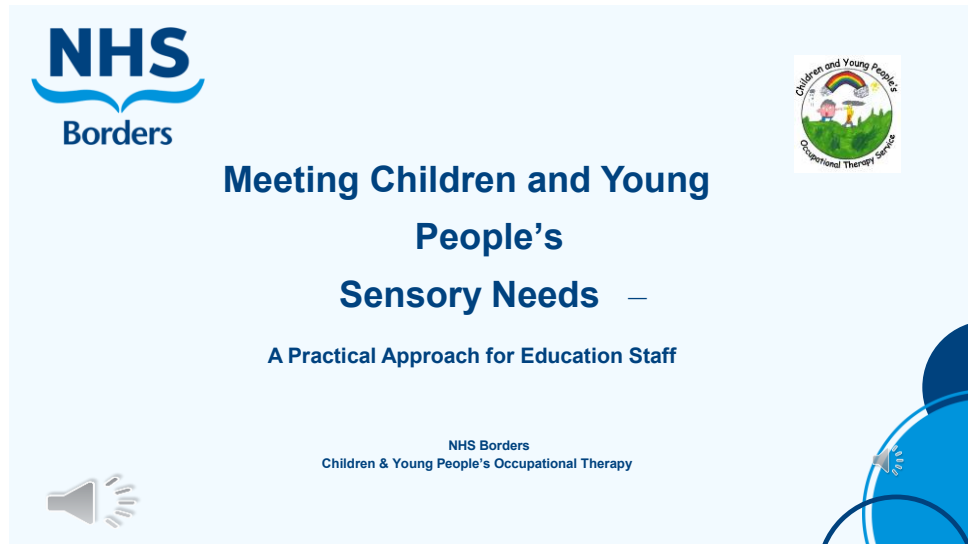


Transcript



Welcome to our video meeting children and young people's sensory needs- a practical approach for education staff.

Occupational therapists have been studying and treating sensory integration for many years, using both remedial and compensatory strategies to treat people. (Bodison & Parham, 2018). Additionally, practice standards state that as occupational therapy practitioners, we may intervene within the dimensions of the person, their environment and in the occupation itself. A person's environment might be physical, social, societal, cultural, economic and/or attitudinal (RCOT).

We have another video in our Education mini-series where we focus on how you can meet their sensory needs in the school environment.

Before watching this video, please watch our What is sensory integration video mini-series. This will provide you with an explanation of sensory integration, and self-regulation as well as demonstrate activities to support arousal levels. Some of these activities can also be used in classrooms.

From watching this video, we aim: -

- ◆ To increase your confidence in recognising and meeting your pupils' sensory needs
- ◆ Provide ideas for strategies and equipment that can be used in a classroom.
- ◆ Provide you with an Individual problem-solving tool that can be used when considering a problem.

- ◆ Provide you with ideas for useful reading and websites.

First things first.

When thinking about the sensory needs of your pupils, remember that:-

Each child, no matter what disorder or condition they may have been diagnosed with, will present with different behaviours. Research shows that 20% of the school age population have sensory processing difficulties that impact on their ability to do everyday activities. You don't have to have a diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition to have sensory processing differences although they are more recognised with these diagnoses. Often you will see bright children not achieving because they are struggling with sensory integration, and **then** can get labelled as "bad". Remember we all have different sensory likes and dislikes and your pupils will likely have different preferences to you and their peers.

Each child needs to be treated as an individual case. The cause of the behaviour for one child does not mean it's the same for another. Some behavioural issues are a response to sensory stimuli. To help you recognise if the cause might be sensory, step back and look at the problem and ask yourself these questions.

From using the information in our video series on sensory integration you will be able to recognise their alertness level. Think back to the videos describing Eeyore and Tigger. Is the child under alert? You may have noticed that they constantly seek cuddles either from you or their peers. Is the child over alert – you may have noticed they need to cover their ears often during the school day. Consider if these behaviours are stress related. When we are anxious or stressed, our senses become heightened and can result in bigger behavioural reactions. An example of this is if we hear an unexpected sound in our house late at night, we can become very sensitive to any other smaller sounds that may be going on that we previously weren't aware of.

Is the problem related to one or more sensory systems? Hearing, touch, movement, etc?

When does it occur? Take a note of when these behaviours happen to help you work out if there is a pattern.

