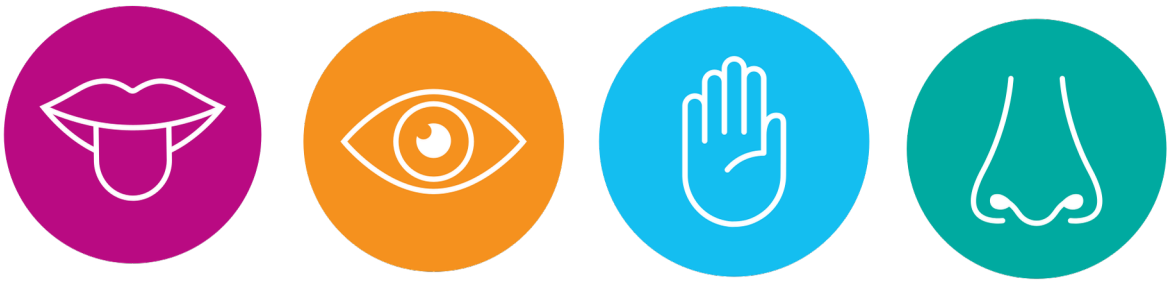
NHS
Black Country Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Dudley Sensory Toolkit for Schools

Contents



Introduction to the toolkit

Who is this toolkit for?

The toolkit has been designed for teachers, teaching assistants and support workers in pre-school and primary school settings who work with children v are showing signs of sensory processing differences, where this is impacting upon their participation in pre-school or school activities.

What is the purpose of the toolkit?

To help pre-school and primary school settings identify possible sensory processing differences and be able to implement strategies within their setting. This is not intended to be a diagnostic or assessment tool, instead it should be used to enable education settings to consider environmental and behavioural factors which may have a sensory basis. The toolkit will provide strategies for settings to try in order to reduce the impact of potential sens differences on a child's learning, provide ideas to adapt the environment or modify tasks. This is intended to be used as part of a graduated approach.

What is sensory processing?

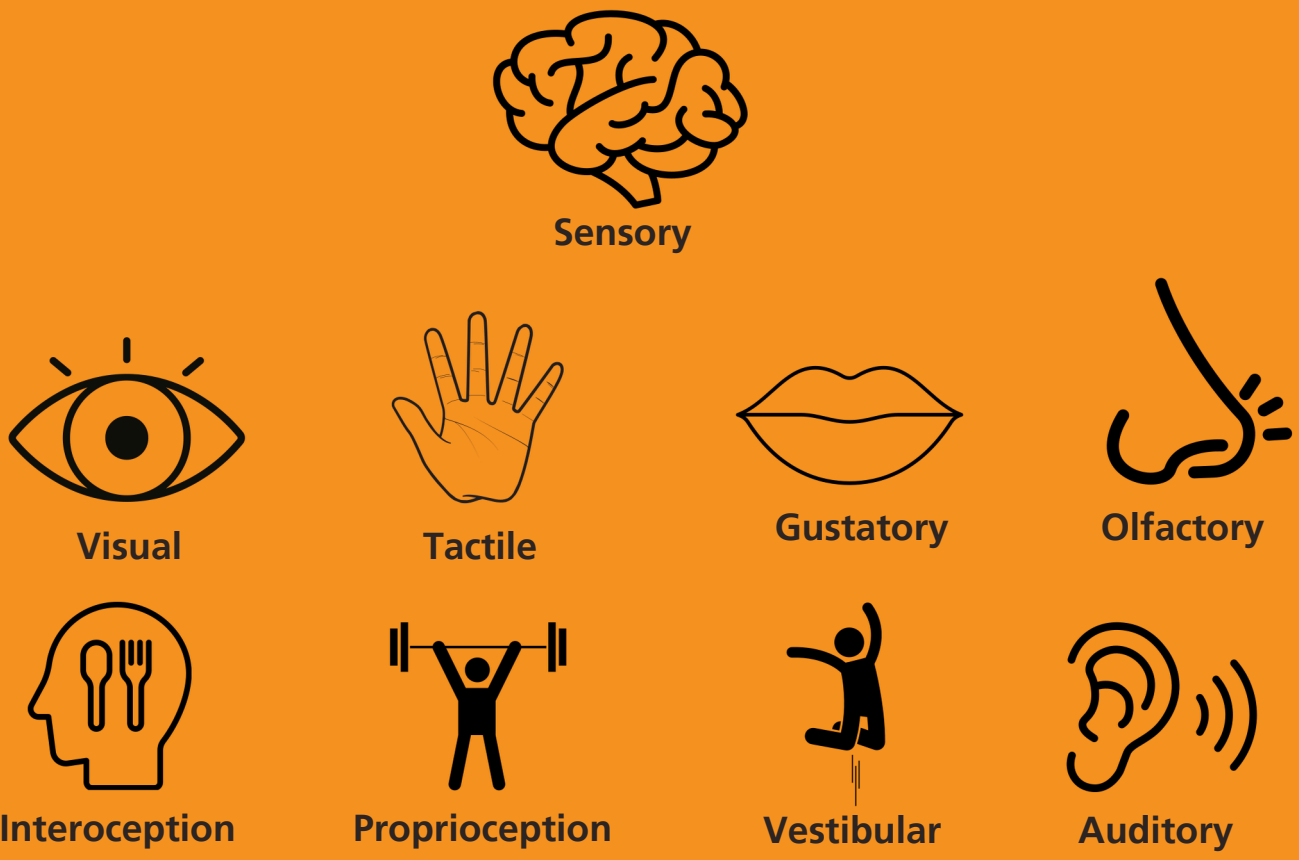
Sensory processing is how we take in, process and respond to the information we receive from our bodies and the world around us. When our brain receives this information it organises the sensations for use i.e. it will filter out any information it does not need and acts on the information it does need. This means that we can adapt to our environment and engage in everyday activities. Our sensory systems therefore play an important role in our ability to engage in the world around us and participate in everyday activities.

Reaction (output)

Information from our senses (input)

Motor skills
Social skills
Attention
Learning
Emotions
Self-regulation
Self-esteem

Each sensory system has its own unique role and together they inform our brain how to react and interact with our environment. This process helps us to maintain a sense of position, level of alertness in different surroundings and our ability to move. Some people find the information that they receive through their senses challenging. Things like hearing, touch, vision, taste and smell are our commonly known senses. In addition to these, there are three other less known senses that also play a big part in how our bodies engage and respond to the world around us. These are proprioception, a sense of body awareness; vestibular, which involves movement, balance and coordination; and interoception, which helps you understand and feel what's going on inside your body i.e. when you are hungry or you need the toilet.



We all have differences in the way we process sensory information and everybody experiences the world around them in different ways. Sometimes how your brain understands information from your senses can make it difficult to join in with everyday activities. Some people will receive too much information from their senses and some people won't receive enough. It is important to recognise that some people will have sensory processing differences but they do not impact on their ability to engage or participate in daily life. However, for some, their sensory processing differences will significantly impact upon their ability to engage in learning and everyday life.

Difficulties can occur with a single sensory system or with many sensory systems. When the sensory systems don't work together effectively we may see difficulties with attention, learning, understanding the intentions of others, over/under reacting to situations or unusually high or low activity levels.

It is important to consider that the way children behave or react isn't always because of a sensory issue; there can be a multitude of different reasons such as anxiety, illness, tiredness, hunger, stress, motivation, their preferences or a need for structure/routine. Use this tool to think beyond just sensory and consider the child's needs holistically.

Use behavioural strategies to support the child i.e. consistent modelling and repetition, use of social stories, visuals to help clearly communicate expected behaviours or to help prepare them for a situation they may be unsure about. Think about what the purpose of the behaviour that they are demonstrating may be: what happens in the run up to the behaviour, what happens during, what happens after?

Sensory processing and additional needs

Sensory processing difficulties are not a diagnosis in their own right and can occur without any other formal diagnosis being present. However, there is a higher incidence of sensory processing differences in people with additional needs such as autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Down's Syndrome and Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD). Additional risk factors for sensory processing differences also include prenatal complications and premature birth.

Currently, there is no formal diagnostic label or criteria for sensory processing disorders, meaning you cannot receive a formal diagnosis of Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) in the UK. However, some people will use the term SPD to describe sensory processing difficulties that have a significant impact on a person's ability to manage their day to day life.

It is important to note that there are certain sensory behaviours that are part of the diagnostic criteria for autism; research suggests that between 65-90% of children with autism demonstrate differences in how they process sensory information.

Although researchers are still trying to agree on the exact rates of different types of sensory processing problems in different groups of people, it is generally believed that people with a diagnosis of autism, people with genetic syndromes and/or intellectual disability are more likely to experience sensory processing difficulties.

Sensory processing and anxiety

Anxiety can also impact upon how people respond to sensory experiences. The anxiety may be in relation to something else but manifests itself in a sensory seeking or avoiding behaviour or the anxiety may have developed as a response to a sensory need. Often when we are anxious, stressed or worried we can find it harder to cope with sensations that on a good day we may not notice or cope with just fine. Worrying about sensory experiences can lead to hypervigilance or avoidance behaviours which can be another challenge to manage.

Sensory processing and development

You should also consider the child's developmental level when thinking about sensory processing. For example, it would be usual for a younger child to put things in their mouth; this is a normal part of development and enables the child to explore texture, size and shape. For a child who is older but has a developmental delay, this may be an appropriate behaviour for them to be exhibiting if in line with their overall learning level. In this situation, the adult should allow them to mouth objects to support their development but encourage them to do this safely and ensure it does not prevent them from accessing other learning opportunities.

What is the process for using this toolkit?

