

SENSORY TOOLKIT

A resource to help identify basic strategies to support children who experience sensory differences.



Developed by the Autism Spectrum Education Team and

St Luke's Primary School

In collaboration with North Lincolnshire Parents Involvement and Participation (PIP) forum and pilot schools.

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Background to the toolkit

We are all affected by a range of sensory experiences as part of everyday life. These help us understand and interpret our environment.

Our sensory experiences include sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste and our internal senses such as balance. Cognitive processes help us determine whether the experience was pleasurable or not; whether it is to be experienced again or avoided. Our mood levels and previous experiences also affect our sensory responses. We use our senses and our sensory experiences to interpret situations and protect ourselves e.g. moving back from a hot fire or repelling from an unpleasant smell.

Sensory experiences will be different in all people and through these we learn to understand ourselves. We will all seek out pleasurable sensory experiences and avoid those we do not like. We will use sensory techniques to help us stay alert, calm down or relax, seeking out behaviours to regulate and make us feel 'right'. However, there may be some sensory experiences which some of us find challenging and may cause distress. On the vast majority of occasions though we are able to regulate and manage our sensory differences.

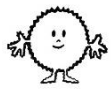
However, when we are unable to regulate our sensory experiences effectively then we may need support to understand how to achieve this. This is particularly true when an experience begins to intrude on our ability to function on a day to day basis, on our well-being, potential to achieve and ability to participate successfully in social situations.

This toolkit has been developed to help professionals and families try to understand a child's sensory needs and develop strategies to help support those needs. It has been developed from an educational viewpoint by a range of education professionals and piloted by primary and secondary schools in North Lincolnshire.

It is intended to be used as one of the tools available to schools and families to help identify a child's needs then put in place strategies to support those needs and maximise learning opportunities within the graduated approach to inclusion. Many of

the strategies included in this toolkit can be embedded into whole school and whole class approaches and strategies, helping the school become a 'sensory friendly' environment. Some of the strategies are more specific to the young person for use in a supportive inclusion plan.

An introduction to our senses

Sensory system	Location	Details
Vestibular (balance) 	inner ear	Provides information about where our body is in space and whether or not we or our surroundings are moving.
Tactile (touch) 	skin	Protective and discriminative functions. Tells us about pain, pressure, heat and provides information about the environment and object qualities.
Proprioception (body awareness) 	joints, muscles, ligaments, tendons	Provides information about body position. Gauges the force needed to do activities.
Olfactory (smell) 	nose	Provides information about different types of smell.
Gustatory (taste) 	tongue	Provides information about different types of taste.
Visual (sight) 	retina	Provides information about objects and people.
Auditory (hearing) 	inner ear	Provides information about sounds in the environment.
Interoception (state of internal organs) 	bladder, uterus, stomach	Provides information about the state of our internal organs that work on stretch.

We may be aware or subconsciously aware of where we are and how we interact with the environment.

Sometimes we seek out sensory information to make us feel better.

Or

Sometimes we retreat from certain types of sensory input if it makes us feel overwhelmed.

There may be children who have different reactions to sensory information but this does not interfere with their learning / daily life. Our individual likes and dislikes are what make us unique.

However, there are some children who have difficulty interpreting and managing sensory information and this can impact on how they feel, think, behave and respond. This can interfere with how they perform in play activities, at school, with self-care tasks, learning and relationships.

There may be a pattern of how a person reacts to sensory information. The framework for discussion will help identify any patterns and help plan to provide suitable strategies to enable to child to maximise both academic and social learning opportunities.

How to promote a sensory friendly school (general good practice)

**Taken from 'Sensory Processing Resource Pack: for schools Key stage 1-4'
developed by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Leicestershire County
Council, Leicester City Council and Rutland County Council and parent
representatives**

Developing a sensory friendly school Whole School Approach

The following provides information on general principles and strategies that support a whole school approach which are suitable for all children particularly those with sensory differences.

