



# PARENT TOOLKIT

## *Sensory Processing Differences*



Sensory processing differences affect how a child interprets and responds to sensory information — such as sound, touch, movement, taste, smell, or visual input. Children may be **sensory seekers**, **sensory avoiders**, or a mix of both depending on the situation.

This toolkit offers strategies to help your child feel regulated, comfortable, and understood.

### Understanding Sensory Processing

Children may experience:

- **Over-responsivity** (sensory avoidance): overwhelmed by sounds, light, touch, crowds, or movement.
- **Under-responsivity** (sensory seeking): craving movement, pressure, noise, or strong sensations.
- **Sensory discrimination difficulties**: trouble identifying where a sound comes from, or how much force to use.
- **Mixed patterns**: e.g., avoiding noise but seeking movement.

Sensory differences are common in children with autism, ADHD, developmental coordination difficulties, trauma histories, and anxiety — but can also occur on their own.

## **General Sensory Support Strategies**

### **Create predictable, low-stress routines**

Reduce uncertainty and transitions, which can overwhelm sensory systems.

### **Offer choices to increase control**

Giving agency reduces anxiety caused by sensory unpredictability.

### **Reduce sensory load**

Dim lights, turn down background noise, or choose quieter spaces where possible.

### **Pre-warn before sensory events**

“After this game, the hand dryer might be loud. Let’s use paper towels instead.”

### **Provide a “safe retreat”**

A calm area at home (tent, corner, beanbag) helps the child regulate independently.

## **Strategies for Sensory Avoiding (Over-Responsive Children)**

Your child may be sensitive to sound, touch, taste, movement, or visual clutter

### **Sound Sensitivity**

- Use noise-reducing headphones.
- Choose quiet times for busy places.
- Prepare the child ahead of loud events.

### **Touch Sensitivity**

- Remove clothing labels / choose soft fabrics.
- Introduce new textures gradually (e.g., messy play with tools first)

### **Visual Sensitivity**

- Reduce clutter and use soft lighting.
- Limit bright screens and fast-moving visuals.

### **Movement Sensitivity**

- Build confidence with slow, controlled movement (rocking, gentle swings).
- Allow stepping back during busy physical games

### **Taste/Smell Sensitivity**

- Offer “safe foods” alongside new ones — avoid pressure.
- Keep strong-smelling products (cleaners, perfumes) low.

## **Strategies for Sensory Seeking (Under-Responsive Children)**

A sensory-seeking child may constantly move, jump, touch things, or seek intense input.

### **Movement Seeking**

- Provide jumping, climbing, trampolines, swings.
- Use heavy work (carrying items, pushing a vacuum, wall pushes).

### **Touch Seeking**

- Use fidget toys, textured objects, weighted blankets (with guidance).
- Provide deep-pressure play — bear hugs, rolling in a blanket.

### **Oral Seeking**

- Offer chewing tools, crunchy snacks, straws, or chewable jewellery.

### **Visual Seeking**

- Use visual toys (spinners, bubble lamps) within limits.
- Provide calm-down visuals like slow-moving lights.

### **Noise Seeking**

- Offer musical toys, rhythm games.
- Build in time for loud play followed by calm play.

## **Supporting Transitions & Daily Routines**

Children with sensory differences often struggle with stopping and starting activities.

- Use visual countdowns (5–4–3–2–1).
- Give advance notice before transitions.
- Use visual schedules for morning/bedtime routines.
- Build sensory breaks into the day (movement, deep pressure, quiet time).
- Keep clothing/shoe choices sensory-friendly.

## **Emotional Regulation & Sensory Needs**

Sensory overload can trigger strong emotions. Help by:

- Teaching the child to recognise early signs of overwhelm.
- Using co-regulation — calm voice, slow breath, grounding.
- Keeping “calm kits” with sensory tools.
- Allowing quiet recovery time after busy environments.

Validation is key:

“It’s okay that the noise felt too much. Let’s take a break.”

## **Tools & Supports That Help**

- Weighted or compression items (under professional guidance)
- Fidget toys or sensory toolkits
- Visual schedules and timers
- Ear defenders or noise-reduction tools
- Chewing tools or oral sensory items

- Calm corners or sensory tents
- Apps for emotion and sensory regulation
- Heavy-work tasks built into daily routines

## **Working With School**

Schools can support by:

- Offering sensory breaks or movement breaks
- Providing a quiet space for regulation
- Adjusting seating or lighting
- Allowing ear defenders in noisy environments
- Using sensory strategies in lessons (e.g., multisensory learning)
- Reducing overwhelm during transitions (corridor movement, assemblies)

## **Supporting Yourself as a Parent**

- Sensory needs can be unpredictable — it's not your fault.
- Take breaks when you can; sensory demands affect the whole family.
- Seek connection with other parents for reassurance and shared wisdom.
- Celebrate your child's strengths — creativity, resilience, passion, deep focus.

Sensory processing differences are not bad behaviour — they are a **neurological response to the world**. With understanding, the right support, and sensory-aware strategies, your child can feel safe, engaged, and confident. Your patience and attunement make a powerful difference.