Can you predict when it will happen? If you can predict it, then you may be able to put strategies in place to manage their response/behaviours. Keep a record of their arousal levels at the time of the behaviour, what sensory systems may be involved, when it occurs, is there a pattern and if you can successfully predict when it will happen.

Use A Secret

(Lucy Jane Miller 2006)

- A** ATTENTION - Can I draw the young person's attention away from his anxiety?
- S** SENSATION - Is there a sensation alarming the young person right now?
- E** EMOTION - What emotion is the young person experiencing and what works best when he feels this way?
- C** CULTURE - What part of our culture can be changed to avoid this situation? e.g. avoid taking them to assembly hall/ PE hall
- R** RELATIONSHIP - Is there something in his relationship with me or someone else right now is causing them to act in this way?
- E** ENVIRONMENT - What in the environment is upsetting the young person? How can we change it.
- T** TASK - What is upsetting the young person about the task in hand? Can we modify or substitute the task?



We introduced “a secret” by Lucy Jane Miller in our video “meeting your child's needs”. It can also be used when considering challenges during the school day.

This is a problem-solving tool allowing you to think about the seven elements in sensory motor challenges and to come up with some ideas of things to change to lead to smoother functioning for the child/young person. A SECRET” is an acronym for these seven elements: attention, sensation, emotional regulation, culture, relationship, environment and task. A SECRET is not a rigid formula for what to do, but a flexible format helping you to consider each of these important elements in turn.

The sensation element is only one part of “a secret”. Think about how each of these elements could be influencing the behaviour and how or if these could be manipulated to allow your pupil to function smoothly.

Analysing and understanding the sensory experiences of your pupil will help to identify the strategies that may help to make school a more positive sensory experience. Asking yourself these questions may help you to establish whether your pupil is receiving too much or possibly too little sensory feedback that may be causing challenges when at school.

It may take a few attempts before you notice any change. If there is no change, go back and look at the other elements in A SECRET. You may need to try a combination of strategies and elements to help meet your child's needs by reducing/replacing the feedback with a more positive sensory experience.

The first step when considering S for sensation, is to closely observe your pupil's reactions and ask yourself which sensory system is being over or under stimulated? Investigate by thinking of one sensory system at a time. We will look at each and give you some questions to ask yourself and practical suggestions for things to try. Look for consistencies in their sensory response as this will allow you to manipulate the sensation element that is causing alarm.



When considering the touch sensory system ask yourself these questions.

- Do they react inappropriately to touch? They may become upset with light touch in particular and find someone brushing past them in a queue distressing.
- Do they dislike messy play? You may notice they avoid putting their hands in sand, finger paints, glue etc. They are also likely to avoid eating with their fingers.
- Do they dislike wearing clothes or certain specific textures of clothes? Do they run around without their shoes on? You may have noticed they avoid wearing their jumpers or always have their sleeves over their hands?
- Do they often bump into others? Conversely, they may not be aware when others bump into them.
- Do they notice food on their face, a runny nose or that their hands are dirty?
- Do they overreact/underreact to pain or temperatures? They may have poor social relationships due to their touch reactions. If touch is perceived as a threat they may act with physical or verbal aggression when you know they are not an aggressive child or avoid situations entirely.
- Do they need to touch everything? You may notice they constantly fiddle or feel things around them.
- Do they have difficulty manipulating tools, pencils, etc

Try these strategies for the touch sensory system or experiment with your own.

- Give them a place to stand in a queue. This might be at the end or the beginning of the queue. This will decrease the chance of bumps. Place their peg at the end of the rack. This will also prevent bumps. Arrange seating to minimise bumps from classmates.
- Provide tools to use with messy materials. Be aware that materials such as glue, finger paints, clay, papier mâché may cause them to have an adverse tactile reaction. Using tools such as a glue stick or paint brush may allow them to participate more fully. Make sure they have access to paper towels or allow them to wash their hands if it becomes too much sensory input.
- Avoid light touch as this is more alerting to our sensory system, and always touch on their terms. Use firm pressure if touch is required and always ask their consent. Ask parents if they have tried Lycra clothing such as a vest under their usual clothing, as this provides deep touch feedback. This can be helpful for children who struggle to tolerate the textures of their clothes.
- Allow them to use a fidget toy with set boundaries. One toy can be used e.g. when listening in class or after break but before you start the lesson. You need to ensure it is not negatively impacting on their attention and concentration.
- Use contrasting tactile experiences within learning. You can incorporate sand or shaving foam in a lesson to practice letter formation.
- Use some deep pressure or heavy work (proprioception) activities such as a mini circuit. It is acknowledged that it may not be appropriate to apply deep pressure touch directly onto a child or young person within the school setting. Therefore, where deep pressure contact may be of possible benefit to support their sensory arousal level, an adult could trial using a slightly deflated small or medium sized ball to apply this type of contact.