- Complete the environmental audit tool
- Implement for 6-8 weeks
- Review

Child needs further support

Issues are manageable - child is engaged in learning. Continue with successful strategies.

Complete the sensory screening questionnaire.
Devise a plan based on strategies in the toolkit.
Implement for 6-8 weeks.
Review

Access the training, advice and resources as recommended in the resources and strategies section.

Child is still experiencing significant difficulties and requires further support.

Issues are manageable - child is engaged in learning. Continue with successful strategies.

Access specialist support

Stage 1: Initial Environmental Audit

Stage 1 - Initial Environmental Audit

Complete this audit first to assess the current situation and identify some basic strategies that can be easily implemented.

If they are able to, discuss with the child what they find challenging and what they think might help.

These strategies should then be implemented for at least 6-8 weeks and then be reviewed.

For children with low level sensory processing needs this should be sufficient.

Dudley Sensory Toolkit for Schools
Stage 1 - Initial environmental audit

Child's name:

Complete this audit first to assess the current situation and identify some basic strategies that can be easily implemented. If they are able to, discuss with the child what they find challenging and what they think might help. These strategies should then be implemented for at least 6-8 weeks and then be reviewed. For children with low level sensory processing needs this should be sufficient.

Good practice environmental alterations/ considerations	Current situation & observations	Action plan
Tactile (touch)		
Consideration is given to where the child is positioned to reduce sensations they find uncomfortable/ painful/ anxiety provoking: • The child can stand at the front/back of lines to reduce risk of bumping • Seating position in class, assembly, dining hall is adjusted to avoid sitting in areas where other children regular pass through and they may get bumped		
There can be some flexibility in the uniform policy so that the child can wear a variation of their uniform which isn't uncomfortable and distracts them from their work		

Good practice environmental alterations/ considerations	Current situation & observations	Action plan
Auditory (noise)		
Consideration is given to where the child is positioned so that they are not sat in the noisiest place in the classroom i.e. by the door or the windows		
Sounds emitted by classroom equipment are kept to a minimum: • Turn off equipment that is not required • Ensure child is not sat next to equipment that emits a background noise/hum		
Where possible the child is warned about loud noises such as the school bell in advance		
Consider the environment itself: • Is the classroom carpeted or are there mats/carpet squares available to muffle noise • In more open spaces, are there ways to adjust acoustics to reduce echo		
There is a strategy in place for the child if they become overwhelmed by the noise: • There is a system in place for the child to alert staff that they feel overwhelmed • There is a quiet room or space that is available to the child that they can access to calm down and self regulate • If the child needs to complete focussed work and is struggling- is there a quieter space they could access for focus		
The child has access to ear defenders or headphones for when they are moving around busy corridors or spaces		

Good practice environmental alterations/ considerations	Current situation & observations	Action plan
Visual		
Consideration is given to the lighting in the classroom: • Flickering lights are turned off and changed as soon as possible • If overhead lights are not needed in the classroom they are turned off • Staff are aware of where light is coming into the room e.g. sun shining through windows, how light dapples through any blinds, reflections off shiny materials, where the child is positioned in relation to this and how this may be a distraction		
Consideration is given to how visual information is presented in the environment: • Wall displays- for some these may be visually appealing but for others these will be overwhelming and distracting • The child works at a desk or has access to a workstation where visual distractions are kept to a minimum • The child avoids sitting facing a window or the doorway-they may be distracted every time someone walks past/there is movement in their field of vision • Operate a clear desk policy so the child's attention is focused on the task they need to do • The classroom is organised so that there are designated areas for specific activities		

Good practice environmental alterations/ considerations	Current situation & observations	Action plan
Smell		
Distracting smells within class are kept to a minimum where possible: • Avoid sitting the child in close proximity to the bin, the toilets etc. • Try to keep the smell of paints, glue, cleaning fluids to a minimum • Staff are aware that the smells of others may be distracting or distressing e.g. strong perfumes or deoderants		
Distracting/distressing smells outside of the classroom are addressed/reduced where possible: • Allow for alternative toileting arrangments if child struggles with the smell of pupil toilets (i.e. disabled toilet or care room) • Be aware of the dining hall/cafeteria smells which may be distressing-can seating position be considered		

Good practice environmental alterations/ considerations	Current situation & observations	Action plan
General sensory issues		
The child is happy to move around the school environment: • Child could leave class first/slightly earlier to avoid busier times in the corridor		
The child has a trusted adult to raise any concerns with		
Dinner hall does not cause undue distress (noise, smell, crowd): • Can the pupil enter before or after other pupils to reduce effects of queuing/crowds • Is there an adult who can offer support • If they cannot cope in the environment is there an alternative where they can go to eat their lunch with a couple of friends		
There is a support plan in school for children who are struggling with sensory overload in school: • There is a system in place for the child to alert adults that they are struggling • There is a designated areas that they can access if they are overloaded and need to calm down • There is an opportunity for them to access a learning or movement break so that they can regulate their responses and refocus		

Stage 2: Sensory Screening Questionnaire

Stage 2

Stage 1 should be completed first. If the child needs further support following the completion of stage 1:

Complete the Sensory Screening Questionnaire to gain a more in depth understanding of what the child's particular sensory needs are.

Devise a plan and implement the suggested strategies for each sensory area that has been highlighted. These should be implemented for at least 6-8 weeks and then reviewed.

Access the training and information that is available on the Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy webpage to further understand the sensory systems. This is located in the extra information / resources section and includes a sensory overview and information and strategies on the different sensory systems: https://www.blackcountryhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services/dudley-childrens-occupational-therapy

If the child needs additional opportunities to move then you could consider utilising the 'Get Moving' programme at the start of the school day. This will help provide them with the movement and deep pressure input that they need prior to them sitting and concentrating. If you require free training on this please contact the Children's Occupational Therapy service on 01384 366912.

See the advice in the 'Making Sense of Sensory Behaviour' booklet produced by Falkirk Council: https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/1626/making-sense-of-sensory-behaviour_falkirk-booklet.pdf

For nursery/pre-school age children: the Integrated Early Years Service offers training to settings including: access to Autism Education Trust tools as part of a package of support (all levels) and topic based networks (behaviour, social communication differences), a range of parent workshops (topic based including advice on sensory regulation activities), stay and play groups, the Incredible Years Programme (language development and social communication needs).

Access the Dudley 'Happier Minds' website which has a range of mental wellbeing advice for young people, parents/carers and school based staff in Dudley including anxiety, sleep, dealing with change and links to local and national mental health support: https://happierminds.org.uk/

Helping Hands service: Offers support to families of children/young people who have been diagnosed or are in the process of being assessed for autism or ADHD. They offer workshops for parents/carers where they explore behaviours, sensory needs, coping strategies and more. Families can self-refer or be referred by another agency. There is also a Family Action Family Line available to support parents and carers manage the challenges of parenthood via telephone, text message and email. This includes emotional support or practical advice on any aspect of parenting or broader family life.

About the screening tool

Complete stage 1 of the toolkit first and ensure that you have undertaken a review of what has and hasn't worked. If you have further concerns you can complete this screening questionnaire to give you more information about what sensory systems are presenting as barriers to the child being able to engage at school. More targeted strategies from this pack can then be chosen to try.

Please bear in mind the child's developmental level when completing this tool; some of these behaviours may be appropriate at younger developmental stages.

In the questionnaire there are a number of statements that represent common behaviours you may see in children who have sensory processing differences (although this is not an exhaustive list).

Read the statements and make a judgement as to whether you think this is either:

- true for the child (T),
- false for the child (F) or
- sometimes true for the child (S).

If you select a number of statements that are 'true' within a sensory category, this may suggest that the child is struggling to process sensory information in this area.

As part of the scoring you are asked if you think this is an area of concern - what you should consider here is, do you think the behaviour is having an impact on the child's participation.

You are looking for a cluster of behaviours under each sensory system as this would indicate that there may be a sensory basis to the behaviours seen (i.e. you will observe multiple difficulties in an area, where you have ticked T or S, and not just one). Please note that a child can be both sensitive and seek out sensory experiences (this would suggest they may be struggling to modulate their responses).

On completion of the questionnaire please then refer to the resources/strategies highlighted within stage 2 of this pack.

Sensory screening questionnaire

Child's name:

Read each of the statements on the questionnaire and decide if they are true, sometimes true or false.

Please tick T for true, S if the statement is true sometimes, and F if this does not describe the child.

If you select a number of statements that are true in a sensory category, this may suggest that the child is struggling to process sensory information in this area.