1. Advocate flexible teaching and learning i.e. taking account of auditory, kinaesthetic (including tactile) and visual learning styles.
2. Celebrate all learning whether within school or outside school so that children can excel in their own (sometimes narrow) interests.
3. Provide safe (quiet, comfortable) spaces in school for calming at all times. Difficulties can occur especially during playtimes, changes, and times of less routine (i.e. Christmas).
4. Ensure that all relevant information is passed to the next teacher and/or school. Encourage the next teacher to visit your classroom to observe the child in situ.
5. Whole school ethos promoting such activities as:
 - Brain Gym
 - Yoga
 - Motor control exercises
 - Multi-skills
 - Sensory circuits
6. Encourage extended out of hours activities (not always competitive)
 - i.e. Drama club
 - Football
 - Tai Kwando
 - Multi-skills
 - Dance
 - Music
7. Celebrate different recording/learning styles through school display, ICT, performances and tournaments.
8. Increase awareness of all staff to sensory difficulties. Ensure that all lunchtime staff understand the issues both during dinner breaks and in the playground.

General Classroom Strategies

1. Check that the class environment meets needs of different children.
 - a. Have an area (if possible) where there is less sensory stimulus so that they can work at times without distraction and they don't distract others.
 - b. Have an area where they can go and calm down. **These areas need to be separate from facilities used for isolation and exclusion.** They should be seen as places of safety.
 - c. Use of visuals e.g.
 - Clearly displayed timetables (visual and interactive if possible), capable of being changed on a day to day basis.
 - Clearly displayed keywords/Topic vocabulary.
 - Clearly labelled areas and resources.
 - Clearly labelled expectations/rules and objectives.
 - d. Ensure odours are as neutral as possible.
 - e. Try and keep the temperature neither too hot nor cold.
2. Consider splitting the lessons that involve a lot of sitting, for refocusing and calming through learning breaks.
3. Adapt lessons to take account of the social skills i.e.
 - Paired learning rather than a group
 - Staff modelling cooperative skills
 - Mix groups by social ability as well as learning styles.
4. Facilitate consistency in routines, rules and boundaries from all adults including supply teachers, lunchtime staff.
5. Plan transition times i.e.
 - Around class activities
 - Lesson to lesson (especially important in Secondary schools)
 - Playtime to classroom.
 - Children with sensory issues find change, crowds, noise and smells very difficult to cope with.
6. Have a range of resources at your disposal i.e.
 - a. Difference size/colour/shapes of writing implements.
 - b. Different methods of recording.
 - c. Fiddling aids (blue tac, bands, squidgy balls)
 - d. Different resources for calming, extension, withdrawing.
7. Don't assume what makes us feel safe/happy is the same for all i.e.
 - a. Some children may find creative play/art / cooking/ textiles really challenging (tactile defensiveness).
 - b. Eating can be difficult for some children with tactile or odour defensiveness.

- c. Crowded situations including lining up can be very difficult for children with sensory differences.
 - d. Playtimes are difficult for many children across a whole range of sensory issues.
 - e. PE, whilst very good for many children with sensory issues is also very difficult for them and may lead to them attempting to with-draw.
 - f. Art is a lovely activity, but can be very stressful for children who have motor control issues or who are visually or tactile defensive.
8. Ensure that you make opportunities available for friendships to flourish in the classroom, encourage paired working and or group working. Friendships develop in the classroom; the playground offers further opportunities to strengthen friendships but necessarily to foster them in the first instance.
 9. The child is very likely to require extra supervision to stay on task.
 10. Verbal instructions should be repeated. Ideally all instructions should be written so that they can be referenced as required. The use of symbols may be necessary if literacy levels are low.
 11. Ensure the temperature is neither too hot nor too cold.
 12. Ensure that the child is only required to write what is absolutely necessary, provide lesson notes rather than expect the child to copy from the board. Use alternative methods of recording, scribe / Dictaphone / computer.
 13. Allow sufficient breaks during the lesson to help refocus and to optimise learning opportunities.
 14. Offer incentives to speed up a desirable behaviour. If you finish (a) then you can do (b). This gives the child a goal to work towards, the work in itself may not have any intrinsic value for the child.
 15. After an incident has occurred allow the child sufficient time to calm down. When the child appears to be calm allow the child the opportunity to undo/or redo a given behaviour. This helps the child to understand that it is possible to retrieve a situation. Opportunities should be given to help the child to understand why things went wrong on this occasion and strategies should be offered to show how to do it differently next time.
 16. It may be useful to write a social story with the child. It is a simple method used to help a child understand what is expected of them in a given situation.

