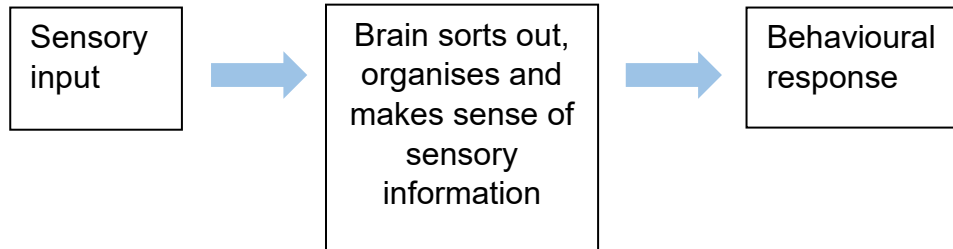


Sensory pack for schools

Sensory Occupational Therapy Outreach Service

What is sensory processing?

All day, everyday we are bombarded by sensory information coming from our environment and from within our bodies. Our brain 'sorts out' and 'organises' this information so that we can engage appropriately in our everyday activities.



Sensory input from the environment might include the smell of the lunch hall, the look of the display boards and the sounds in the school hall.

Sensory information from our bodies may include the movement of our muscles, feelings of thirst or the need to use the toilet.

Effective integration of the senses forms the foundations for learning and engagement in necessary and meaningful occupations.

Sensory processing difficulties/differences can be seen in individuals with or without a diagnosis e.g. ADHD or Autism.

The senses

Most people think that we have 5 senses, but we now know that we have 8, these are:

External senses (information from outside of the body):

- Vision
- Hearing (Auditory)
- Taste (Gustatory)
- Smell (Olfactory)
- Touch (Tactile)

Internal senses (information coming internally within the body):

- Proprioception
- Vestibular
- Interoception

Proprioception is our sense of body awareness. It allows us to understand where we are positioned relative to things in our environment and to understand where our body parts are in relation to one another. The proprioceptive sense enables us to understand how much force or speed to apply when engaging in activities.

Vestibular is our sense of movement, balance and posture.

Interoception is our sense of internal body functions such as feelings of hunger or thirst.

Sensory processing difficulties/differences

Some children, young people and adults can have difficulties registering, making sense of and responding to sensory information.

Sensory information can have different effects on the nervous system. Some sensory information excites the nervous system whereas some sensory information dampens down (inhibits) responses. Modulation is the delicate balance between excitatory and inhibitory input so that a person can attend to what they need to and filter out what is irrelevant. This process supports engagement in everyday occupations. For example, a child that has modulation difficulties may find it hard to filter out irrelevant background noises leading them to become distracted in lessons.

There are several patterns of sensory integrative dysfunction, however, educators in school are most likely to notice students who have difficulties with sensory reactivity. Sensory reactivity relates to how a person responds to sensory information. Sensory reactivity can present as either over-responsiveness or under-responsiveness to certain stimuli.

Over-responsive/hyper responsive

This means that a person has a greater than expected response to certain sensory stimuli, they 'over respond'. Hyper responsiveness can be seen in relation to one sensory system or to multiple sensory systems in any one person. Behaviours you may observe might include but are not limited to; refusal to wear school uniform because of how it feels, easily distracted, strong emotional responses to touch, fussy eater, afraid to use playground or P.E. equipment, places hands over ears when school bell rings and becomes upset after being in the hall.

Under-responsive/hypo responsive

This means that a person has a less than expected response to certain stimuli, they 'under respond'. Just like hyper responsiveness, hypo responsiveness can be seen in relation to one sensory system or to multiple sensory systems in any one person. Behaviours you may observe might include but are not limited to; Child doesn't notice when they are hurt, child sits slouched or has difficulties remaining upright, child needs instructions repeated, child may seek sensory stimuli to increase the sensory input they are receiving.

The following tables show what you may observe if a child or young person has sensory processing differences and the strategies you could use to support the child or young person in your school.

Over-responsivity

Vision



Distractibility/difficulties focusing on work.

Easily distracted or distressed by changes in the environment.

Distressed by busy environments

Dislikes or is sensitive to certain lights. Seeks out quiet, dark or low stimulus spaces.