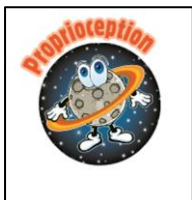
Deep Pressure Strategies



For many children, deep pressure can be very calming to their sensory systems and helps them get to the just right level.

If working with them on a one-to-one basis out of the class, you can play games such as making a sandwich with a therapy ball or cushion. Ask your pupil to lie on the floor either in their front or on their back and use a therapy ball or a cushion to press down firmly, asking them what they want on their sandwich. Pretend to spread butter and then add the tomatoes. Remember to use slow rhythmical movements and continue for 3-5 minutes. Check their reactions to ensure they find this calming. This can help them to transition back to class.

When in the classroom setting, it's especially helpful to apply deep pressure by pushing down gently on their shoulders or they apply this pressure themselves. Some children particularly enjoy deep pressure on their heads so you can place a hand on top of their head if they are sitting next to you during carpet time.



Proprioception is how the body senses itself; our body awareness. This ensures we know where our arms and legs are in spaces, helps to keep up upright and is how we grade the level of force that we use. It is also considered to be able to calm and override other systems so using proprioceptive activities is always beneficial.

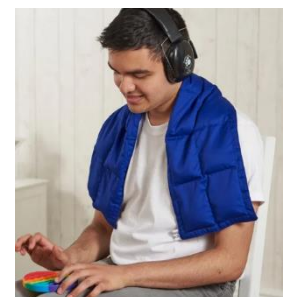
The signs to look for are: -

- Do they fidget in their seat? This is their bodies attempting to gain more information from muscles and joints as to the position of their body parts and shouldn't always be considered a behaviour difficulty. They may also find it difficult to sit on the floor.
- Are they heavy handed when writing or playing? They may use a lot of pressure when writing, breaking pencils or toys as they can't the grade force they use effectively.
- Do they struggle in PE or look at their feet often? This may be more obvious when working with balls or apparatus and may impact of their relationships with their peers.
- Do they chew hard on pencils or sleeves?
- Do they bang into objects or others when not an aggressively natured child? You may have noticed they seem to enjoy crashing into objects or other people or are unable to walk across a room without banging into something.
- Do they react as expected when they fall over? You may have noticed they have almost no reaction to falling over when you would expect them to express pain or discomfort or overreact to the experience.
- Do they push themselves into small spaces or corners? You may have noticed that when they sit on the floor, they lean against you, others or a table.

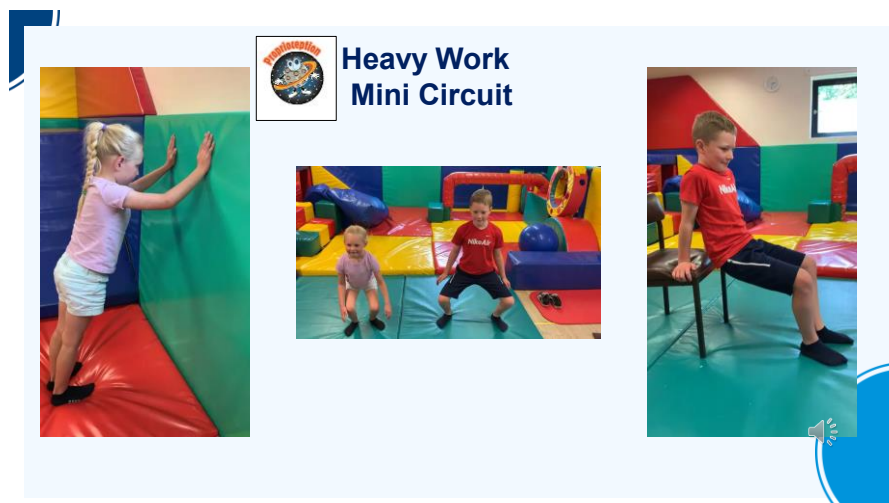
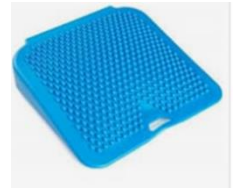
If so try these supporting strategies.

