

Sensory based strategies to support participation in activities

Touch (tactile)



Oversensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Distressed/avoids areas with people (supermarket/playground)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Upset when others brush past them).<input type="checkbox"/> Push/shove others, fearful of them getting close.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid/distressed during play activities involving touch (i.e. messy play, painting).<input type="checkbox"/> Distressed when their hands/face are messy (i.e. mealtimes/baking).<input type="checkbox"/> Distracted and fidgety.<input type="checkbox"/> Dressing difficulties: poor tolerance certain fabrics/clothing/labels.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid/Distressed during self-care activities (washing/hair-brushing).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow child to stand at end of queuing line (supermarket/school).• Child to push trolley/carry shopping in supermarket.• Allow child to sit on a small table at front or back of class.• "Deep pressure/Heavy work" prior to, during and after exposure to sensation (i.e. washing/grooming activities/busy places).• Allow child to have their own space (at home & school).• Seamless clothes/lycra garments.• Consider type of clothing (fabric and length of sleeves, cut out labels).• Use pressure when shampooing/drying with a towel.• Encourage child to wash/dry self.• Vibrating toothbrush

Under-sensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Stand/sit too close to others.<input type="checkbox"/> May be heavy handed.<input type="checkbox"/> Appears to have high pain threshold.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sitting still.<input type="checkbox"/> Touches items more than peers.<input type="checkbox"/> Not notice having messy hands and face/twisted clothing.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty with fine motor tasks.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty manipulating pencils/scissors<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty cleaning themselves after using the toilet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Encourage tactile experiences:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Messy play (sand, water, paint, lentils/rice, foam, play-dough, powder, jelly, slime).• Hide & Seek - find objects of hidden in bowls of rice/pasta etc.• "Deep pressure/Heavy work"• Dress in front of mirror (visual cue for motor planning & body awareness.• Hand "warm up" before fine motor tasks.• Pencil grips.• Use moist toilet roll.

Please use this list as a guide to highlight the child's specific areas of difficulty. This list is not exhaustive and is not a diagnostic tool. There may be underlying medical reasons for the difficulties suggested, so the child/young person should be seen by a medical practitioner. Please discuss use of strategies with an Occupational Therapist, as these strategies are not suitable for every child.

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Taste & Smell

Oversensitive:



Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Vomit/Gag at smells that may not bother others.<input type="checkbox"/> Mealtime difficulties:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Get upset by certain tastes and/or smells and may not appear to get used to the smell.<input type="checkbox"/> Has a bland diet.<input type="checkbox"/> Appears anxious at mealtimes<input type="checkbox"/> Become distracted by a smell in the room and have difficulty focusing.<input type="checkbox"/> Won't use toilet at School.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid/Distressed during self-care activities (washing/grooming).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow child carry out some Deep pressure/heavy work activities to distract and calm them from the smell/taste (prior to, during & after exposure).• Allow them to have their favourite scent or an object that they like the smell of to block out smells they don't like.• Consider food textures.• Food textures that encourage biting & chewing (deep pressure).• Encourage breathing through mouth instead of nose.• Wash and dry clothes in unscented products• Use non-perfumed soaps/sprays.• Cold food (ice pops/ice) prior to eating foods child dislikes.• Involve child in food preparation, and give them choices on what to make.

Under-sensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Crave certain tastes and/or smells.<input type="checkbox"/> Under reacts to bad/strong or good/nice smells.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scratch and sniff stickers.• Scented perfumes.• Scented pens.• Cooking with strong smells.• Play near freshly cut grass.• Play with strong playdough• Food textures that encourage biting & chewing (deep pressure).• Strong tasting food (sweet/sour/ spicy) prior to trying new foods.

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Visual

Oversensitive:



Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Distracted by pictures or people in the room, affecting engagement in school, mealtimes, dressing.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty engaging in conversations/learning.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Distracted by clutter, board displays, bright colours.<input type="checkbox"/> May dislike or cover their eyes when the lights switched on.<input type="checkbox"/> May complain of a headache, rub their eyes, have watery eyes or squint.<input type="checkbox"/> Dislikes lighted environment, prefers darker environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure child has had an eye test with an optician.• School:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Build privacy boards with cardboard around desk.<input type="checkbox"/> Minimise wall & ceiling displays.<input type="checkbox"/> Sit the child at front of class to block out visual stimuli.<input type="checkbox"/> Give regular breaks.<input type="checkbox"/> Only get out what they need for that task.• Keep Home & classroom clutter free.• "Deep pressure/heavy work" prior to, during and after exposure to sensation.• Timeout space at home and in school with dimmed lighting.• Use natural light where possible.• Keep visual distractions to a minimum when participating in tasks.• Be colour sensitive when choosing toys, towels, wall colours etc.

Undersensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating at school: Takes more visual information to respond.<input type="checkbox"/> Likes different types of lighting (reflective, fluorescent, spinning).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use bright lights, lots of colour and movement.• Use different coloured papers.• Use lots of hand gestures.• Increase visual stimulation when teaching/playing with the child.• Use visual cues when completing activities.

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Auditory



Oversensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Avoids or becomes distressed in noisy places (playground, shopping centres, swimming pool).<input type="checkbox"/> Easily startled by noise.<input type="checkbox"/> Dislikes loud noises.<input type="checkbox"/> May cover ears.<input type="checkbox"/> Appears anxious before expected noise (i.e. fireworks, school bell).<input type="checkbox"/> Over react to sounds that others barely notice.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating, distracted by noise such as a fan, or ticking clock and be unable to focus on another task.<input type="checkbox"/> Hums to self.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audiologist – hearing test.• Forewarn child of any loud noise (i.e. bell/fire alarm).• Rugs/carpet in house/school.• Headphones/ear plugs when noisy.• Don't sit child near to school bell or speakers.• Consider tone of voice and use of language.• Allow time out to a quiet space (pop up tent/other room).• Encourage participation in "deep pressure/heavy work" prior to, during and after exposure to sensation.• Be aware of other visual or auditory noises in the room which may affect participation in self-care/leisure/productivity activities.• Carry a heavy back pack in noisy environments.• Plan for special events (football games, firework displays).

Under sensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Difficult learning new skills, participating in activities of daily living: appears not to hear information.<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys loud noises.<input type="checkbox"/> Hum to self<input type="checkbox"/> Speaks loudly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audiologist – hearing test.• Alter tone and pitch of voice.• Only speak to the child when they are facing you and looking at you.• Give simple instructions. Don't use too many words.• Speak loudly and clearly to these children at all times.• Find out what activities are alerting.

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Vestibular



Oversensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Avoids activities where feet may be off ground (gymnastics, swings, toilet).<input type="checkbox"/> May become dizzy/sick easily.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty engaging in play: avoid apparatus or fast-moving playground equipment<input type="checkbox"/> Hesitate or avoid walking downstairs<input type="checkbox"/> Be fearful of heights even on slightly raised surfaces<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid tilting the head from midline e.g. dislikes doing forward rolls, becomes distressed/avoids having hair washed/brushed.<input type="checkbox"/> Appear cautious, move slowly, and unlikely to take risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supportive seat, feet firmly on ground.• Ensure child always has feet grounded, use a stool/step if required (toilet, classroom seat).• Use your hands to help child develop his awareness of his body position.• Always use firm 'grounding' touch and concentrate on the joints of the body. This will also help to focus the child's attention on an activity.• Deep pressure/proprioceptive/ heavy work prior to, during and after exposure to sensation.

Under sensitive:

Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Need to keep moving as much as possible to function.<input type="checkbox"/> Have difficulty staying or sitting still in their seat.<input type="checkbox"/> Repeatedly jump up and down, rock back and forth, and shake their heads.<input type="checkbox"/> Crave intense movement experiences, going upside down jumping off furniture etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular change in position (laying on tummy, cross legged, standing)• Obstacle courses where child must go over/under/through obstacles.• Move in sit cushion.• Fidget toy• Active work.• Deep pressure/proprioceptive/ heavy work throughout the day.• Sports: swimming/running/cycling.• Go to the playpark before School.• Regular short movement breaks.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Jumping Jacks.○ Circular moves/spinning.○ Forward/backward & up/down movements.

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Proprioception



Difficulties and impact on function:	Ways to help:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Climbs & hides in small spaces.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sitting still, and concentrating.<input type="checkbox"/> Poor fine and gross motor co-ordination.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty washing & dressing.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty using cutlery.<input type="checkbox"/> Poor handwriting.<input type="checkbox"/> Uses too much or too little force on objects (pencils, scissors, buttons, zips) and people.<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty throwing and catching.<input type="checkbox"/> Poor balance.<input type="checkbox"/> Seek out rough and tumble play.<input type="checkbox"/> Bump into or push objects or people.<input type="checkbox"/> Appear to uncoordinated or clumsy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play games with large cardboard boxes – allow child to climb/hide/squeeze into then rip apart/jump on it etc.• Regular “deep pressure/heavy work proprioceptive” activities through day.• Frequent movement breaks.• Fidgets.• Supportive seat, feet on floor with arm rests.• Allow various sitting positions (laying on tummy, against a wall).• Air cushion/move & sit cushion for activities that require concentration (school work, mealtimes etc).• Try obstacle courses where child has to go over, under, between obstacles.• “Hand warm up” exercises prior to completing fine motor tasks.• Make a “burrito” or “sandwich”: Firmly press on your child’s arms legs and back with pillows or make a “burrito” by rolling them up in a blanket.

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