

# Touch Primary School



Sensory Behaviour Toolkit

## What is in this toolkit?



This toolkit provides a range of suggested supports to help children with Sensory Behaviours while learning at home. The toolkit can be used for reference and covers supporting learning at home. If you have any further questions, please get in touch with the Touch Support for Learning Team.

### Understanding Sensory Issues

Life is full of sensory experiences. We all respond to sensory information through touch, movement, sight, hearing, taste and smell. We are aware of where we are and how we interact with the environment. When we interpret sensory information with ease, it impacts on our behaviour at a subconscious level.

Sometimes we seek sensory information to make us feel better (e.g. a hug). Sometimes we retreat from sensory information if it makes us feel overwhelmed (e.g. very loud noises).

It is important to recognise that difficulties interpreting sensory information can have an impact on how we feel, how we think and how we behave or respond. We constantly make responses to sensory input from within our bodies (internal) and from the environment (external).



## Reading the Signs

Becoming a detective to identify if there is a pattern showing how sensory information is reacted to, may help you plan for any inappropriate reactions. This may allow you to provide strategies to help someone regulate the amount of sensory information they need, in order to respond as appropriately as they can.

<b>Hearing</b>	
Highly Sensitive	Low Sensitivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• noise levels feel magnified</li><li>• dislikes like loud noise</li><li>• is easily startled</li><li>• likes to 'chew' to damp down noises</li><li>• is anxious before expected noise (school bell)</li><li>• talks loudly</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• enjoys loud noise</li><li>• fails to pick up expected cues.</li></ul>

<b>Vision</b>	
Overly sensitive vision	Not sensitive enough or under-sensitive vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dislikes bright lighting</li><li>• prefers dark environment</li><li>• is distracted by visual information</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• takes more visual information to react</li><li>• likes bright environment, reflective or spinning light</li></ul>

## Smell/Taste

### Overly sensitive

- dislikes strong tastes
- likes only bland tastes
- tastes or smells objects, clothes etc
- smells people
- likes consistent temperature of food or really cold or really hot
- over-reacts to new smells
- gags easily

### Not sensitive enough or under-sensitive

- eats non-food items
- has lots of hard, crunchy food in diet
- craves strong tastes
- under-reacts to strong, bad or good smell

## Touch

### Overly sensitive

- fussy
- avoids
- loves or hates hugs
- mouths objects
- only likes certain textures, clothes
- dislikes or really likes messy play
- can react aggressively to another's touch
- feels pain and is very sensitive to temperature

### Not sensitive enough or under-sensitive

- takes firm touch to respond to stimulus.
- is sometimes heavy handed
- over-grips objects
- is sometimes too close to others
- has difficulty responding to pain/temperature

How we process touch has a huge impact on how we feel. The same sensation causes a different reaction depending on how we feel. If a young person is constantly reacting to touch it can be difficult to focus on a task or activity.

The five senses are well known but there are two other senses that help us make sense of all the information we receive. These are our sense of movement and body awareness.

<b>Movement</b>	
Overly sensitive	Not sensitive enough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hates spinning, jumping</li> <li>• becomes dizzy easily or not at all</li> <li>• hates a busy place full of movement</li> <li>• avoids feet off ground (e.g. avoids swings.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is always on the go</li> <li>• has difficulty sitting still</li> <li>• is constantly fidgeting/tapping</li> <li>• runs rather than walks</li> <li>• takes risks</li> <li>• is fast but not always well co-ordinated</li> </ul>

<b>Body Awareness</b>	
Overly sensitive	Not sensitive enough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• doesn't like others being too close</li> <li>• creates own boundaries, sometimes inappropriately e.g. young person may always need to go at the end of the school line</li> <li>• removes self from crowds (e.g. crowded shops/busy queues)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bumps into or trips over things/people</li> <li>• stands close to others</li> <li>• puts self in too small spaces or pushes against corners of the room</li> <li>• looks at feet when going down the stairs</li> </ul>



## **Advice/Strategies for Parents and Carers**

### **Calming Strategies**

When the young person is over-stimulated and feeling anxious these activities/strategies may help them feel calmer.

#### **Quick fix**

- Sitting under a big, heavy blanket.
- Hands on head and pressing down.
- Tucking legs up and squeezing.
- Deep pressure massage.
- Slow rocking e.g. rocking chair.
- Giving themselves a hug or receiving a bear hug.
- Lavender scents.
- Squeezing and relaxing a small fidget toy. .
- Snuggling into a small space.
- Sucking yoghurt/thick milkshake through straw.