- Decrease visual stimuli e.g. limit displays, keep space around the board plain.
- Seating plans- consider where the child is less likely to get distracted. This will likely be the front of the class away from windows or doors.
- Reduce irritating lighting such as flickering or fluorescent lights.
- Use blinds to reduce uncomfortable sunlight across board or on child's desk.
- Only have necessary items out on worksurfaces but keep these close by for the child to use.
- Place resources/equipment in storage trays which are clearly labelled.
- Allow child to use a desk screen- keep desk screen clear from clutter.
- Break down worksheets e.g. uncover questions one at a time.
- Print worksheets in larger print and have less information per page.

Hearing



Distressed by noises (e.g. cries, holds hands over ears, rocks)

Avoids certain lessons or places in the school.

Becomes distressed or withdraws in the lunch hall or in the playground.

Makes a lot of noise themselves (can be to drown out unpleasant sounds or exert control over noise in the environment).

Insists on wearing headphones, ear defenders or hoodies.

- Offer earplugs, headphones or ear defenders when needed (use only when needed not all the time).
- Offer quiet lunch clubs.
- Support child to engage in calming activities prior, during and after noisy activities (see proprioception information sheet for activity ideas).
- Consider subtle noises and sit child away from these e.g. pipes, projectors, alarms.
- Warn child in advance of noise if possible.
- Explain source of noise if child is not sure.
- Allow child to access a quiet space if becoming overstimulated/ offer child a seat in a quieter area of the room.

Over-responsivity

Taste



Child has a limited diet.
Child is unable to participate in food tasting sessions.
Child retches.
Child prefers bland foods.

Strategies you can try

- Never force child to engage in food tasting.
- Allow child to interact with food in food prep sessions without pressure to eat.
- Seek specialist support if child's diet is severely restricted.

Touch



Child has difficulties wearing the school uniform due to the feel of it.
Child has strong emotional responses to touch.
Child struggles to participate in messy play activities.
Child has a limited diet.
Child is unable to use tools/utensils appropriately.
Child has difficulties lining up with other children.
Child has strong reaction to small bumps and scrapes.

Strategies you can try

- Support child to engage with proprioceptive activities to their hands prior to fine motor activities such as writing. See proprioceptive information sheet for more details.
- Allow child to engage in deep pressure or proprioceptive activities prior, during and after less tolerable tactile activities.
- Allow child to engage in messy activities at their own pace. Start with dry items before moving on to wetter or sticky materials.
- Allow child immediate access to wash hands when engaging in messy play e.g. wet wipes on the desk.
- Offer alternative items e.g. glue stick in place of PVA glue.
- Sit child where there is less chance of people walking past and brushing them.
- Have child stand at the front or the back of the line.
- Avoid light touch (light touch is often perceived as more uncomfortable).
- Think about your use of touch- very often when a child is distressed we naturally want to offer comforting touch like a hand hold however this may cause more distress for some children.
- Allow modifications to the uniform e.g. seamless clothing or no tie etc.

Over-responsivity

Smell



What you may observe

Child gags at smells.
Child struggles to tolerate the lunch hall.
Child seeks out pleasant smells.
Child notices subtle smells.
Child has a limited diet.

Strategies you can try

- Minimise smells in the classroom, e.g. scent free pens, no air fresheners, even staff perfumes can be problematic so try to limit these.
- Use unscented hand soaps.
- Support child to engage in food prep sessions but don't force participation.
- Offer lunch clubs (small and quiet space to eat lunch).
- Explain to child what may be causing smells e.g. the food in the lunch hall.

Vestibular








What you may observe


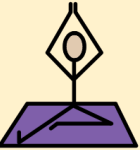
Child is fearful of movement.
Child becomes distressed or struggles to engage in P.E activities.
Child gets dizzy easily.
Child does not want to join in with peers in the playground.
Child prefers sedentary activities.

Strategies you can try

- Make movement games fun without pressure to achieve an outcome (never force participation).
- Offer additional support in P.E. e.g. adult close by to reassure or support child.
- Modify activities where necessary.
- Support child to identify safe/comfortable activities in the playground.
- Keep tools and materials close to child so they don't need to keep moving around the classroom.
- Ensure child's desk is appropriate height and when seated the child's feet are flat on a stable base.
- Avoid spinning activities which can be dysregulating.