How to use the sensory toolkit

Recognition that a child's sensory needs / behaviours are different to what would be expected developmentally and are having a significant impact on learning and daily life



Someone who knows the child well (school and home) to go through the framework for discussion. Guidance can be sought from external agencies in the completion of this



Using the information gathered through the framework for discussion (and the user guide in the toolkit) build a sensory profile for the child. (See pro forma for recording)



Use the guidance (suggested strategies document) to identify appropriate strategies, activities and changes to the environment. Use the information to develop a sensory action plan for the young person



Review the impact of the plan on a regular basis (initially half termly, then termly)

Advice and training in the use of this toolkit is available from the following:

Emotional Health and Wellbeing and St Luke's Primary School
Email: nledpsychology@northlincs.gov.uk or
admin.stlukes@northlincs.gov.uk

How to build a sensory profile and action plan for the child

1. Summarise the information from the framework for discussion (appendix 1) and record it on the sensory profile (see appendix 2 for a **sensory profile** suggested pro-forma).
2. Using information from the sensory profile choose 3-4 priority areas to address. Using the suggested strategies document identify any environmental changes you can make, activities that you can build in for the young person and resources you can access. Use this information to build up a sensory action plan for the young person. (See appendix 3 for a **sensory action plan** suggested pro-forma).
Wherever possible and appropriate the child should be involved in this process.
3. Carry out the action plan, record the outcomes and review the plan on a regular basis (initially half termly).
Wherever possible and appropriate the child should be involved in this process.
4. A sensory one page profile can be created to be shared with all adults working with a child. Key information from the sensory profile and action plan can be added to the one page summary. Discuss with people who know the child well how to identify early signs of the child needing sensory input and add this information too (see appendix 4 for a suggested **sensory one page summary** pro-forma)
Wherever possible and appropriate the child should be involved in this process.

Useful resources

Sensory circuits: A sensory motor skills programme for children by Jane Horwood

'Sensory Processing Resource Pack: for schools Key stage 1-4' developed by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and Rutland County Council and parent representatives (online document)

'Sensory Processing Information Pack for Schools' developed by Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (online document)

'Sensory Processing Resource Pack: Early Years' developed by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum (online document)

'Sensory Processing Dysfunction, Occupational Therapy Pre-referral advice for schools' developed by Pennine Care NHS foundation Trust (online document)

Videos to illustrate sensory differences experienced by children:

<https://actforautism.co.uk/info/projects/>

Video of autistic students saying how it is for them in school. What helps and a focus on sensory

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr4_dOorquQ

NAS too much information

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0t2dRfWj648bfg1aVONrjioeb05GD8fm>

NAS video collection

Appendix 1 - Framework for discussion

Sensory differences: A framework for discussion

Child's name		DOB		Setting	
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Completed by					
Name		Relationship to child		Date	
Name		Relationship to child		Date	

The framework for discussion is designed to be used by people who know the child well (school and home). Children may present with different sensory behaviours in different environments so it's important to consider the responses over a range of environments. It's important to consider that children may be able to tolerate sensory input if they are in a highly motivating situation and general wellbeing can affect a person's ability to tolerate sensory information.

Please discuss the statements below, tick the box that best fits the child and add comments as appropriate.

Any sensory responses are to be considered in light of typical developmental patterns.

Sensory system - TACTILE (touch)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Distressed when is being, or needs to be, changed	1				
Reacts strongly to light touch or unexpected touch	2				
Appears fearful of, or avoids standing in close proximity to other people or peers (especially in lines)	3				
A raindrop, water from the shower, or wind blowing on the skin may produce adverse and avoidance reactions	4				
May overreact to minor cuts, scrapes etc.	5				
Avoids certain textures of material or avoids wearing new clothes	6				
Avoids/dislikes "messy play", i.e., sand, mud, water, glue, glitter, play dough, slime, shaving cream/funny foam etc. or needs to wash hands immediately/frequently	7				
Becomes distressed with personal hygiene action e.g. having face washed having hair, toenails, or fingernails cut	8				
Is a picky eater, only eating certain tastes and textures; mixed textures tend to be avoided as well as hot or cold foods; resists trying new foods	9				
Chooses to tip toe walk (tactile / proprioception)	10				
May seek out touch, needs to touch everything and everyone (esp. messy play / vibration or intense sensations)	11				

