

Sensory Environment

It is essential to consider the effect of the environment for children with sensory processing differences. Most of the sensory input we receive comes from the world around us and children who have difficulty filtering out unnecessary information will then have difficulty concentrating. For example a child who is easily overloaded with visual stimuli will find it more difficult to stay in the just right level of arousal if there are lots of colourful pictures or lots of movement around them. Similarly, a child who is sensitive to noises will struggle if the classroom is noisy and any sudden/unexpected noise may cause distress. Remember if children are over responsive to a certain stimuli it can initiate a fight/flight response! Once adrenaline levels have reached this point it can take a long time to reduce arousal levels and therefore get a child to attend to anything else!

Visual

- Lighting
 - Natural lighting is always best
 - Try to avoid using strip lighting
 - Flickering lights can be very distracting
 - A table lamp might be easier to tolerate
 - Try using coloured bulbs
- Bear in mind reflections – do the blinds flicker? Is there mirrors, disco balls or reflective surfaces.
- Roller blinds will help cut out glare from the sun without causing flickering patterns.
- Keep working area free from clutter – have set work stations.
- Present work tasks or items one at a time rather than getting lots of objects out at once.
- Use off white or pastel coloured paper to reduce glare.

- Off sunglasses in bright lights, or caps when going outside.

For those seeking extra visual stimulation:

- Use light up/reflective toys – disco balls, lava lamps, bubble tubes.
- Use of both the dark and white rooms with light up toys, bubble tubes, projectors, fibre optics, gel pads.
- Play with spinning tops and wheels.
- Tracking games such as marble run and car tracks.
- Play with that includes pouring and sprinkling media such as sand, water, confetti, streamers.
- Use of kaleidoscopes, magnifiers, sand timers, glitter tubes.

Sound

- Bear in mind your tone and volume when you speak – avoid shouting!
- Provide a warning of noises which are about to happen when able.
- Use more visual rather than auditory cues where able.
- Large rooms may affect the acoustics which some children might struggle with – think about using smaller, carpeted rooms to lessen the acoustics.
- Think about the background noise in the area that you are in – is there music playing? Can the windows and doors be closed to block out external noise?
- Switch off electrical equipment that is not in use to avoid 'white noise'.
- Head phones or ear defenders may be useful but should be used prior to the child being exposed to the noise.
- Provide quiet safe spaces as sensory retreats.
- Let them choose the music they like – encourage dancing to it to distract from sound and encourage them to sing along (keeping your own voice calm and quiet).

Space

- Keep working environments free of clutter
- Have designated areas for specific activities.
- Think about what the child is expected to sit on – are they comfortable, could there be extra padding if the surface is hard, or a square of carpet if the surface is cold.
- Is the area busy? – especially the corridors. Allow them to move through corridors during quieter times, or go to lunch before others to avoid needing to queue.
- Allow them personal space if they are anxious about being touched by other – think about where you expect them to sit during work tasks or lunch break.

Sleep

- Make the bedroom nice and relaxed — make sure the environment is only used for sleeping. Do not use the environment to playing.
- Turn off screens an hour before bedtime. White or blue light (for example from tablets and television screens) can over stimulate people. Try using a red or orange light. This is thought to be the most calming light.
- Light projectors with dim, slow moving patterns can provide the visual input a child might be seeking, while calming them before they go to sleep.
- White noise may help to mask other sounds in the environment that may cause distraction or distress whilst trying to sleep. There are white noise apps available, or you can buy a white noise machine.



- Using deep pressure, such as firm hugs or massage, will provide proprioceptive input. This can help to calm the sensory system before or while your child is trying to get sleep.