Under-responsivity		
<p>Vision</p> 	<p>What you may observe</p> <p>Child doesn't notice visual details.</p> <p>Child misses information on documents.</p> <p>Child likes to look at moving objects.</p> <p>Child flicks objects in front of their eyes.</p>	<p>Strategies you can try</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use bright, bold objects in learning. • Clearly define where child is to write e.g. full bold lines. • Use highlighters to highlight important information.
<p>Hearing</p> 	<p>What you may observe</p> <p>Child doesn't notice noises around them e.g. their name being called.</p> <p>Child seeks or makes noises.</p>	<p>Strategies you can try</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure you have the child's attention before you give them instructions and check their understanding of the instruction. • Use noise to cue a child into an activity e.g. tapping a drum or shaking a tambourine etc.
<p>Taste</p> 	<p>What you may observe</p> <p>Child tries to lick or taste everything including non edibles.</p> <p>Child craves strong flavours.</p> <p>Child doesn't seem to notice strong flavours.</p>	<p>Strategies you can try</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to have strong flavoured foods. • Provide safe foods for child to chew and eat. • Seek specialist advice from child's GP or an Occupational Therapist if concerned about PICA.

Under-responsivity		
<p>Touch</p> 	<p>What you may observe</p> <p>Child does not notice when touched.</p> <p>Child does not notice when they are hurt.</p> <p>Child doesn't notice when they are messy.</p> <p>Child tries to touch everything or everyone.</p>	<p>Strategies you can try</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer opportunities for messy play. • Provide tactile/sensory boxes. • Allow child to use fidget toys, playdough or Blu tac at their desk. • For discrete tactile input, a piece of fabric attached to the underside of the table can work well. • Be aware that the child may not notice when they are hurt. Child may have a reduced awareness of dangers such as hot water etc and may need close supervision to ensure safety.
<p>Smell</p> 	<p>What you may observe</p> <p>Child does not notice smells around them.</p> <p>Child tries to smell everything/everyone.</p>	<p>Strategies you can try</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use scented pens for writing. • Have access to scented hand soaps in washroom. • Allow child to have a preferred scented item in class e.g. handcream, item from home etc.

Under-responsivity		
<p>Vestibular</p> 	<p>What you may observe</p> <p>Child rocks on chair. Child is always on the go. Child fidgets in chair.</p>	<p>Strategies you can try</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer child a wobble cushion to sit on (if child has good core stability). • Allow child to have regular movement breaks- these can be made functional such as movement within learning. • Use stretchy band tied to the bottom of the chair legs for child to push feet on/against. • Offer alternative seating such as wobble chairs, gym balls (if good core stability) or Zuma rockers.
<p>Proprioception</p> 	<p>What you may observe</p> <p>Child may not know how to grade the force and/or speed of their movement. Child may frequently trip or fall. Child might overfill their mouth. Child may seek jumping, pushing, pulling or crashing activities. Child may chew inappropriate items. Child may bump into things frequently.</p>	<p>Strategies you can try</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide plenty of opportunity for proprioceptive activities- see information sheet for activity ideas. • Ensure child's environment is safe and free from trip hazards. • Engage child in 'hand warm ups' before writing. Use activities such as kneading, rolling and squeezing playdough. • Offer chews (if parents agree). • Increase chewy or crunchy foods in the diet (if no eating difficulties). • Supervise mealtimes carefully, cut up food and support child not to overfill mouth. • Oral-motor activities can support child to develop awareness of their mouth. Activities such as blowing bubbles, sucking drinks through straws, using blow pens etc. • Allow child to work in different positions e.g. lying on tummy, sitting in chair, using standing desk etc.

Easy environmental modifications

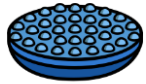
The environment can have a big impact on how well a person is able to engage in their everyday school life. It is advisable that all schools complete a sensory audit and that this is reviewed regularly particularly if there are any changes.

Here are some resources to support you to do this:

- Autism education trust environmental audit
- Twinkle Classroom sensory audit (you will need an account to access)
- Twinkle SEND *How to complete a sensory checklist in a learning environment* Video on YouTube.