Sensory system - TACTILE (touch)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Is not aware of being touched/bumped unless done with extreme force or intensity and/or not bothered by injuries	12				
May not be aware that hands or face are dirty or feel his/her nose running	13				
May pinch or bite self or bang own head	14				
Thoroughly enjoys and seeks out messy play	15				
Has difficulty with fine motor tasks such as buttoning, zipping, and fastening clothes, difficulties using scissors, crayons or cutlery	16				
May not be able to identify which part of their body was touched if they were not looking	17				
Continues to mouth objects to explore them even after age two	18				
May not be able to identify objects by feel, uses vision to help; such as, reaching into backpack or desk to retrieve an item	19				
What touch experiences does the child enjoy / like?					

Sensory system - VESTIBULAR (balance)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Avoids/dislikes playground equipment; i.e., swings, ladders, slides, or roundabouts	1				
Prefers sedentary tasks, moves slowly and cautiously, avoids taking risks	2				
Avoids/dislikes lifts and escalators; may prefer sitting while they are on them or, actually get motion sickness from them	3				
Struggles with heights, even the height of a curb or step, including going up or down stairs or walking on uneven surfaces	4				
Avoids being upside down, sideways or backwards; will strongly resist getting hair washed over the sink	5				
Startles if someone else moves them; i.e. pushing his/her chair closer to the table	6				
May be fearful of, or have difficulty riding a bike, jumping, hopping, or balancing on one foot	7				
In constant motion, can't seem to sit still	8				
Seeks out fast, spinning, and/or intense movement experiences e.g. Always jumping on furniture or trampolines,	9				
Likes getting into upside down positions, loves to swing as high as possible and for long periods of time	10				
Likes sudden or quick movements, such as, going over a big bump in the car or on a bike	11				

Sensory system - VESTIBULAR (balance)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Frequently slumps, lies down, and/or leans head on hand or arm while working at his/her desk	12				
Poor gross motor skills; jumping, catching a ball, jumping jacks, climbing a ladder etc.	13				
Shows poor body awareness; bumps into things, knocks things over, trips, and/or appears clumsy	14				
Difficulty catching him / herself if falling	15				
Tires easily	16				
Often sits in a "W sit" position on the floor to stabilize body	17				
Difficulty simultaneously lifting head, arms, and legs off the floor while lying on stomach ("superman" position)	18				
Has difficulty licking an ice cream cone, drinking from a cup	19				
Seems to be unsure about how to move body during movement, for example, stepping over something	20				

Sensory system - PRIOPRIOCEPTION (body awareness)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Loves "rough and tumble"	1				
Loves/seekes out "squishing" activities, enjoys bear hugs and squeezing into small places	2				
Bites or sucks on fingers and/or frequently cracks his/her knuckles	3				
Prefers bedding and/or clothes to be as tight as possible	4				
Kicks his/her feet on floor or chair while sitting at desk/table	5				
Stomps feet when walking	6				
Seeks out jumping, bumping, and crashing activities	7				
Grinds his/her teeth throughout the day	8				
Loves pushing/pulling/dragging objects	9				
Chews on objects and clothing	10				

Sensory system - PRIOPRIOCEPTION (body awareness)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Seems to do everything with too much or too little force; i.e., walking, slamming doors, pressing things too hard, slamming objects down	11				
Misjudges how much to flex and extend muscles during tasks/activities (i.e. putting arms into sleeves or climbing or turning door handles)	12				
Misjudges the weight of an object, such as a glass of juice, picking it up with too much force sending it flying or spilling, or with too little force and complaining about objects being too heavy	13				
What proprioceptive experiences does the child enjoy / like?					