VESTIBULAR (SENSE OF MOVEMENT & GRAVITY)

Sensitive to movement	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern? ACTION PLAN
Dislikes/avoids playground equipment and/or PE apparatus				
Dislikes movement/feet leaving the ground				
Avoids participation in sports/active games				
Avoids balancing activities				
Gets easily motion/travel sick if go on a school trip				

VESTIBULAR (SENSE OF MOVEMENT & GRAVITATIONAL PULL)

Seeking out additional movement	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Has great difficulty sitting still				
Seeks out movement opportunities that may put them at risk				
Frequently (more so than their peers) seeks out movement e.g. rocks, twirls, spins, jumps, bounces				
Appears to like falling and may purposefully throw themselves to the ground				
Will become overly excitable (more so than their peers) when engaged in movement opportunities i.e. a PE/sports lesson, outside play				

Comments:

PROPRIOCEPTION (SENSE OF BODY AWARENESS)	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Appears clumsy, bumping into objects				
Cannot judge force and is heavy handed in activities i.e. may break things without meaning to				
Finds it difficult to know how close to stand to other people i.e. stands too close to others in line / has difficulty standing in line				
Uses too much or too little pressure when writing or drawing				
Looks heavy footed or 'stompy'				
May take longer to learn new movements during PE/sports lessons				
Needs to always look at what they are doing i.e. looking at their hands when writing or feet when climbing stairs				
Fidgets more than others in class				
Struggles to sit on the floor appropriately during carpet time/assembly i.e. either fidgets excessively or struggles to maintain appropriate posture (slumps/leans)				
Likes crashing into/leaning on objects or people				
Chews non-food items e.g. sleeves, pen/pencil				

Comments:

TOUCH

	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Sensitive to touch **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Dislikes touch or cautious of unexpected touch e.g. wants to always stand at the end of a line				
Avoids messy play or immediately washes hands after getting messy e.g. paint, glue, sand, clay, food etc.				
Gets upset if hands or clothes are messy/dirty				
Will not wear certain items of school uniform e.g. tights, trousers, coat or dislikes labels in clothes'				
Seems overly sensitive to temperature: hot/cold/both				
Has an over-reaction to pain (i.e. a paper cut or a splinter) or being touched (e.g. playing tag)				

TOUCH

	T	S	F	ACTION PLAN(2) Is this an issue/concern?
Seeking out touch				
Appears clumsy, bumping into objects				
Does not seem aware of when hot or cold i.e. not wanting to wear a jumper even when it's really cold.				
Often fiddles/fidgets with objects to the point of distraction				
Often chews/mouths non-food objects (e.g. clothing, pencil)				
Has messy face and hands and doesn't seem to notice				
Under-reacts/doesn't react to pain i.e. if they fall over and cut their knee				
Craves sensation of deep pressure against body i.e. sitting pressed up next to others, leaning on furniture, tight hugs or bumping into furniture				
May not seem to notice when face/hands are messy				
Unaware that clothes are twisted, on the wrong way, inside out, wet				

Comments:

VISUAL

	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Sensitive to visuals **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Seems uncomfortable in bright light (e.g. squints or covers eyes)				
Seems sensitive to changes in light (e.g. from classroom into playground)				
Bothered by flickering light / strong visual patterns				
Becomes distracted by bright/busy displays or movement in the classroom				
Frequently struggles to keep their place when copying work or focusing/locating relevant information				

VISUAL

	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Seeking out visuals **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Carries out visually repetitive behaviours that interfere with learning e.g. repeatedly dropping/spinning/throwing objects				
Watches running water or sand to the point it interferes with other play/exploration				
Likes to stare at lights				

VISUAL

	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Seeking out visuals Appears clumsy, bumping into objects				
Gets up close (too close) to screens				
Often flaps/stims in front of their eyes?				
Comments:				

NOISE

	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Sensitive to sound Appears clumsy, bumping into objects				
Over-reacts/avoids loud/unexpected noises e.g. assemblies, dinner hall, school bell				
Easily distracted by noise and finds it difficult to focus on their work				
Will cover ears in response to loud noises				

NOISE

	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern? FAIR (2)
Sensitive to sound **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Often seems 'switched off' when being spoken to				
Has difficulty following more than one instruction				
Seems to hear sounds others do not hear				
Hums/sings to screen out unwanted noise				

NOISE

	T	S	F	ACTION PLAN Is this an issue/concern? FAIR (2)
Seeking out sound **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Often loud/makes inappropriate noise				
Shows a strong preference for noisy toys/games				
Appears to make noise for noises sake				
Struggles to focus if it's too quiet or can be disruptive				

Comments:

INTEROCEPTION

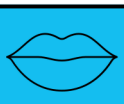
	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Over-responsivetointeroceptive input **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Frequently asks to go to the toilet				
Eats and/or drinks excessively, report they are always hungry and/or thirsty				
Don't want to remove their coat when come in from play as it takes longer to register a change in temperature				
Are highly sensitive to changes in temperature				

INTEROCEPTION

	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Under-responsivetointeroceptive input **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Has an extremely high pain threshold				
Do not notice when they need to go to the toilet / may have frequent accidents				
Do not feel hungry or thirsty and need reminders to eat and/or drink				
Do not react to being hot or cold				

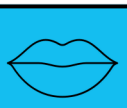
Comments:

TASTE/SMELL



	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Sensitive to taste/smell **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Notices smells that others are not aware of				
Struggles to tolerate smells in the dining hall				
Has a preference for bland foods / smells				
Eats a very limited diet/selection of foods				
Has difficulty tolerating utensils in mouth				

TASTE/SMELL



	T	S	F	Is this an issue/concern?
Seeking out additional taste/smells **Appears clumsy, bumping into objects**				
Often investigates people/objects/food by smelling				
Frequently mouths/chews/licks non-food objects				
Prefers foods with very strong flavours				
Comments:				

Resources and Strategies

Vestibular strategies (sense of movement and balance)

What to do if you suspect a child has difficulty in this area?

Vestibular input is received when the head moves. It enables our awareness of our head and body position and movement, balance, spatial orientation and stabilises the visual field during movement. It also has a large role in how alert we are and fight or flight preparation.

Generally speaking, linear (in a straight line) movement is calming and rotational movement is alerting. The speed of the movement is also important as fast movement is alerting even in a straight line. Rapid acceleration and deceleration (i.e. fast changes in speed) are also alerting.

You MUST ensure that you grade the child's involvement in activities if they are sensitive to movement. When providing vestibular input monitor the child's responses as it can be easy to over stimulate.

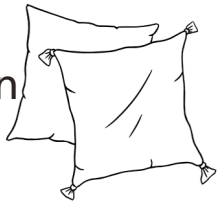
What to do if a child is oversensitive to movement?

It is essential that the child is in control of the amount of challenging movement experiences they engage in. The young person should never be pushed past his or her limit. Be aware of sensory strategies you can use to make the young person feel calm, safe and secure (heavy work). These are useful to prepare the young person for challenging work against gravity and to comfort and calm them if they feel unsure or unhappy with certain movement activities.

- Use a firm, supportive seat that will not tip to help the child feel stable and secure whilst at their desk. Make sure their feet can stay flat on the ground, if this is not possible, provide a foot box.

- Use your hands to help develop their awareness of their body position. Always use firm 'grounding' touch and concentrate on the joints of the body. This will also help to focus their attention on an activity.

- The child may become distressed or anxious with changing positions in the classroom e.g. getting down onto the floor, onto a chair etc. Use visual markers so they have a clear aim of where to go e.g. put their favourite cushion on the floor so they can aim to be sitting on top of it.



- Break down activities into their most basic parts. For example, it might be more successful to practice sitting on a chair than getting right down to the ground at first. If the child is able to model your behaviour, show them what to do.

- Think about what position they like to be in during different activities in the classroom. Let them maintain the position they are happy and secure in (e.g. cross-legged sitting on the floor). As their confidence develops, support them in different, more challenging positions (e.g. flat on their tummy, on a therapy ball) and work towards them maintaining these positions independently.

- Use every opportunity to reinforce their proprioception/body awareness. This doesn't always have to be done by another person. Trial using a backpack weighted with books or simple pushing/pulling games which facilitate traction and increased sensory feedback.

- For a child who is more nervous about movement don't force movements; ensure they are graded and low level to the floor.

- Remember that linear movement (movement in a line) is easier to tolerate than rotary (circular/spinning movement).

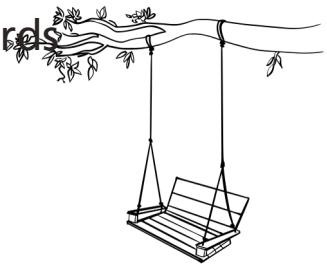
Ideas for primary school PE lessons

- If possible, limit the number of children and space to increase sense of security. Allow the child to increase their ability to work on moveable or suspended equipment at their own pace. The idea is to grade your approach very gently and allow them to lead exploration of the activities. For example, start with a line on the floor to balance on and raise height as child becomes more confident.

- Consider starting off by using mats, soft play wedges and textured materials (bubble wrap, car mats etc) to create uneven surfaces for the child to negotiate around. When they are ready, move onto equipment such as smaller therapy balls, rolls, large wedges, balance beams, steps, boxes, apparatus.

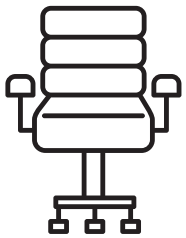
- Eventually the child may be able to access more challenging equipment such as climbing frames, swings, benches etc.

Ideas for toddlers and preschoolers



- Swing on playground swings- start with linear (forwards and backwards) movement using a small degree of movement.

- If they can tolerate forwards and backwards movement, try side to side. Take it slow and at their pace.