A few quick and easy adjustments that you can make in the classroom

Alternative classroom seating



Can support those students that need different seating to focus and engage in learning. See Alternative seating handout for more information

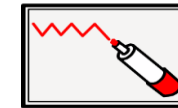
**please note some alternative seating options require the individual to have good core stability in order to use them effectively*

Check or reduce florescent lighting



This can reduce flickering and glare, and therefore discomfort for children and young people who are hyper-responsive to visual input.

Keep space around a board free from clutter



This can support children who are easily distracted by visual stimuli to maintain focus.

It makes the board the main focus point and can support children to understand where they are meant to be looking.

Child has less irrelevant information to process and filter out.

Have access to fidget toys which may also include play dough or equivalent



Supports children/young people to get tactile and proprioceptive feedback.

Can support focus and attention.

Provide option of a low stimulus work space for children to access



This allows children that need it a low stimulus environment to work in.

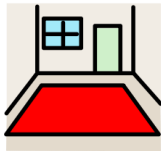
Have classroom items in clearly labelled storage trays/boxes



This supports children to organise themselves and to know where items are.

This can reduce unnecessary visual clutter in the environment.

Seating areas of classroom are carpeted

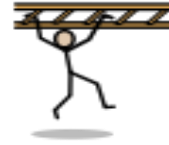
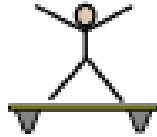


This reduces noise from chairs being moved.

Can dampen acoustics of a room.

This can all support children with auditory hyper-responsivity.

Proprioception



Proprioception gives us an awareness of our body position and movement. It lets us know where our body is in relation to our environment and helps us to know how to move our body and how much force we need to use to conduct a task. This is the reason why we know where our bodies are. For example, most of us can close our eyes and accurately point to our nose. The receptors of the proprioceptive system are located in our muscles, tendons and ligaments and these are triggered when we pull, stretch, receive deep pressure, or conduct heavy muscle work activities. Another role of the proprioceptive system is to help us calm and regulate.

Ideas for Proprioceptive Activities

Proprioceptive activities involve input to the muscles and joints. Here are just some ideas, you may wish to develop your own ideas which will suit your children and your classroom routine. Think of activities which will work the muscles and joints.

Teachers and Teaching Assistants will often be required to explain or demonstrate to the children any activities outlined below before starting and ensure that the child/young person is happy to engage. Remember that these activities need to be fun, and the child or young person needs to be fully engaged to get the best results.

Movement Activities



Wheelbarrow walking

Child is in the plank position, hands on the floor under their shoulders and another child or adult holds the child's legs and they begin to walk forward together. Repeat as many times as you like.



Rocket jump

Crouch down and place your hands on the floor next to you. Count down from ten and leap into the air raising both hands up to the sky. Repeat the rocket launch a few times.



Jog on the spot

Bring your knees up to high jog on the spot for 15-30 seconds.



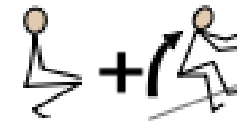
Bunny hop

Place a long rope on the ground. Travel the length of the rope by hopping from left side to the right, all the way along the rope.



Star jump

Stand with your hands by your sides and your legs together. Jump to a star shape with your legs apart and arms apart (like a star). Repeat the above action as many times as you can in 15 seconds.



Squat and jump

Squat with your arms out in front of you then jump, bringing your arms down beside you. Repeat as many times as necessary.



Commando crawling

Lay down on your tummy. Move forward by pulling with your left arm and pushing with your right leg. Then switch and use your right arm to pull and your left leg to push.



Marching

Start with a regular paced march. Increase to a fast pace. Try doing high marching by bringing the knees up higher. Try to include some marching songs while doing the activity such as, 'The Ants Go Marching' and 'The Grand old Duke of York'.



Animal Walk

Crab walk- Squat close to the floor. Lean backwards and place your hands on the floor. Now walk sideways, while holding your bottom off the ground.

Bear crawl-On your hands and knees bear crawl from one side of the room/ hallway to another.

Frog jump- Place your hands on the floor in between your knees. Using your feet, jump forward and land with your hands on the ground.



Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes

Perform the action slowly and then fast. Then complete the "just right" pace to get ready to return to work.



Body sock

The body sock provides resistance for deep pressure.