#### **Longer Lasting Ideas**

Long term routine calming activities may be part of the day.

- Walk after coming home from school (with backpack on).
- Allow chill out time, prior to homework in a daily routine.
- Help with heavy manual tasks in the home or garden e.g. digging, hoovering or moving furniture.
- Put on a heavy coat or heavy blanket over the shoulders as part of chill out time.
- Have a corner with favourite sensory activities to go to at any time.

## Alerting Strategies

When the young person is not alert enough to pay attention to a task, these activities/strategies may help.

### **Quick fix**

- Up/down movements, jogging/running, fast movement (for short periods only).
- Jumping, jumping jacks.
- Clapping activities.
- Making faces e.g. open mouth wide.
- Stamping on spot.
- Sucking sour sweet.
- Eating crunchy food.
- Drinking cold drinks

### **Longer lasting ideas**

- Regular routine of jumping/chair push ups.
- Timetable the 'Quick Fix' that works into regular routine, immediately before the young person must pay attention to a task.



## Sensory Strategies for Personal Care

### DAILY CARE ACTIVITIES

Sensory sensitivity can lead to difficulties with young people being independent in daily life skills. The following strategies may help in personal tasks.

#### **Dressing**

- Use comfortable clothes, consider type of fabric and length of sleeves.
- If the young person cannot tolerate labels, cut them out.
- If the young person cannot tolerate seams, undergarments can be worn to reduce friction.
- Try washing and drying clothes in unscented products.
- Dressing can be done in front of a mirror so as to provide visual cues to assist with sequencing, motor planning and body awareness.

#### **Personal Hygiene**

- Use non-perfumed soap.
- Be aware of bathroom lighting levels and minimise any noises, e.g. run the bath prior to entering the bathroom.
- Use pressure when shampooing or drying with a towel.
- Before bath time, do activities that provide deep touch input, e.g. rest your hands on your young person's shoulders and apply moderate pressure.
- Make the transition from undressing and getting into the bath as quick and smooth as possible.
- If the young person dislikes having his face or body washed, encourage him to wash himself.



- Use a large sponge or loofah sponge. Rub firmly to decrease defensiveness.
- If the young person is showering, use a hand held shower nozzle. Let the young person control the direction and force of the water.
- Use a large towel, and quickly and firmly wrap the young person in it. Avoid exposure of the wet skin to the air as the light touch may trigger a defensive reaction.

## General

Some non-sensory strategies can also help:

- Where the choice is available, allow your young person to choose a bath or a shower.
- Try to incorporate bathing into a play activity. e.g. use floating toys and bubbles and/or coloured floating soap.
- Talk to your young person and explain every step, particularly when you are going to touch them with soap or a towel.
- Visual aids can be used in order to help your young person understand the activity.



## **Haircare**

- Place your hands on top of your young person's head and exert gentle but constant pressure down.
- Use a firm stroke or pressure as you comb or wash your young person's hair.
- Count or have the young person count as you comb, wash or rinse the hair.
- Give definite time limits to the task e.g. let's count to 10, then we will stop, provide deep pressure immediately after.
- Break the task into small steps. Practise each step in isolation in a stress-free environment. Gradually combine these steps and perform the task in the natural environment.

## **Toileting**

The young person may be sensitive to toilet tissue, try using moist toilet roll.

- Consider visual and auditory stimulation around and keep it to a minimum., turn off loud fans etc.
- The young person may not like how the toilet seat feels.
- The young person may feel unsafe with their feet off the ground and sitting (consider small padded seat insert and stepping stool).

## Eating Strategies

Many young people with sensory sensitivities have eating and drinking difficulties. Difficulties can be chewing or can present as behavioural issues e.g. biting, grinding teeth. Difficulties can range from very restricted diet (due to taste or dislike of how it feels/habit) to mouthing objects (food and non-food).

Some food or drinks make us feel calm, others make us more awake. Everybody is different but you and your young person will know what is relevant to you. Use this information to plan a calmer mealtime.

### EXPERIENCING TASTE AND TEXTURES

Food can be an easy way to give sensory experiences to the mouth. Cold food can be useful to 'wake up' your mouth before you eat something else.