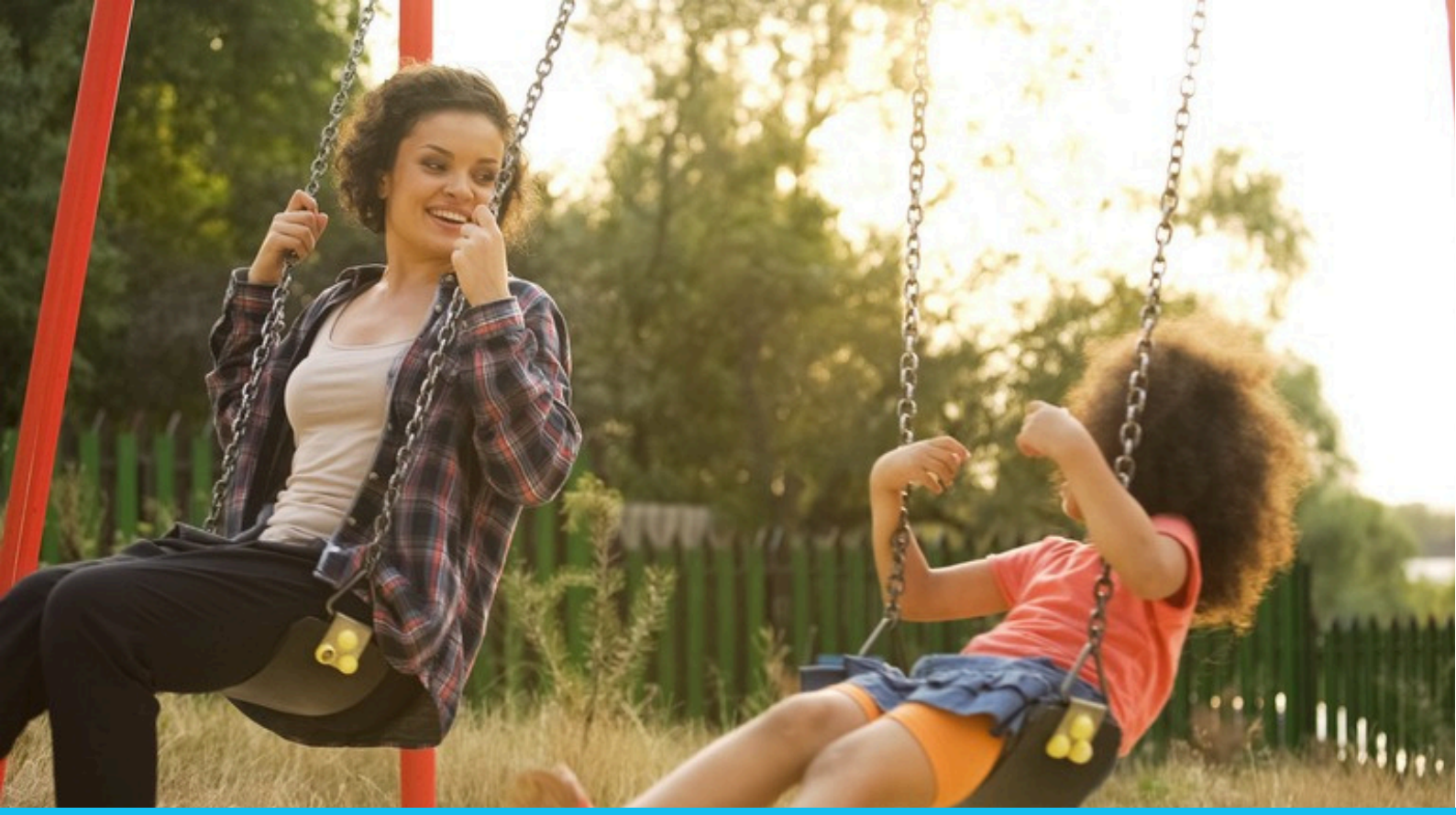
- Spinning activities will likely be harder for them to tolerate so work up to these very slowly. You could try activities such as sitting on an office chair and gently turning (take care to ensure safety), twirling whilst playing with ribbon sticks, or completing an obstacle course that includes running in a circles.

- Jump on a trampoline.

- Play on playground equipment such as the seesaw, swings, slide and roundabout.

- Roll down a grassy hill.

- Complete the nursery Get Moving programme.



What to do if a child is seeking out additional movement

- Use a defined 'spot' for them e.g. carpet square, coloured spot etc. during carpet time or assembly.

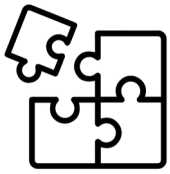
- A regular change of position can help them to maintain their attention e.g. lying on tummy, sitting on the floor, sitting on a chair during circle time, kneeling, allowing them to stand.

- Work within success; if they can stay in their spot or circle well for 20 seconds, use this as your baseline and increase the time they can tolerate from this point.

- Try a short walk around the classroom and then try sitting again.

- Encourage physical activity/exercise/sport followed by a calming activity before expecting the child to sit and attend.

- Have a box of fine motor activities that they are allowed to go to during transitions between lessons or classroom activities e.g. puzzles, threading, peg boards, pencil tasks.



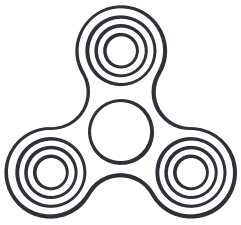
- Provide as many opportunities as possible for active work during the day e.g. instead of sitting to complete a Maths lesson have them stand to do the problem on the board.

- Provide a solid seat with armrests of the correct height.

- Provide a tilted desk top (angle board) to help them to maintain an upright posture.

- Provide 'heavy work' activities during the day especially prior to handwriting tasks or those which require long periods of sitting. Examples: cleaning the board, handing out books, pushing tasks, moving furniture, etc.

- Provide a fidget toy to keep their hands busy to use at their desk so as not to distract other young people. However, only use if this does not become a distraction in itself.



- Provide a 'move 'n' sit' cushion which allows them to have the sensation of movement in a more appropriate and less distracting way for the classroom environment.
- Allow child to sit on a ball/cushion/beanbag as an alternative to a chair if they find this easier for focus and it's appropriate for the task.

- Assign regular active tasks such as handing out books, moving chairs, giving out art supplies.

- Do not discipline a child by removing break time or other physical activities as this will intensify fidgeting and restless behaviour.

- Monitor the child's response to input as it can be easy to over stimulate. Use deep pressure to calm if over excited.

Movement breaks

Be aware of the child's cues that may indicate that they need a break. However, it is often better to have movement breaks scheduled into their timetable rather than waiting to see the signs that they need movement. You are trying to pre-empt it so that their body is getting the movement it needs in a more functional and structured way.

Aim to schedule movement breaks in at times when they usually need to be on the move or add them in prior to activities where they will need to use more effort in concentrating. They will hopefully not need to fidget as much if these activities are done regularly during the day.

Try a combination of these for 5 minutes directly before you want them to focus their attention well:

- Getting up to hand out books/pencils
- Taking the register to reception
- Running errands around school or taking notes to other teachers

- Helping to move equipment in a PE lesson
- If walking to the hall or another classroom have the child hold the door open for others
- Moving workstations (not always sitting in the same place in class)
- Moving between classes for older children acts as movement break, but be aware if they are sensitive to being bumped and knocked. A young person may need movement breaks more frequently than this, therefore tasks and responsibilities in the classroom may help.
- Mini exercise circuits including wall push ups, squats, chair dips, animal walks Standing up and stretching – try different yoga
- activities designed for children in the classroom Sitting or bouncing on a therapy/exercise ball during lessons or in between lessons (the
- use of a wobble cushion may also help) Dancing games like musical statues / stop and go games such as 'tig' Access to outdoor space
- and play equipment Complete the 'Get Moving' programme
-
-

Proprioception strategies (sense of body awareness)

What to do if you suspect your child has difficulty in this area

Proprioception is one of our body senses where feedback originates in our muscles and joints when they are active. Messages from our proprioceptors relay what position the body is in, as well as the force of movement the body makes.

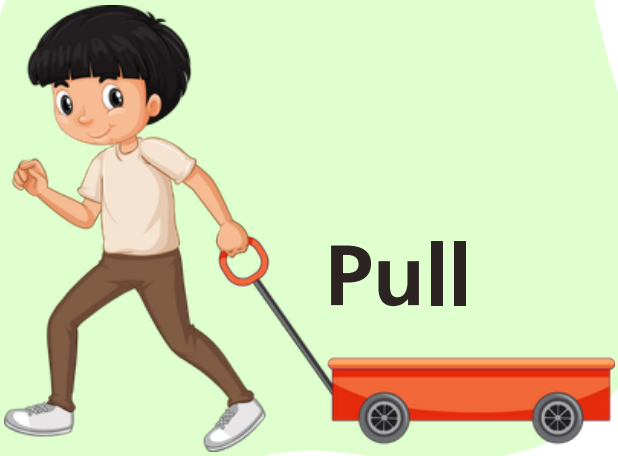
Proprioception is therefore important because it helps the body organise itself for useful activity. It can also help to balance the input from our other sensory systems, helping us to achieve an optimum level of alertness.

Proprioceptive input can be obtained by lifting, pushing, and pulling heavy objects as well as by engaging in activities that push together or pull apart the joints like playing tug-of-war.

Heavy work activities can be used during ‘movement breaks’ or incorporated into P.E. sessions. This may include:

- WHOLE BODY actions involving pushing, pulling, lifting, playing, and moving
- ORAL actions such as chewing, sucking, and blowing
- USE OF HANDS for squeezing, pinching, or "fidgeting"