Try to pre-empt their sensory behaviours so that their body gets the movement it needs in a more structured and functional way rather than waiting for them to begin to move.

- Try allowing your pupil to wear a backpack with a few books in it during times of transition or when sitting. The weight from the books may help to keep them calm.
- Before handwriting, do some warmups. Warm up hands by pressing palms together, pulling and pressing on each fingertip, press palms against the desk or add a little playdough activity incorporating pinching and rolling.
- Use a weighted lap buddy or shoulder wrap when they are seated.
- Where possible they can try an oral chew instead of pencils and sleeves.



- Use a “move n sit” cushion on their chair/floor. This gives them additional feedback on the position of their body, helping them to fidget less in their seat.
- Use large bean bags for downtime where they can squish themselves onto the bags to give them extra deep pressure.
- Incorporate movement breaks into their timetable between activities. They could get up and hand out books or pencils, take the register to reception, move workstations, stretch between carpet time and desk time, use chants, poems, songs or morning meeting activities. Using tasks as classroom responsibilities may help. In high schools, moving between classes acts as a movement break. Try a few strategies for 5 - 10 minutes directly before you want them to focus their attention well.
- Use heavy work activities in movement breaks such as mini workout circuits or in PE. Remember that activities that use forward and back movements are more calming. Avoid spinning as this often has an over alerting effect. Use the mini circuit ideas or they can help in school by pushing trolleys, helping to set-up PE equipment, carrying bags of equipment such as footballs, carrying a heavy box or ream of paper to another class.



Create mini workout circuits in the classroom such as wall push ups, squats and chair dips. Be careful to select slow and calming activities or this can increase their arousal levels. This can help to reduce their anxiety and the impact around their tactile experiences. Get all the children involved if possible, to ensure they are not singled out. For more ideas, look at our handout “Body Awareness and Proprioception” on our website.



When our vestibular system functions poorly, we often do not act in accordance with what the activity would provoke. For example, we may be fearful and avoid movement or conversely, we may seek out intense movements regularly. When considering if your pupil's vestibular system is causing behaviours ask

- Do they avoid playground equipment? They may hate or be fearful of spinning, rolling, swinging and jumping up and down stairs. You will notice them avoiding these movements during PE. They may show signs they are scared to have their feet off the ground and won't take part in climbing activities on apparatus. Or you may have also noticed they hesitate or avoid going downstairs.
- Do they seek out movements such as spinning across the classroom or rocking in their chairs.
- Do they become dizzy easily? Or they may love fast moving equipment and don't become dizzy at all.
- Do they find it difficult to sit still? You may notice they need to constantly be on the go, run from place to place without accomplishing anything, constantly fidget or move quickly but not always with co-ordination.
- You may have noticed they have poor seated posture and slump over their desks. They may have trouble holding their head up whilst sitting.
- Do they not do well or enjoy PE or sports? Do they stumble and fall over a lot?
- Do they have difficulty co-ordinating both sides of their bodies? They may confuse their left and right, have poor hand dominance and not be able to cross the midline.

Work out if the child avoids or seeks movement and use an appropriate strategy to balance their vestibular system. Remember to continue to use heavy work activities to calm before or after movement.

Where the child avoid movement or shows signs of being fearful

- Provide a solid seat where their feet can stay flat on the floor. This can help them feel secure and safe.
- When fearful, let them control the amount of challenging movement experience. Never push them beyond this limit. Use heavy work to prepare them for challenging work against gravity and to comfort and calm them if they feel unsure or unhappy with certain movement activities. Break down the activity into small parts and practice these until their confidence grows e.g. sitting in a chair before getting onto the floor or up off the floor.
- Use visual markers when changing positions e.g. from table to floor. These give the children something to aim for. You can try placing their cushion on the floor for them to sit on top of.
- In PE, grade your approach gently, allowing them to lead exploration of the activities as their confidence grows. If possible, limit the amount to people and space to increase security.