<b>Cold (to wake up)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ice poles.</li><li>• Fruit juice frozen in ice cubes.</li><li>• Frozen grapes.</li><li>• Frozen bananas,</li><li>• Ice drinks</li></ul>	<b>SUCKING AND BLOWING</b> <p>Sucking and blowing during play can help 'work out' the muscles in the mouth and gives positive experiences not connected to eating).</p>
<b>Chewy (to organise/calm)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hard cheese or string cheese.</li><li>• Cereal bars.</li><li>• Dried fruit.</li><li>• Chewy sweets e.g. gummy bears, toffee bars.</li><li>• Chewing gum.</li><li>• Bagels.</li></ul>	<b>Sucking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using longer, curly, thinner straws or bundles of straws.</li><li>• Use a straw to drink yoghurt/fruit puree.</li><li>• Use a straw to drink fruit smoothies.</li><li>• Sucking frozen fruit or ice cubes.</li><li>• Lollipops/hard sweets.</li><li>• Water bottles with 'sports tops'.</li></ul>

<p><b>Crunchy food (to alert)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raw vegetables.</li> <li>• Fruit e.g. apples.</li> <li>• Bread sticks.</li> <li>• Crisps.</li> <li>• Dry cereal.</li> <li>• Nuts.</li> <li>• Crackers.</li> <li>• Popcorn.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Blowing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blowing bubbles using a straw in a cup/bowl.</li> <li>• Blowing bubbles in drinks.</li> <li>• Blowing bubbles.</li> <li>• Musical instruments.</li> <li>• With straw or mouth, blow football using cotton wool balls, paper or feathers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Spicy food (to alert)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hot salsa.</li> <li>• Cinnamon cereal.</li> <li>• Curries.</li> <li>• Chilli or Mexican food.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tugging, biting, pulling, teeth grinding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liquorice.</li> <li>• Straws.</li> <li>• Chewy toys designed to improve jaw strength.</li> <li>• Toffee bars.</li> <li>• Water bottles with 'sports tops'</li> </ul>



## **General Calming Strategies**

Anxious behaviour with a sensory basis is like any other anxious, sensitive response. Here are some calming suggestions.

### **Routines**

Making a list or organising a specific routine always helps to make us feel calmer. In particular, after school or bedtime routines will help to calm. Include one or two of the calming quick fixes in the routine.

### **Visual Supports**

When the young person cannot focus, a visual timetable or written list of what to do may help as a reference.

### **Environmental Checklist**

Try to consider the young person's environment and what could be done to reduce possible stress triggers and increase positive experiences. Links to social experiences, such as clubs, through online calling etc can promote positive experiences for young people.

### **Challenging Environments**

The young person may be stimulated positively or negatively just by the environment around them. For all of us the light can be too bright, the room too noisy, the glare of the sun too dazzling, affecting how we feel.

### **Inside the home**

Developing a routine and a consistent way of doing things is very helpful and can reduce the impact of over-reacting. Organisation can give the young person a sense of control over how they plan their day.

## **Sensory**

- Provide a place where the young person can take themselves for time out, for example a small tent or quiet corner. Young people affected by sensory sensitivity often find dark and enclosed spaces calming.
- Avoid visual and auditory stimulation that is not necessary.
- If the young person has a positive response to movement try a rocking horse or chair swing.
- Give your young person "heavy" tasks around the house, for example carrying the shopping, arranging tins on shelves. This may have a calming and organising effect.

## **General**

- Minimise clutter.
- Sharing a bedroom with a sibling can be difficult. Clear boundaries may be helpful as can a 'timetable' for time in the bedroom for each young person.
- Try to structure the young person's time and consider introducing an 'activity schedule' to reduce anxiety.

**The following pieces of equipment can help the young person to have sensory experiences: -**

- Swing, therapy balls, mini-trampoline or space hoppers for movement.
- Sand and water pits for tactile experiences.
- Playhouse or tent to provide a safe and calming area.
- Small sheds in the garden to give a less distracting environment.

## Garden Creativity

The garden can provide positive experiences for a young person, it can promote calm times, even just time to 'let off steam'. Some of the following may be helpful to consider.

- Creating sensory areas - small, safe, hidden areas or use of garden sheds with suitable toys can create a calming experience.
- Large climbing frames, trampolines, chutes and swings may give the young person the experiences of movement they need.
- The dislikes, likes, motivations and pleasures can be carefully reviewed to give a unique experience which a young person can have in their garden environment which is vital to family life and support at home.
- Night lighting, gazebos and sheds allow the experiences not to be curtailed by weather or the dark.
- Small water features can be extremely calming or give something to distract when things are difficult for a young person. Likewise, small wind chimes, musical chimes, light reflector toys or spinning toys may be both aesthetic and enjoyable.

The garden may be an area where, as a family, a shared experience with a young person can take place or it can simply be pleasurable for the rest of the family as a calm, quiet area.