Push



Pull

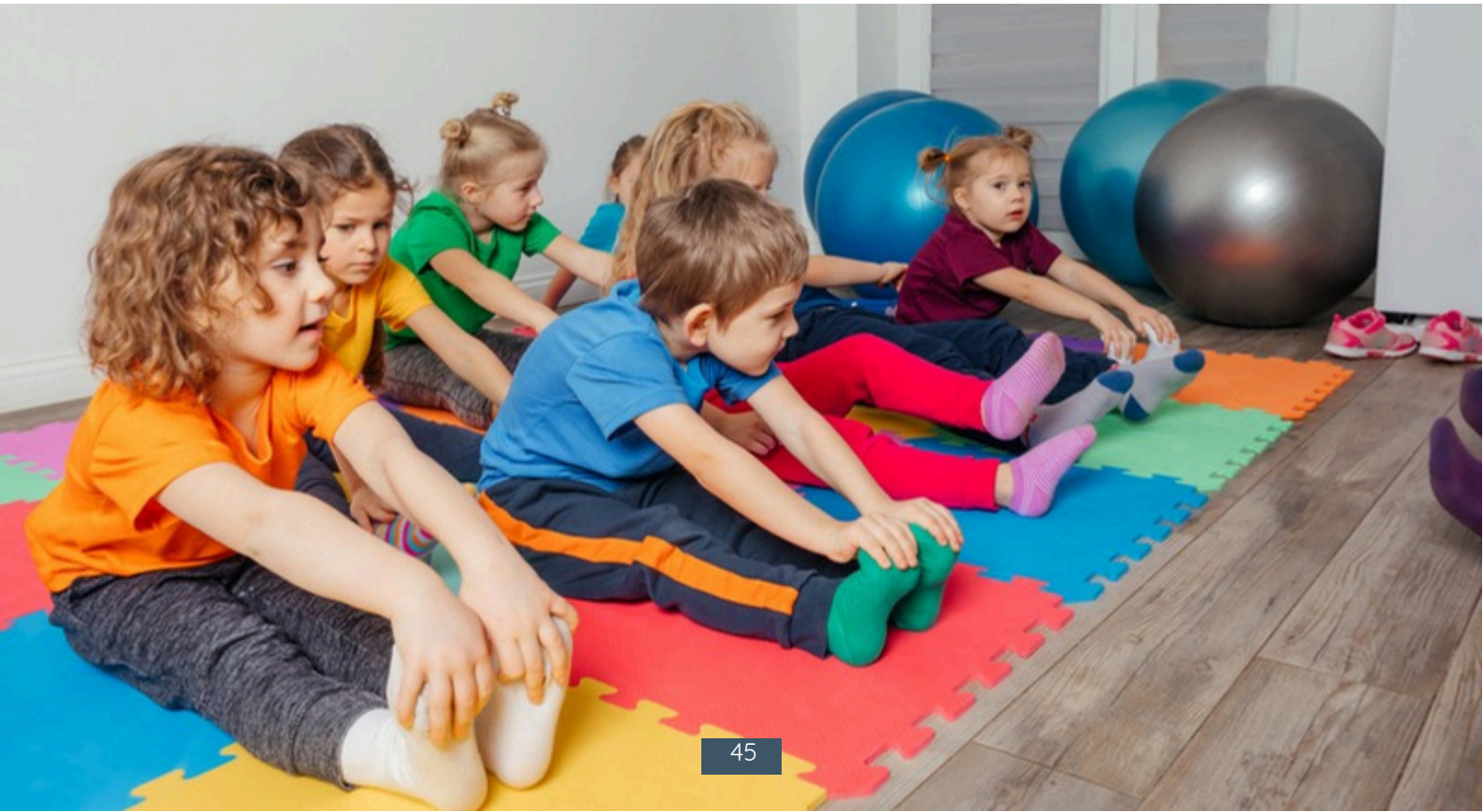
Heavy muscle work

Stretch

Children who seek additional proprioceptive feedback would benefit from having a range of the following activities implemented into their daily routines. They will likely have difficulty sitting still for prolonged periods of time, therefore regular movement breaks are advised.

Whole body activities

- Complete the Get Moving programme/encourage physical activity
- Provide pushing, pulling, carrying and lifting activities e.g. giving out books, setting up/tidying away P.E. equipment, holding doors open for others, moving desks, stacking chairs, help clean white board
- Writing on vertical surfaces i.e. a wall mounted white board or black board
- Chair push-ups – child sits on a chair with feet on the floor and bottom at the back of the seat, they place their hands on the seat and push down until their bottom lifts up. Repeat.
- Head pushes – sit on a chair, hands placed on head with fingers linked together and push down. Repeat.



- Wall press ups – stand facing the wall with hands on the wall at shoulder level. Lean towards the wall and push back. Repeat.
- Use weighted pens, pencils or utensils.
- Allowing the child to wear a back pack with a few books in during times of transition or when sitting may help to keep them calm (this should be worn for a maximum of 15-20 minutes at a time, with an hour or two between each wear).
- Playing in the sand - digging, filling buckets and tipping.
- Climbing on playground equipment.
- Games such as tug of war, wheelbarrow walks, crab walks, sack races.
- Theraband - a stretchy resistance therapy band - this can be held between two hands and child can pull apart or can be wrapped around chair legs for child to push their legs/feet against.
- Sports such as swimming, gymnastics, football, rugby, dancing.
- Provide deep pressure i.e. make a "sandwich" by firmly pressing on the child's arms legs and back with pillows or make a “sausage roll” by getting them to roll up in a blanket or a mat.
- Frequent breaks during more difficult tasks (march, hop, skip, jump, sit ups, walk).
- Jump on a mini trampoline.
- Sit on a gym/therapy ball and bounce.
- Skip with a skipping rope.
- Play hopscotch.
- Try a weighted lap pad.
- Use a ‘move ‘n’ sit’ cushion to sit on to give them additional feedback.
- Use a large bean bag for them to sit down on for down time or time on the carpet.

Hand movement

- Try squeezing and stretching objects such as theraband, koosh balls, therapy putty, playdoh, clay, hand fidgets, blue-tac.
- Use scissors to cut putty, playdoh, thick paper or cardboard.
- Use playdoh rollers or cutters/molds.

Oral activities

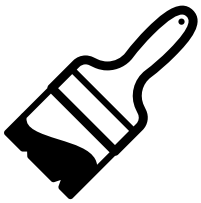
- Having access to regular drinks from a sports bottle or drink through a straw.
- At snack times having foods that are crunchy or chewy.
- In music lessons try wind instruments.
- Make splatter paintings (use thin paint on paper, blow air through a straw and watch the paint move).
- Play table football with a paper ball which you move by blowing through a straw.

Touch strategies

Tactile input is the sense of touch and includes texture, temperature and pressure. The tactile system includes not only the skin covering the body but also inner skin linings such as inside the mouth.

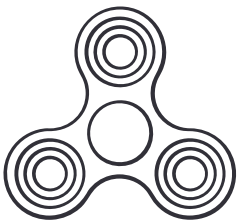
What to do if a child is oversensitive to touch

- Let the child know they are going to be touched and approach from the front.
- Avoid light touch, use firm pressure when touching or as preparation.
- Allow the child to stand at the end or beginning of a queue when lining up. This will decrease the chance of bumps.
- Ensure their peg is at the end of cloakroom rack and their drawer is at the end of cupboard.
- Arrange seating to minimise the risk of being bumped by classmates.
- Do not avoid messy play or art activities. Instead provide a range of tactile experiences which are introduced gradually. Provide modifications to art activities to accommodate their sensitivity to touch. Be aware that materials such as glue, sand, finger paints, clay, papier-mâché, etc., may cause an aversive response. Using tools (i.e. paint brush, etc.) may help the child to participate more fully.

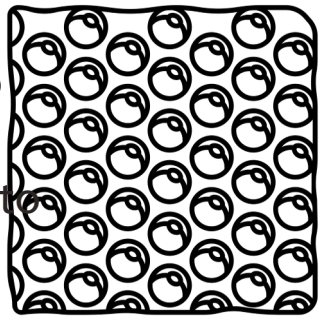


- Provide a flannel/towel/wipe for messy activities. Encourage the child to wipe their hands independently. If providing support, try to leave some residual mess on their hands so they get used to different textures on their skin.
- Never force a child with tactile sensitivities to touch something they are scared of- instead grade your activities, provide tools and give gentle encouragement.
- Use some of the heavy work activities (see proprioception section) as preparation. This can help to reduce the anxiety and impact around tactile experiences.

What to do if a child is seeking out touch



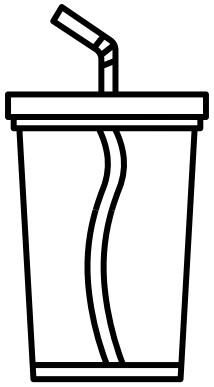
- Allow fidget toys/chewellery (but be mindful these may cause a distraction). To use, permit them to use one object at a time. Set boundaries as to when these will/wont be used e.g. when standing in the line after break before lesson begins, during listening time and ensure that this is not negatively impacting on their attention to task.
- Provide lots of tactile learning opportunities which will keep them engaged i.e. using sandpaper letters/drawing in shaving foam to learn letter formations.
- Perform wake up activities with a tactile focus prior to activities.
- Try a tactile obstacle course – different textured steps to walk on, roll over a spiky ball, crawl over bubble wrap etc.