For the children who seek out movement, try these strategies: -

- Change position regularly to maintain attention. Try short walks around in a circle and regular breaks to move around the classroom. You can add in tasks such as collecting books. Provide opportunities for them for active work so instead of sitting doing maths, they stand at the whiteboard, clean the board or pushing tasks.
- Have a fine motor box they are allowed to use during transitions between lessons or classroom activities. E.g. puzzles, threading, peg boards, colouring in.
- Try an angled writing slope to help them maintain an upright position



- Use a move n sit cushion which gives them a sense of movement in a less distracting way for others in the class.



Sense of Smell – it is acknowledged that our sense of smell is closely linked to our memory and therefore it is advisable to approach with consideration as well as caution where there is a known history of early life trauma / neglect. For their smell sense, ask yourself: -

- Do they smell people or items? They may smell people's hair or sniff food before they put it into their mouths.
- Do they overreact to new smells? You may have noticed they may crave or get upset by new smells. They may not appear to show signs they are getting used to a smell?
- Do they notice strong smells? They may gag or become nauseated by a smell or dislike lunchtimes, the smell of the lunch hall or they may become so distracted by a smell they can't focus on class. They may notice smells that typically don't bother others.

Try these strategies.

- Allow them to have their favourite scent on a cotton wool ball or paper tissue or an object they like the smell of. They can use this to block out the smell they find offensive or redirect them to if they are smelling people.
- If your school has two lunch sittings, if possible, let them have free time first. This may allow them time before going into a stimulating environment.
- Be aware of changing perfumes, scented deodorants and other hygiene products. The pupil may associate a certain smell to a person and have a reaction of any change to their smell. Try to be consistent.



For taste, ask yourself these questions.

- Do they prefer strong or bland foods? They may gag often at tastes or textures. They may avoid food most other young people of their age enjoy or they may crave strong flavours such as chillies, lemons and curries. They may even refuse to eat at school.

- Do you find getting them to drink water difficult?
- Do they taste or eat non-food items? You may have had to stop them from licking or even eating items such as playdough.
- Has lots of hard, crunchy food?

try these strategies.

- Let them eat their spicy or bland food, it may be their way to self-regulate. We all like different types of foods and that's ok. If you are concerned they are not eating or drinking at all at school, speak to their parents. They may have very specific foods or drinks they can tolerate. Some children can't tolerate water. Ask parents to supply alternatives such as a splash of sugar free diluting juice or diluted fruit juice in an opaque bottle to ensure the child is not singled out. Give the child a drink they can enjoy to keep them hydrated and support regulation.
- Try to distract or redirect your pupil when they are tasting or consuming non-food items. Give your pupil the chance to use an appropriate alternative such as chewellery, chewable pencil topper or other chewing aids if they have them in school. You can also provide more opportunities to increase their oral stimulation using oral motor activities. If they are digesting non-food items, ask parents to contact their GP.
- Strong mints may be regulating to your pupil. Allow them to have a mints to help their focus and attention when listening or sitting to do a task.
- Offer taste preferences during snack and challenging time such as when studying for a test or working on subjects they find challenging. Chewing and crunching food gives lots of powerful proprioceptive input, which is calming, helping them to regulate.



For our auditory system consider if you see these behaviours

- Are they startled by unexpected loud noises? You may notice they put their hands over their ears when it becomes noisy in class or when the bell rings.

- They may overreact to sounds that are barely noticeable such as a buzzing light and can't focus on their work.
- Do they talk loudly or enjoy really loud noises? You may have heard them humming but they don't realise they are making noise.
- Fail to pick up expected cues? They may need to use a lot of effort to concentrate and block out distracting noises, and so appear inattentive or have a short attention span. They may also have trouble sequencing verbal directions.

Strategies to try for when you see these behaviours.

- Try to let your pupil know when there is going to be an unexpected loud noise such as a fire drill or the lunch bell.
- Read our handout available on our website **Sensitivity to Noise & Ear Defender Use Guidance**. If the strategies in the handout are unsuccessful after a sustained period of trial, and noise continues to prove distressing or upsetting for a child or young person – it may worth considering the use of ear defenders or ear plugs, or for older children headphones or air pods.
- Acknowledge existing noises, tell them what it is then bring back them back to lesson.
- Use carpets and rugs in your classroom to help decrease background noise.
- Appropriate use of music, either for the whole class or the individual can help them to concentrate on a task.
- Make sure to speak when they are facing you and looking at you. You may need to give a physical prompt such as patting the back of their hand to get their attention. Wait until any background noise has reduced or gone before giving instructions then ask them to repeat it back to check their understanding. They may take a little longer to process the information and respond. Give written instructions, prompts sheets as well as verbal ones. Start with 1 direction and increase when they are able to retain more information.

