



Berkshire Healthcare
Children, Young People and
Families services

Sensory Needs

There are eight sensory systems – touch, smell, taste, sight, sound, interoception (internal bodily sensations), vestibular (balance and movement), and proprioception (body awareness and coordination).

Every individual's sensory profile is different. Some children experience the sensory world in different ways to others. They may be oversensitive or under sensitive to sensory input, but even if they are more sensitive to one sensory system, like sound, they may be less sensitive to another like smell.

Auditory/noise

- Ear defenders or noise-cancelling headphones can help children sensitive to noise.
- Prepare them for changes in noise levels, for example using a social story to explain a fire drill.
- Give them access to a quiet, low stimulation environment for them to go to when they are feeling overwhelmed.
- Calming music to filter distractions may improve focus and reduce distress.
- For children under-sensitive to auditory input, they may benefit from subtitles on videos/TV, written instructions or visual supports.

Tactile/touch

- Adjust school uniform where you can such as black trainers instead of school shoes or leggings instead of tights.
- Remind them to remove or put on their jumper as they may not notice temperature changes.
- Seam free and sensory friendly clothing may reduce distress around clothing.
- Remove clothing tags.
- Encourage your child to express their needs, for example, "Please don't hug me, I don't like to be touched."
- Food textures may be difficult for some children to tolerate. It's okay for them to have their food preferences if their diet still meets their nutritional needs. They may naturally choose to expand their diet when they are ready. If you are concerned about their nutritional intake, seek advice from their GP.

- Trial different types of creams and sun lotions.
- Weighted blankets or soft things can help to self-soothe.
- Offer opportunities for sensory or messy play such as leaf piles, water tables, sensory bins, painting with hands etc.

Visual/sight

- Remove visual clutter in the environment to reduce distractions and overwhelm.
- Avoid visually overwhelming decorations or posters.
- Dim lights and non-fluorescent lighting. Use natural light where possible.
- Offer sunglasses for outdoors.
- Use visual supports.
- Encourage visual stimulation, such as lava lamps or sensory lighting.

Gustatory/taste

- For children who are sensitive to taste and food textures, aim to keep mealtimes calm.
- Create a list of safe foods.
- Try different toothpaste brands, or non-flavoured toothpaste.
- Keep mealtimes as calm as possible. Introduce new foods outside of mealtimes to help them feel more relaxed.
- Offer crunchy or chewy snacks for children who enjoy different textures.
- Chewies (stim toys) may help some children to regulate.

Olfactory/smell

- Avoid wearing perfumes and colognes around a child who is very sensitive to smells. Strong smells may cause headaches or affect their ability to focus.
- Use chemical and fragrance free washing products.
- Use plain soaps and non-scented shampoos.
- Open windows for fresh air.

Interoception (internal bodily feelings)

- Support your child to notice how different parts of their body feel.
 - Practice naming internal sensations throughout the day.
 - Use an emotions wheel if they are struggling to identify their feelings.
 - Verbalise your own body feelings to your child, for example 'I feel nervous about seeing my boss today and my stomach feels uneasy' or 'I've just walked quickly up the road and now my heart is beating quickly'.
 - Include eating and drinking and toilet breaks into the daily routine as your child may not realise they are hungry or need to use the bathroom. Encourage older children to set alarms as reminders.
- 

Vestibular (balance and movement)

- Provide regular access to activities like trampolining, swinging, dancing and gymnastics to help your child to regulate and meet their movement and balance seeking needs in a safe way.
- Use fidget toys to aid focus and learning.
- Have equipment at home to facilitate stimulation where possible like a trampoline, sensory swing, bouncy ball or rocking chair.
- If your child is oversensitive to balance and movement, try new activities slowly and avoid activities that might make them feel dizzy. They are more likely to experience car sickness so may benefit from sitting at the front of the car when possible.

Proprioceptive (body awareness and coordination)

- Access to things like a weighted blanket, compression clothing, and exercise like swimming, dance, yoga, lifting/pulling objects, or push-ups can help to make them feel more calm.
- Encourage activities at home that meet sensory seeking needs safely, like climbing frames, jumping and bringing in bags of shopping.
- In school, they may be able to help to move tables or chairs.
- For children who are oversensitive to their body's movement, prepare them for what to expect. Respect their body boundaries if they do not want to be touched and encourage them to express these needs to others.

National Autistic Society

More information about autism and sensory processing can be found on the National Autistic Society website: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/about-autism/sensory-processing>

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

More information about helping your child manage sensory experiences can be found on the Berkshire Healthcare website: <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/advice-and-resources/childrens-health-and-development/sensory-processing>

Sensory Processing Workshops

Berkshire Healthcare provide workshops for parent/carers and educational staff to learn more about how to support children and young people with their sensory needs. There are workshops for early years children (aged 0-5 years), primary school-aged children, and secondary school-aged children. More information about the workshops and the links to book a place can be found on the Berkshire Healthcare website: <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/advice/sensory-processing/online-workshops>