Here are a few fun things to do with the body sock:

- . Get your whole body inside the body sock and fully stretch your arms or legs or both! You can do this while standing or lying on the floor.
- . Try rolling with arms tucked in and your legs stretched out.
- . Pull the sock around you in a hug.



Lycra Fabric

Fold or twist the Lycra fabric and use it as a rope. Gently pull the rope out and in, with a rowing motion and sing some rowing songs such as ' Row, row, row the boat'.

Chair, Wall, and Floor Based Activities



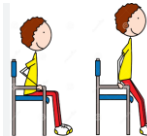
Chair resistance bands

Place a stretchy band around the bottom of the two front chair legs. The child can kick against this to get their muscles and joints moving.



Wall push ups

Do five wall push ups or more if you need to. Place palms flat against the wall and engage in 'push ups' against it or lie on the floor and push against the wall with your feet.



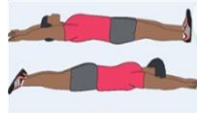
Chair push up

Press your hands against the seat of your chair. Puuush it hard so that your body lifts or almost lifts 1...2...3... Now let go and let your hands relax. Do it again, press your hands to the chair 1..2..3.. then release.



Floor press ups

Start in press position with hands, shoulder width apart, and feet together, with body staying straight. Lower yourself down slowly to the floor and then push up to return to straight position 1-3 times.



Log roll

Lie flat on your back on the mat. Turn head and shoulder to the left or right keeping the body straight then start rolling from back to front then front to back.
Repeat three times.



Wall sit

Stand against the wall and pretend to sit down. Hold for 5-10 seconds



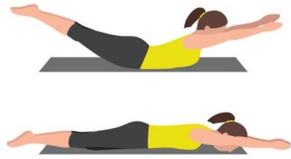
Standing on one leg

Practice standing in one leg for 5-10 seconds. Then swap legs and repeat the exercise.



Yoga

Yoga poses can be fun and simple to start the day. Try some fun poses like, 'Child Pose', 'Mountain Pose' and 'Bridge Pose'.



Superman pose

Lay face down on the floor with legs and arms stretched out in front, above the head. Lift your legs and arms off the floor. Hold for 5-10 seconds.



Row a boat

Child and partner sit on the floor. Stretch each leg out and hold each others forearms and wrists, gently pulling forwards and backwards like a boat on the waves. Try pulling backwards and forwards faster and sing the 'Row, Row Your Boat' song.

Hand Activities



Playdough/Plasticine

Kneading, rolling, cutting, stretching, modelling all get hand muscles working.



Fidget toy

Offer the child a variety of sensory toys that can be **pulled**, **pushed**, or **stretched**. Make the activity fun and engaging for the child to participate.



Theraputty

Hide some small toys or objects in the theraputty and ask the children to work through the stiff substance to see if they find the hidden treasure.
Theraputty comes in a variety of different resistances (colour coded), harder to manipulate compared to playdough.



Crumbling paper

Squeezing paper into balls gives children an opportunity to build hand strength.

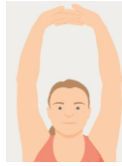


Sponge and Washcloth

Soak a sponge or washcloth in a bucket with water until they are fully saturated. Then squeeze out all the water from the sponge and washcloth.

Hand pushes

- Pushing hands together
- Interlocking at fingertips and pulling,
- Interlocking fingers and pressing on the head.



Arm reaches

Stand up and reach with left arm as high as you can then reach with the right, then reach with both and wave in the air.



Prayer push

Position hands in prayer position with elbow out, pushing palms together.



Plunger

Pick up new plunger and let the children attach them, and then pull them up off the floor.



Squeeze a ball

Find a soft ball and hold it in your palm, squeezing it as hard as you can. Hold this position for three to five seconds.

Oral- Motor Activities



Sucking on an ice lolly.



Sour and sweet snacks

Eating snacks with sour/ sweet tastes like grapefruit, orange wedges, lemonade and sour gummy worms.



Eat crunchy snacks

Eating crunchy snacks or food like apple, carrots, bagel, fruit bars and dried fruit (dried mango is very good for chewing) provides lots of proprioceptive input.



Sensory chewy toys

Specially designed necklaces, bracelets, and toys available for chewing.