If you have concerns about their understanding instructions after putting strategies in place, consider requesting assistance from our Speech and Language colleagues. A link to their webpage is also in the description box. nhs.uk/borders.scot.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/our-services/allied-health-professionals/speech-language-therapists/children/



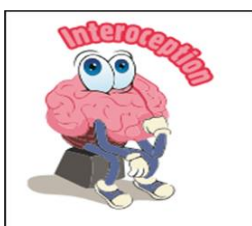
Before considering their visual sensory system, it is important to check with parents if the child has had a recent eye test at the opticians or hospital.

If you think there may be difficulty with their visual sensory system, think about: -

- Do they dislike bright lights?
- Find it difficult to copy from the board?
- Seems distracted by pictures or the people in the room?
- Do they hold screens, lights etc up close to their eyes?
- Do they complain of headaches, rub their eyes or squint?

If so, try some of these strategies.

- If they dislike bright lights, make sure they are away from direct sunlight or the glare of overhead lights. Ensure they are seated away from flickering lights.
- Seat them at the front of the class so they are not distracted by others when looking at the board.
- Provide a written sheet on the desk to copy from rather than copying from the board.
- Keep visual distractions such as art projects, hanging projects, bulletin boards to a minimum in the classroom to help them concentrate on your instructions. Avoid clutter in the room. It may be helpful for them to sit near you to facilitate their ability to follow directions and tasks.
- Try a pop-up privacy board to block out distracting stimuli. You can also build up the sides of their desk with cardboard however you will need to consider the school environment and their sensitivities.



For their interoception sensory system, look for these signs.

- Do they recognise when they need to go to the toilet? Do they avoid the toilet?
- Do they request food often during the day?
- Do they not eat their snacks or food during the day?
- Do they refuse to wear appropriate clothing?

Things than might help are: -

- Use visual reminders, timers or phone alarms to create a schedule/routine to go to the toilet, this can help children finding it difficult to recognise the need to go to the toilet. Visuals can also be used to remind children when it's time to eat and to help them avoid over or under eating.
- Model and describe how you are feeling e.g. r e.g., "my stomach is grumbling I am hungry". They may not be able to anticipate how they will feel if it's cold outside or it may take them longer so describe to them the body signals to look for to tell them they are cold, such as my skin is cold to the touch, I have bumpy skin (goosebumps). I am cold and need to wear my jacket.

What is the cause? Is it sensory or behaviour?

- Sensory difficulties can be misconstrued as behavioural problems e.g. Inattention, Distractibility, Motor coordination, Hypersensitivity, Emotional difficulties. Sensory and behavioural issues are intermingled and often cannot be separated!!
- Challenging behaviours should seldom be excused, even if sensory integration difficulties cause them.
- Behaviours that are sensory in origin are still behaviours and must be dealt with. To excuse unacceptable and socially inappropriate behaviours because they are sensory in nature is a mistake and does the child a disservice.
- Behaviours are very complex and result from multiple causes. They are dependent on the efficient integration of all the sensory stimuli mixed with: The environment, demands, the child's own personality, the child's reactions.
- When a sensory difference exists, it is often accompanied by behavioural concerns or coping strategies that also must be addressed.
- If we make the mistake of only addressing the behavioural aspect of the problem, the base sensory problem will still exist and the child may

become frustrated, act out in different more intense ways or project a feeling of uneasiness, as if something is about to erupt.



What can you do to help?