Sensory system - AUDITORY (hearing)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Distracted by sounds not normally noticed by others background environmental sounds; i.e. humming of lights or refrigerators, fans, heaters, or clocks ticking, lawn mowing, outside building work, sirens.	1				
Fearful of some sounds	2				
Startles easily or distracted by loud or unexpected sounds	3				
Frequently asks people to be quiet; i.e. stop making noise, talking, or singing	4				
May refuse to go to noisy places	5				
May struggle to tolerate certain pitches / tones of voice / accents	6				
Talks self through a task, often out loud	7				
Appears confused about where a sound is coming from	8				
Appears oblivious to certain sounds	9				
Loves excessively loud music or TV	10				
Displays a need to make own background noise / sounds in some environments	11				

Sensory system - AUDITORY (hearing)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Often does not respond to verbal cues or to name being called	12				
What auditory experiences does the child enjoy / like?					

Sensory system - ORAL		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Has difficulty with sucking, chewing, and swallowing; may choke or have a fear of choking	1				
Will only eat foods at extremes of temperature i.e. very hot or cold foods	2				
Refuses to lick envelopes, stamps, or stickers because of their taste	3				
Dislikes or complains about toothpaste and mouthwash	4				
Avoids seasoned, spicy, sweet, sour or salty foods; prefers bland foods	5				
May lick, taste, or chew on inedible objects, or seeks vibration objects near mouth	6				
Prefers foods with intense flavour; i.e., excessively spicy, sweet, sour, or salty	7				
Excessive drooling past the teething stage	8				
What taste/texture/sensation experiences does the child enjoy / like?					

Sensory system - OLFACTORY (smell)		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Refuses to eat certain foods because of their smell	1				
Tells other people (or talks about) how bad or funny they smell	2				
Reacts negatively to, or dislikes smells which do not get noticed by other people, e.g. perfume or aftershave, household or cooking smells, or personal hygiene smells	3				
Decides whether he/she likes someone or some place by the way it smells	4				
Has difficulty discriminating odours or does not notice odours that others usually complain about	5				
Makes excessive use of smelling when introduced to objects, people, or places i.e. uses smell to interact with objects	6				
What smell experiences does the child enjoy / like?					

Sensory system - VISUAL		Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Comment / notes
Sensitive to bright lights and colours; will squint, cover eyes, cry and/or get headaches from the light	1				
Easily distracted by other visual stimuli in the room; i.e., movement, decorations, toys, windows, doorways etc.	2				
Prefers to use peripheral vision	3				
Seeks out dark spaces	4				
Has difficulty in bright colourful rooms or a dimly lit room	5				
Has difficulty telling the difference between similar printed letters or figures; i.e., p & q, b & d, + and x, or square and rectangle	6				
Has difficulty locating items among other items; i.e. papers on a desk, clothes in a drawer, items on a shelf, or toys in a box, differences in pictures, words, symbols, or objects	7				
Often loses place when working especially if copying from a book or the board	8				
Has difficulty telling the difference between different colours, shapes, and sizes	9				
Difficulty with jigsaw puzzles, copying shapes, and/or cutting/tracing along a line	10				

Appendix 2 - Sensory profile

Auditory (hearing)		
Oral		
Olfactory (smell)		
Visual		

Choose 3-4 priority challenges to address. Taking into account the child's sensory preferences, use the suggested strategies document to identify any modifications to the environment, strategies to use and activities to build into the child's day to help meet the child's sensory needs.

Appendix 3 - Sensory action plan

Changes to the environment:

Movement (see vestibular and proprioception sections)	Pressure & Touch (see proprioception and tactile sections)	Heavy work (see proprioception section)	Oral motor	Retreat
Alert and organise mind and body but can over alert. To avoid over alerting follow up with Pressure or Heavy work activities.	Calm and settle the child's nervous system and behaviour. Use as a get ready, regrouping, or transition strategy. Often used after Motion strategies.	Involve muscle effort. The effort and resistance activities of push, pull and pressure are calming and the motion is alerting.	Both alert and calm the child, helping to organise the mind and body. They also help the child to listen and focus.	Calm the sensory sensitive child by reducing the sensory overload. The activities help create a quieter, less overwhelming environment.
Suggested daily input	Suggested daily input	Suggested daily input	Suggested daily input	Suggested daily input
Activity options	Activity options	Activity options	Activity options	Activity options

Note: not all of the columns may be needed and some can be taken out.

It is suggested that formal sensory breaks last at least 10-15 minutes.

Appendix 4 - One page sensory summary