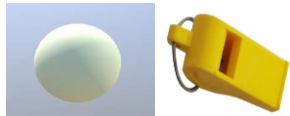


Mirror exercise

Making faces in the mirror- copying or playing 'Simon says...'



Blowing up balloons or playing any wind instruments.



Blowing

- . Blowing Ping-Pong balls around a plate, tray or to a target.
- . Using whistles of varying shapes to make sounds.



Drinking through a straw

- . Using thinner straws for thicker drinks like milkshakes needs more effort and give lots of input to the mouth.
- . Drink from a sports bottle or try using curly straws when drinking.

Classroom Activities



Carry books

Pick up books and carry them across the room when you walk.



Push a box

Fill a box with books or toys and kneel in front of it. Push the box across the room or school corridor.



Door monitor

Child holds the door when entering or exiting a room or building.



Weighted backpack

Place a few books in a backpack and encourage the child to walk with it for a few minutes. A message could be placed in the backpack and the child could deliver the message to school staff.

Note: It is recommended the backpack is no more than 5% of the child's body weight.



Book duty monitor

Have a class book duty monitor in the morning and afternoon sessions to pass out and collect books for the teachers.



Lunch time trolley monitor

At the start of the day, assign a child to be the lunch time trolley monitor. The child is responsible for pushing the class trolley to the hall during lunch time and back to the class.



Snacks helper

Assign a child to be the snack helper. Helping the TA in distributing the fruit snack for the day.



Pencil sharpener classroom job

Great hand strengthening to sharpen all those pencils ready for next day activities.

Note: Please assess the child's ability before giving this task. Always remember to supervise the child while doing the activity.

Playground/ Hall Activities



Bouncing Sphere

Sit on the gym ball unaided if you can or an adult stands close behind to ensure the child doesn't fall off.
Feet firmly on the floor then gentle bounce up and down.



Monkey bars

Try and hold, then move across the bars.



Scooter board

Here are some fun activities using a scooter board:

- . Lie on tummy and move forward or backwards using the arms.
- . Lie on tummy and pull on a hoop or rope held by an adult.
- . Sit and pull-on hoop or rope held by an adult.
- . Sit on knees and move forward or backwards using the arms.



Ladders

Climb the ladder or to the tower. Some come with rope attachments and the child can then pull themselves up the steep slope.



Bouncing on a space hopper

Sit on top of the space hopper, holding onto the rubber horns and bounce up and down until the ball leaves the ground.

Note: Make sure younger or less able children are well supervised so they don't bounce too high or fall off.



'Fireperson' playground poles

Hold on to the pole and try to lift yourself then slide down.



Slide

Encourage the child to climb on the ladder and sit at the top of the slide, facing forward then scoot until their legs are hanging down over the front edge of the slide. If no one's around climb up the slide.

Repeat this process, removing some support until they feel confident enough to slide on their own.



Jumping on a trampoline

Start with, standing upright followed by gently swing your arms forwards up in a circular motion, bringing feet together and jump.

Remember to keep your feet slightly apart to get a good balance when landing on the mat.



Tug of war

Each team will pull on a rope until one of the teams is able to pull most of the rope over to one side.



See-saw

One child will sit on one end and another child or adult on the other end, moving up and down. Remember to take turns on pushing feet against the ground to lift your side up high.



Hopscotch

The player must hop over the square containing their marker, then turn and hop back, retrieving their marker.



Skipping rope

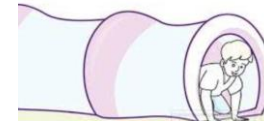
Hold the rope in both hands so that it touches the ground then start lifting both arms, so the rope lifts and swings against your legs. Encourage the child to bring the rope up over their head so that it lands in front of them.

Note: Make sure the ropes are the correct jump rope size for the child.



Peanut ball

Roll forwards over a peanut ball and weight bear through hands. Adults need to support the child while they are on the ball.



Crawling in a tunnel

On hands and knees child makes their way through a tunnel.

The activities listed here are not specific to an individual. Those carrying out the activity with the child are responsible for risk assessing as necessary and making sure activities are appropriate for the child/person based on their capabilities and any relevant information such as medical history. It is important that the person carrying out the activities has the appropriate consents to do so.