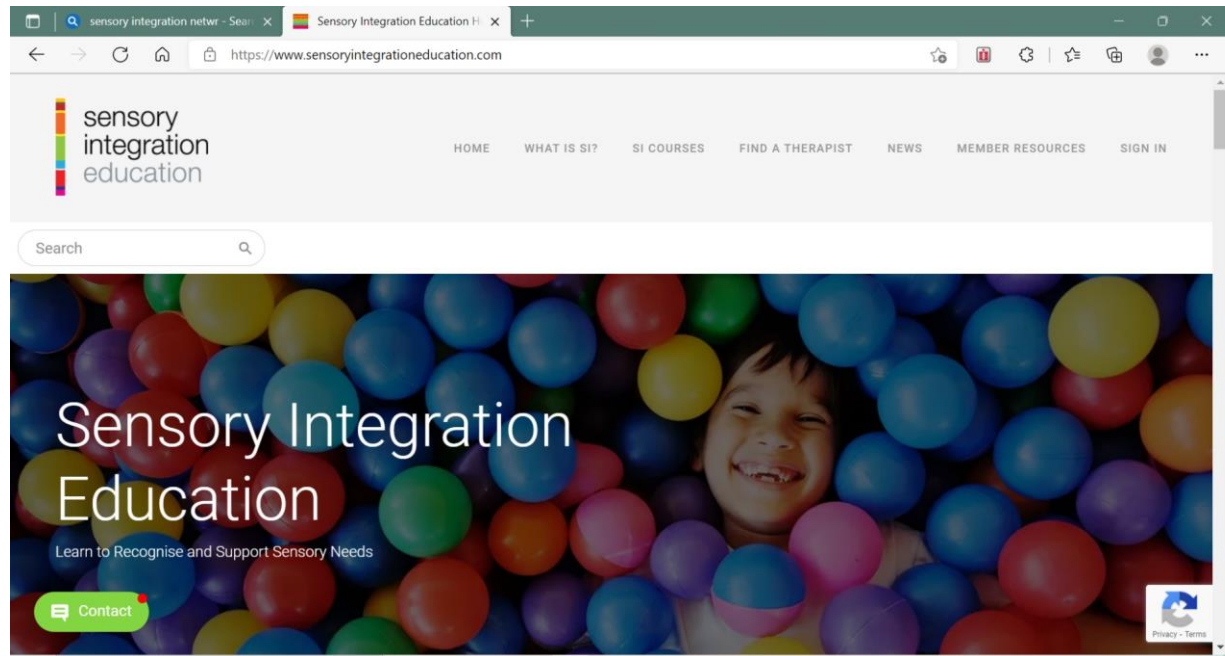
[Educating Different Kinds of Minds | Temple Grandin | TEDxCSU - YouTube](#)

[Temple Grandin: "The Autistic Brain" – YouTube](#)

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and HSE, For Schools

Introduction to Sensory Integration Difficulties (for Schools)

★★★★★ (11)

31 Units | £10.00

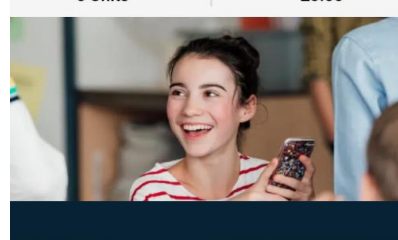


All Courses, For Parents and Carers, For Schools, Teenagers/Young Adults

Understanding Sensory Processing and Integration in Teenagers and Young Adults (for parents and carers)

★★★★★ (7)

5 Units | £5.00

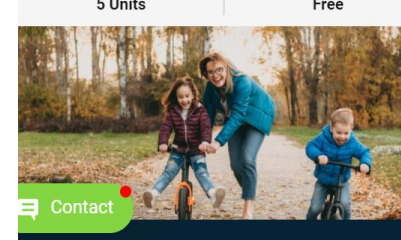


All Courses, For Parents and Carers, For Schools

Understanding Sensory Processing and Integration in Children (for Parents and Carers)

★★★★★ (38)

5 Units | Free



Contact

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Occupational Therapy support you can access without a referral

Occupational
Therapy webinars >



Occupational
Therapy resources >



Occupational
Therapy virtual
advice sessions >



Contact our Occupational Therapy team

01296 838000

Buc-tr.cyptherapies@nhs.net

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We really need your feedback!!!!

<https://bht.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/lo-occupational-therapy-webinar-feedback-v2>



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