

Thinking About The Sensory Environment

Quick reference
SHEET #4

Sensory symptoms can often be seen in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders to a greater or lesser degree. Other learners who have Dyspraxia / DCD may also describe specific sensory challenges dependent on the environment.

Individuals with sensory issues can:

- ☹️ use avoiding behaviour
- ☹️ be over or under-sensitive to different settings
- ☹️ react emotionally to different situations
- ☹️ seek sensory stimulus - likes lots of spinning

Each individual has their own response style. When sensory issues dominate an individual's behaviour, other social / emotional symptoms may appear. These secondary effects may become another problem that is separate but related.

Habits and learned fears can persist if not addressed.

Related social and emotional behaviours

The learner may misperceive the world as dangerous, alarming or at the very least, irritating. Learned patterns and habits are often developed around avoiding disrupting sensory events or seeking out sensation that might restore comfort. Innocent memories can be stored as traumatic experiences. Relationships can be exaggerated. Behaviour with known and trusted people can be quite different than with others. These behaviours make sense, if viewed as the child doing the best he / she can to 'survive'.

In schools it is important to consider the environment and how this can impact on the learner's ability to maintain focus and feel at ease.

Allowing the learner to adapt tasks or change environments can make a real difference e.g. moving to a quiet space; using noise cancelling headphones; wearing a soft T-Shirt under a shirt; alteration in lighting. These don't cost a lot of money to achieve, but require a willingness to do so!