If the child is chewing non-food items:

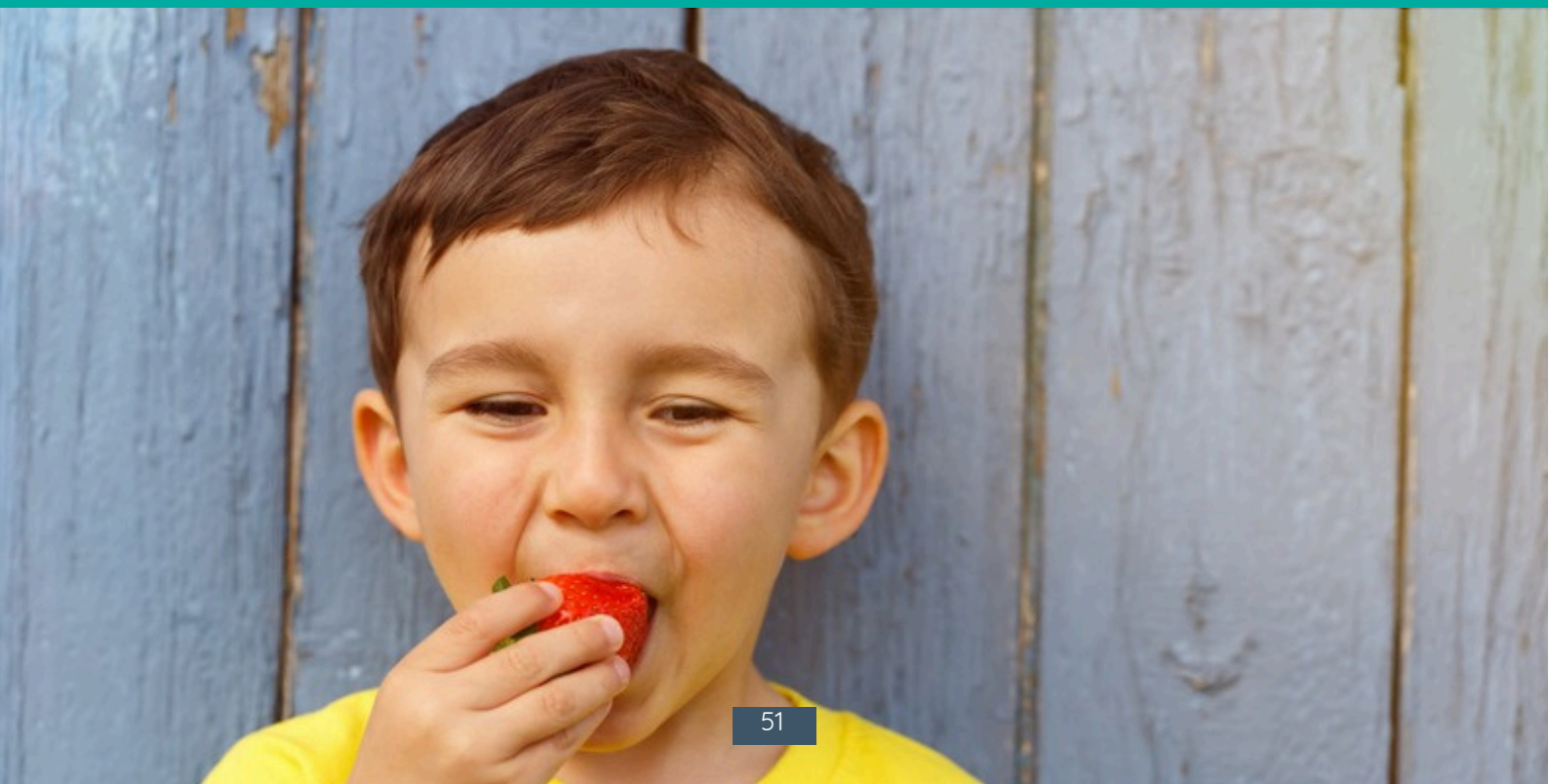
- Redirect - try an activity that uses both hands or occupies the mouth.
- Rewards, praise, consistency, visual cues, appropriate communication tools, social stories, preparation, routine, structure, consider the environment.

- Use chewy toys consistently – replace inappropriate items with items that are safe for chewing. There are a range of items available that have been designed specifically for chewing i.e. chewy tubes, chewellery. There are also pencil toppers, necklaces, bracelets, hoodie strings which are designed for chewing. You will need to monitor use of chewers to ensure that this does not distract them from their learning and if this is the case, ensure there are boundaries as to when these will/will not be used e.g. when standing in the line after break before lesson begins, during listening time etc.



- At snack/meal times encourage child to eat chewy, crunchy foods.

- Encourage the child to drink from a sports bottle or through a straw.



Visual strategies

If an issue is picked up in the visual area, it may be useful to request that parents take their child to get their eyes tested in the first instance.

What to do if a child is sensitive to visuals

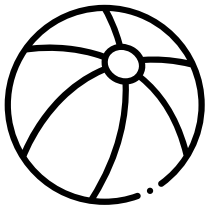
- If the child is visually distractible, simplify the visual field in their environment for a calming effect as per the initial environmental audit considering work space, lighting, placement in the classroom etc.
- Have the child sit at the front of a classroom where there is less visual distraction. They may also need to sit away from the window to avoid the distraction of the outdoors. Keep in mind, however, that some children do best sitting in the back of the room so they can monitor what other children are doing without constantly turning around. You will likely need to try both ways to see which works best for the individual child.
- When providing worksheets, consider the volume of information needed - don't overwhelm them.
- Try a pop-up desk screen if distracted in the classroom.
- Designate areas of the board for frequently recurring information that the child needs quick access to so they aren't struggling to scan and locate.
- Highlight/underline key words in text or provide a reading window so it is easier for them to find their place.

- When going outside consider sunglasses/rimmed hat if the child is bothered by bright lights.

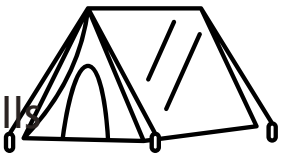
- Use strong visual cues i.e. highlighting, bright coloured or contrasting paper to focus their attention where you need it.
- Hide clutter in cupboards, boxes etc.
- Try to minimise display boards in the classroom, use solid coloured rugs instead of patterned ones and solid-coloured walls.

What to do if a child is seeking out visual input

- Add brightly coloured objects to attract visual attention.
- Use bright/contrasting pages or tools like pencils and scissors.
- Use light up toys or sensory lighting within the environment.
- Play games that require movement and following moving objects with their vision e.g. throwing and catching a ball.



- Use a bright coloured table cloth during table top activities to focus attention.
- Find it games such as 'Where's Wally' or spot the difference.
- Use of a dark tent and torches or shining torches onto different textures/materials i.e. metallic, foil, glitter balls etc.



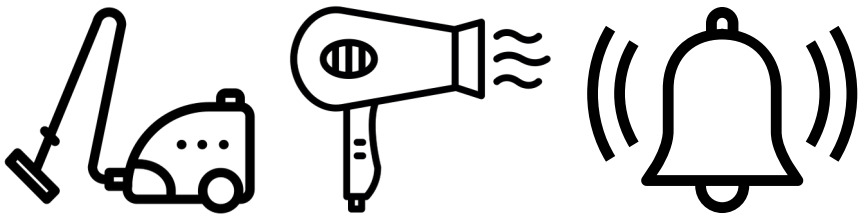
- Play with games/objects with moving parts e.g. water wheel, pouring in the water tray.

Auditory (noise) strategies

If an issue is picked up with noise it may be useful to ask the parent to get the child's hearing tested in the first instance to rule out any other medical difficulties.

For children who are sensitive to noise or have difficulty filtering out background noises

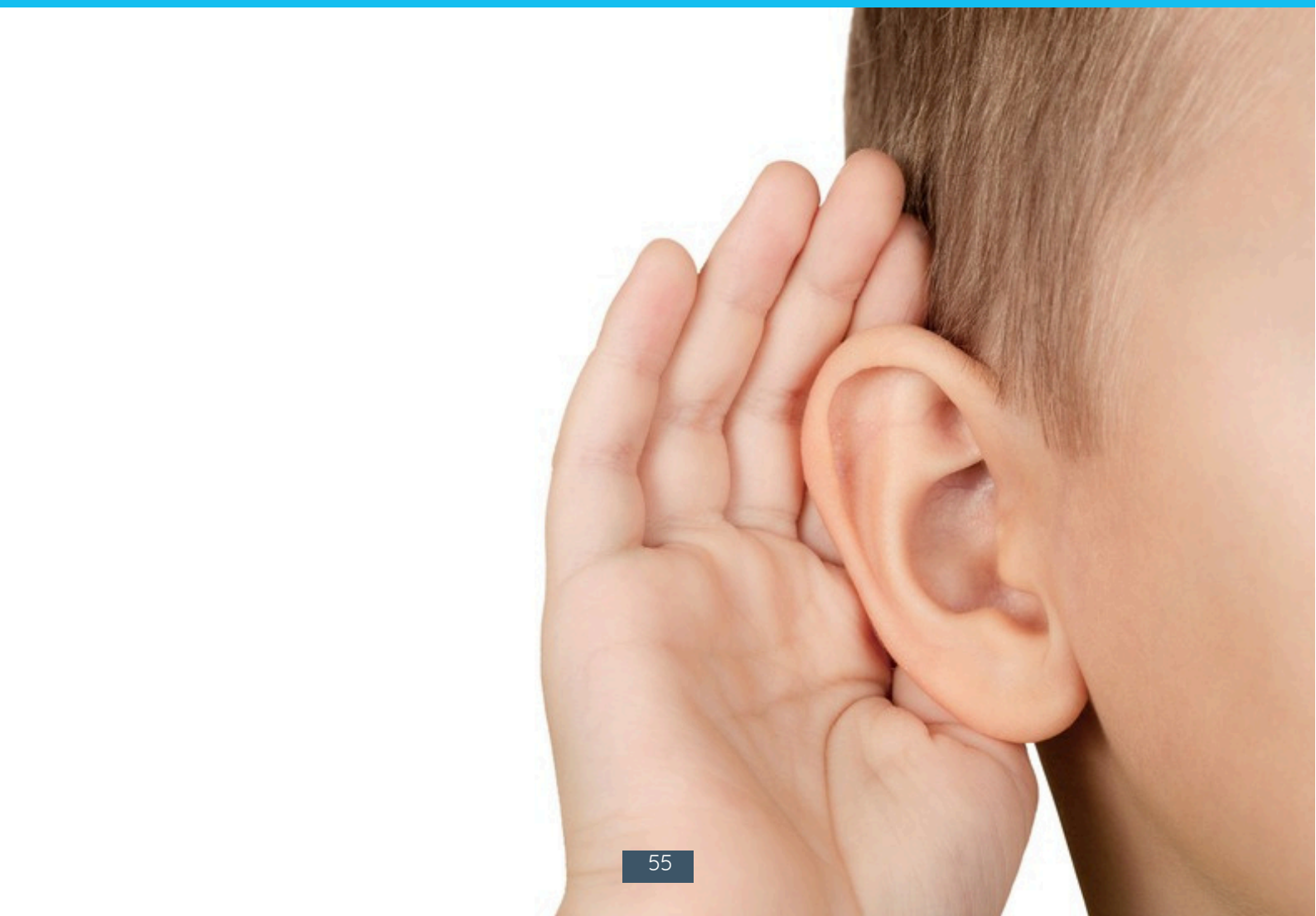
Our auditory sense (our hearing) is very important in helping us understand the world around us. It is very common for children, (particularly pre-school aged or children with additional needs) to appear sensitive to particular sounds, typically sounds like vacuum cleaners, hair dryers, hand dryers, emergency sirens or alarms. These sounds can be loud, unpredictable and the child often has no control over them. This is a normal part of child development, however, for some children the sensitivity to these noises can continue for much longer than others.



Some children who have had recurrent glue ear may also struggle with their perception of sound, as they have experienced periods where their hearing was impaired. Their brains may have adapted to this, but when the glue ear resolves their perception of sound is increased.

Other children may hear frequencies that the rest of us do not detect (such as crayons rubbing on paper or the sound of a plane flying overhead) and it may be difficult for them to filter out the sounds that their brain does not need to attend to. They may become anxious about particular noises and in turn this anxiety actually serves to increase their vigilance so they notice these sounds more. This may make them seem distracted or irritable as they are trying to attend to what their teacher or parent is saying but are struggling due to the background noise.

It is also important to consider whether it is noise specifically that the child is struggling to cope with or whether it is crowded busy spaces, which inadvertently are often noisy. Strategies to support auditory sensitivity may not be as effective if the issues are more related to being around lots of people rather than noise itself.



For children who are sensitive to noise or have difficulty filtering out background noises

- Give the child advance warning about loud noises that you know are going to happen, e.g. before the school bell, before assembly.
- Use social stories to help prepare them for predictable sounds or picture cards, Makaton, visual timetables, now and next charts etc.
- Reduce background noise if possible. If the background noise is hard to reduce then you could try to play soft music quietly in the background to drown out the noise (however, be aware this in itself may become a distraction).
- Consider having a balance between quieter times and those when the child is exposed to noise so they can have a 'break'.
- Ear defenders can be useful at blocking out noise. However if worn for long periods they can increase sensitivity as the child is not being exposed to noise and their brain will adapt to this. This can then make it seem like noises are louder when they are removed. It is important therefore that if using ear defenders they are only worn briefly for that particular activity or even just the beginning of the activity.
- Be aware that in classroom environments there is always background noise - children chattering, the teacher talking to another child, the noise from projectors or screens, the lights overhead, other classrooms, the playground etc.

- Check that lighting (particularly strip lighting) is not buzzing as this may be distracting.
- Where possible shut windows and doors to block sound.
- Talking about the noise and labelling it may help a child to cope with it. If the child is upset by the noise allow them time to calm down before discussing it with them.
- Encourage the child to play a musical instrument or listen to music. For a child with auditory sensitivity, controlling the sounds they hear can be especially helpful. If the child is fearful of loud noises, let them control the volume on the stereo, exploring soft vs. loud music
- Some children who are sensitive to noise may generate their own noise to drown out other noises in their environment. They might hum, sing, shout or bang objects, play musical toys repeatedly etc. Try to establish if there are particular times when they do this and then look at whether there is anything in the environment you can change.
- Allow extra time or to leave before/after crowded change over times.

For children who have difficulty attending to sound

There are many factors that can impact upon a child's attention, processing sound is only one of these. Young children particularly have a limited attention span at the best of times.

It is also normal for children to not hear certain sounds when they are concentrating on an activity they are enjoying. They may appear unaware that they are even being spoken to and give no response despite you knowing their hearing is appropriate.

Try these strategies if you feel the child has difficulty attending to sounds:

- Try to make sure that only one person at a time is talking to the child.
- Make sure you have their full attention before you give the instruction.
- Standing in their line of vision and getting eye contact, if they can tolerate this, may help them focus on what you are saying.
- Use exaggerated expression and higher tones to draw the child's attention to you.
- Use play or songs to catch the child's attention so they want to listen.
- Use an agreed gesture to indicate they are attending, e.g. they could tap your shoulder and do a thumbs up sign to let you know they have understood it is time to listen.
- Use relevant visual cards or pictures to support your communication.

- Allow plenty of movement opportunities before seated activities as this can help with concentration.
- Using a fidget toy may also help with concentration.
- Use a distraction free area for focused work and try to reduce unnecessary noise e.g. over - head lighting, other children talking etc.
- Use simple language, e.g. 'Paul, coat'. Repeat instructions.
- Have a routine check by an audiologist to ensure they are picking up on all frequencies and using their ears together effectively.

For children who are seeking out sound

- Where possible provide opportunities for the child to make noise vocally and with resources such as instruments etc.
- Provide opportunities to listen to music/sounds.
- Use of ear/headphones to listen to music/sounds.
- There are iPad apps available which can show the level of noise being made- this can then be used to teach what an appropriate noise level might be in different situations.
- Use movement and deep pressure such as banging and crashing (drums, cymbals) or stamping feet.
- Listening to clips of noises and identifying sounds heard.



Interoception strategies

Interoception is the sensory system that helps you to understand and feel what's going on inside the body. It allows us to feel our internal organs and is responsible for maintaining homeostasis i.e. the regulation of basic body functions which maintain life.

There are interoceptive nerve receptors all over our bodies including our internal organs, bones, muscles, and skin. These receptors send information to the brain which help us to determine how we feel. Our interoceptive awareness helps us to recognise when we are hungry, need to use the toilet, when the temperature changes, heart rate, breathing rate etc. and then knowing what to do about it.

For children who are over-responsive to interoceptive input

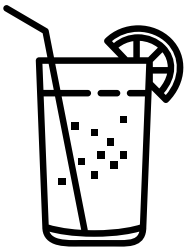
- Have a clear toileting plan with timed toilet breaks that the child accesses as part of their daily routine. Discuss with the child what the signs of needing to go to the toilet are. If the child has a medical condition which impacts on toileting, ensure that you discuss this with a healthcare professional for more specific advice.

- Snacks are limited to set times of the day. Consider snacks that slowly release energy, rather than a quick sugar hit, which may keep the child fuller for longer.
- Adults can discuss with the child what it feels like when you are hungry/thirsty or full. Use social stories to reinforce this.

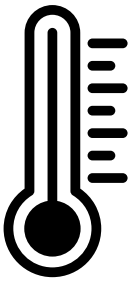
- Adults to support child to understand what clothes are appropriate to wear for the weather and temperature.
- Adults to intervene when the child is not wearing clothes that are appropriate for the weather.
- Where the child cannot understand their own body's cues, an adult will need to intervene and explain whilst they are learning how to do this for themselves.
- Ensure there is a handover to staff who may not be familiar with the child and their needs i.e. supply staff, lunchtime staff.

For children who are under-responsive to interoceptive input

- Staff to be aware that the child may not accurately report an injury and consider completing a risk assessment with a clear process for everyone to follow. Teach the child to report to an adult if they have a bang or a knock as they may not realise that they are hurt. Staff may need to check/examine the child to ensure there is no injury.
- Build clear snack times into the child's routine, encouraging the child to have something to eat along with their peers. Consider snacks that slowly release energy rather than a quick sugar hit.



- Encourage the child to drink regularly - have the child's drink available on their desk as a visual reminder to drink throughout the day. See also the ERIC website for strategies to encourage drinking.
- Have a clear toilet plan with timed toilet breaks that the child accesses as part of their daily routine rather than asking the child if they need to go to the toilet.
- Ensure the child has a change of clothes easily available at school in case they have an accident.
- If the child is over 5 years of age and is struggling with day time wetting, night time wetting, soiling or constipation, it may be useful to consider a referral to the Children's Continence Service.



- Adults can support the child to understand what clothes are appropriate to wear for the weather and temperature.

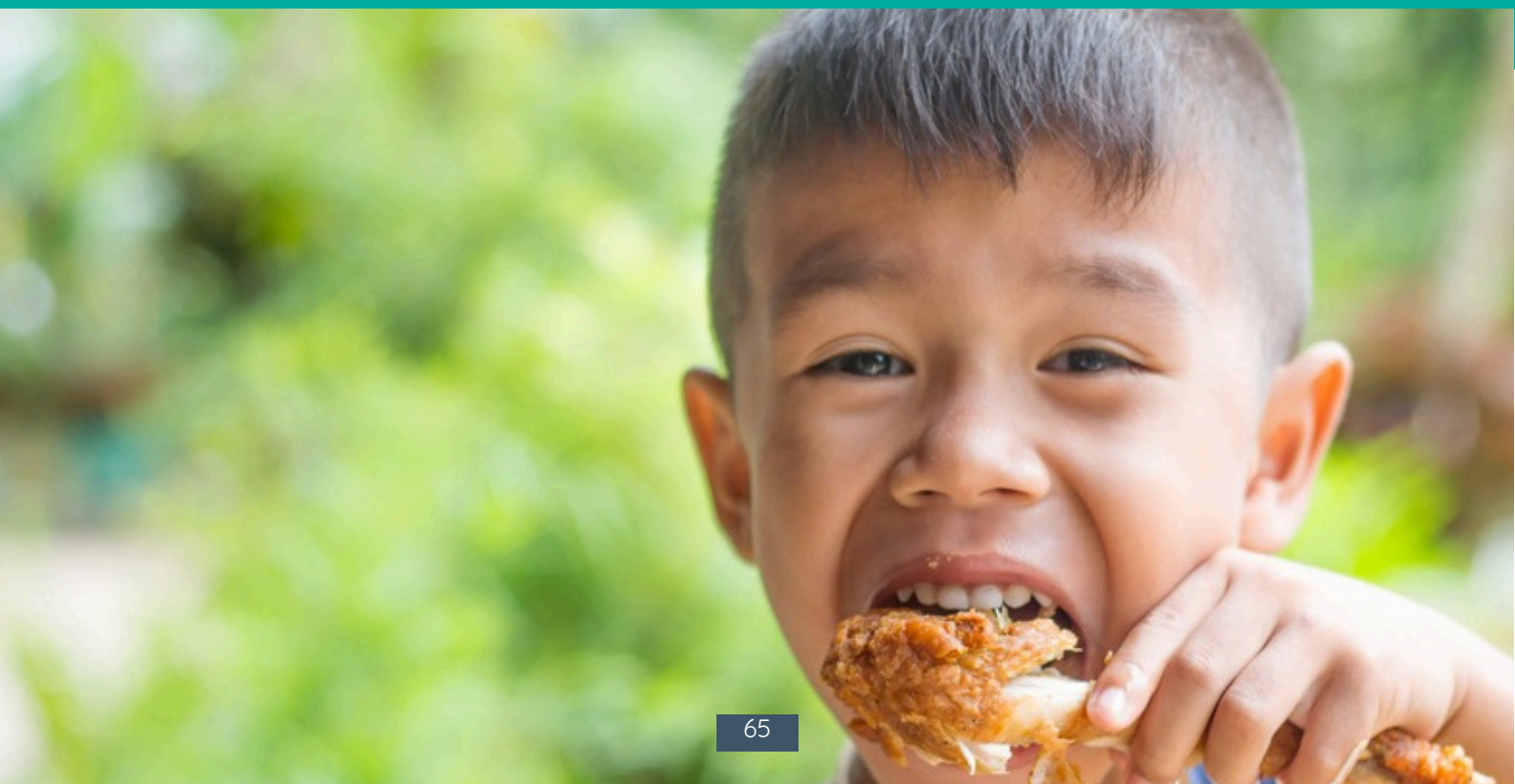
- Adults to intervene when the child is not wearing clothes that are appropriate for the weather.
- Use of social story's to help the child to understand what they need to do to support their independence.
- Where the child cannot understand their own body's cues, an adult will need to intervene and explain whilst they are learning how to do this for themselves.
- Ensure there is a handover to staff who may not be familiar with the child and their needs i.e. supply staff, lunchtime staff.

Taste and smell strategies

For children who are sensitive to smells and tastes

- Be mindful that the child may notice subtleties in taste and smell that you are unaware of.
- Consider placement of the child in relation to bins, toilets and the dinner hall.
- Avoid wearing strong perfume or aftershave that is irritating to the child.
- Allow the child to choose a smell that they like to put on a tissue or handkerchief which they can then use to block out smells they find distressing or distracting.
- Allow the child to choose what they want to eat at snack and mealtimes so that they are engaged in this part of the school day.
- Allow the child to eat outside of the dining hall if they struggle to cope with food smells. This will help to reduce anxiety around food/smells/tastes.
- Teach the child how to manage smells they dislike or have a communication method in place so they can alert you if they are struggling to cope with a smell.
- Some children who eat a limited diet may be more willing to try new foods if they see other children and adults doing so.
- Engage in messy play with and without food – try deep pressure to hands (and/or mouth) as a preparation before the activity if child does not like this.

- Provide frequent opportunities for the child to explore and play with foods without the pressure to eat. Start with just a couple of new food experiences and repeat before adding in new ones. Do not force trying and if they try new foods try to avoid a big reaction as this can increase anxiety and may result in them not wanting to try other new foods.
- Try redirecting the child to carry out some of the heavy work activities to distract them and also calm their overly alert sensory system down.
- Remember we all have food preferences/some food types we just don't like and this is ok.
- For children who have a limited diet but within their repertoire will eat a range of food textures and/or tastes (crunchy/soft/mixed textures/hot/cold/sweet/salty), this is likely not a sensory processing difficulty and is more likely to be a rigidity or behaviour.
- For children who are struggling with eating access the 'Selective Eaters' pack on the Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy website for further strategies.



For children seeking out smells and tastes

- If craving strong foods, let them eat spicy and sour foods, it may be important to help them regulate. Add spices and strong flavour to food.
- Allow access to chewy foods or chewers/chewellery to help them regulate.
- Provide regular heavy work activities throughout the day (see proprioception section).
- Engage in messy play including food and non-food items.
- Use objects with smells or added smells to reinforce learning and exploration i.e. for younger children a treasure basket or tray containing different smells they can explore.
- Use scented playdoh in play.
- Allow the child to choose a smell that they like to put on a tissue or handkerchief which they can then use to help them regulate and stay alert.
- Ensure you educate the child as to what is safe and unsafe to smell and taste and allow them to have access to things that are safe.

Stage 3 - Specialist Support

Stage 3 - Specialist Support

If stages 1 and 2 have been completed and the child continues to experience significant difficulties which are impacting upon access to learning, you may consider accessing specialist support. Please ensure that you share your audits, plans and reviews with specialist services so they are aware of what has been tried.

Dudley Educational Psychology Service

Educational Psychologists work with children and young people aged 0- 25 with a range of different needs. In addition they support schools and local authorities to help them improve and develop their systems for supporting children and young people. Educational Psychologists look at how children and young people experience life within the context of their school and home environment and how different factors in these environments interact with each other. They then work collaboratively with parents, schools and other professionals to identify strategies to support children.

Psychologists support young people and children with: learning needs, emotional and behavioural needs, physical disabilities, sensory needs such as problems with eyesight or hearing, social skills difficulties, concentration difficulties.

The service may support by providing consultation (meeting with parents or carers and other professionals to discuss a child or young person's needs and how best to help them), complete psychological assessments, provide one to one and small group interventions, support staff development (e.g. training, staff coaching), support parents (jointly identifying strategies to use at home, setting up and running training).

You can contact the service by telephone on 01384 814 359 or via email: eps@dudley.gov.uk

Integrated Early Years Service (IEYS)

The Integrated Early Years Service (IEYS) support families and nurseries with children aged 0–5. They support all children; referrals are sent to IEYS when there is some concern regarding development, or for children who have emerging or identified additional needs. Their role whilst children are at home is to introduce themselves, offer advice and support with strategies, support with childcare funding where appropriate, nursery choices, and transition into nursery/school. Plus, being on the end of an email or phone for any queries or concerns.

Where the child is known to the service and in a setting they can provide bespoke support packages dependent on needs (sensory/visual support etc.), help with modelling of activities/interventions for group/individual child, complete visits to support enabling environments/audits, support Team Around the Family meetings at nursery, support in setting targets/individual support plans, provide advice on sensory regulation activities, share resources that support the individual child.

You can contact the service on 01384 814364 or via email at IEYS.Admin@dudley.gov.uk

Autism and Social Communication (ASC) Team

The Autism and Social Communication (ASC) Team supports children with a diagnosis of autism and / or social communication needs who attend a Dudley primary and secondary mainstream school. They also offer information, advice and strategies to settings.

You can contact the service on 01384 816974 or via email at cips@dudley.gov.uk

Dudley Learning Support Service

Dudley Learning Support Service is a team of highly experienced teachers with additional SEN Specialist qualifications. They are a traded service who work in partnership with primary and secondary schools, other educational settings, parents, governors and other professionals to improve outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEND), particularly in the areas of learning difficulties (literacy and numeracy) and specific learning difficulties/Dyslexia.

They may provide a detailed pupil assessment of literacy and/or numeracy difficulties with suggested next steps and ideas for support, 1:1 or small group specialist teaching supporting the development of literacy and/or numeracy skills. They can also provide training to staff who may deliver a range of evidence-based interventions to support children with Literacy difficulties. As a Support Service they also support and advise the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) and offer staff training on a range of SEND topics.

The service can be contacted via telephone 01384 813733 / 812093 or email Lssenquiries@dudley.gov.uk

Children's Occupational Therapy

A referral to Children's Occupational Therapy (which can only be made by a healthcare professional) should only be considered if the advice and strategies at stages 1 and 2 have been implemented and the child is presenting with difficulties performing at least two functional activities which are significantly impacting upon their daily life (self-care, school, play, leisure).

Please note, that we do not accept referrals for 'sensory assessments/profiles'. We will only accept referrals relating to sensory processing where there is a significant impact on the child's ability to engage in everyday activities.

Sensory processing is one tool which can be used within occupational therapy and the trained therapist decides on the appropriate course of intervention based on the needs of the child.

The service can be contacted by telephone on 01384 366912 or via email bchft.childrensot@nhs.net

Useful resources

Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy website
https://www.blackcountryhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services/dudley-childrens-occupational-therapy

Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy website (Black Country Childrens)
https://www.blackcountrychildrens.nhs.uk/OT

Dudley Children's Occupational Therapy Facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/DudleyChildrensOT

NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde website
https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/life-skills/joining-in-with-sensory-differences/

Sensory Integration Network
https://www.sensoryintegrationeducation.com/

Autism Education Trust
https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/

Autism West Midlands
https://www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk/

Interoception information
https://www.kelly-mahler.com/what-is-interoception/

The Alert Programme
https://www.alertprogram.com/

Cerebra 'Sensory Processing A Guide for Parents'
https://cerebra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/sensory-processing-low-res.pdf

NHS
Black Country Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Contact us

Children's Occupational Therapy
The Sunflower Centre
John Corbett Drive
Stourbridge, DY8 4HZ

01384 366912 or 01384 361369

bchft.childrensot@nhs.net