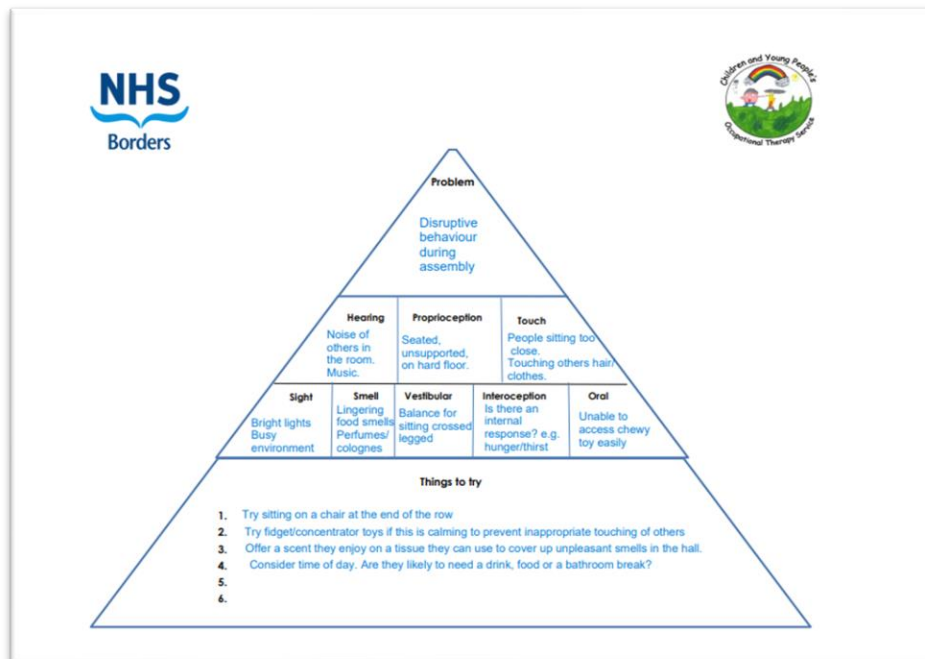
You will now have a better understanding of how sensory processing differences may be causing your pupils to behave for each sensory system. Using this information try to

- ◆ Identify and define the behaviour. Is there potentially a sensory cause? Do any of the behaviours outline for each sensory system relate to your pupil?
- ◆ Look at what comes before. When does the behaviour occur? In what environment does the behaviour occur? Are there any recent special events or changes to routine? What is their arousal level before?
- ◆ Look for warning signs that the behaviour is about to occur. Do you see a change in their arousal level?
- ◆ Consider if their behaviour and method of coping is socially acceptable. If it's acceptable for the classroom, does it need to be changed?
- ◆ If the behaviour has a sensory cause, and is not socially acceptable, consider what actions can be taken to avoid this behaviour. It's important to try to work out how you can help to reduce/replace this feedback with a more positive sensory experience Try the sensory strategies outlined in this video to work with your pupil to identify what works best for them. Be prepared for them not to work each and every time so build a toolbox of strategies they find calming or alerting and help them feel just right.
- ◆ Don't expect big changes overnight. It can take several months for sensory strategies to be used effectively. You will likely need to use the strategies you think work best, consistently for around 3 months before knowing for certain that they work.

By thinking and planning positive sensory experiences you can help manage situations which some individuals find over or under alerting

We have a pyramid problem solving tool on our website that you can download which may be useful for you. This problem-solving tool helps us to

think about the behaviour and the possible underlying sensory causes. By putting the problem at the very top of the triangle then starting to think about each of the sensory systems below, you may be able to identify if there is a sensory reason for the problem. At the bottom of the pyramid, you list the strategies you wish to try.



In this example of a pupil behaving in a disruptive way during assembly, we have given examples of the sensory systems that might be receiving too much or too little feedback and strategies you can use to change that, such as trying alternative seating options or trialling a fidget.

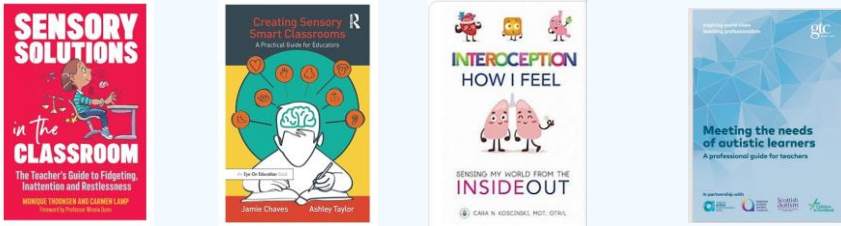
Don't expect big changes overnight. It can take several months for sensory strategies to be used effectively. You are likely to need to use the strategies you think work best, for you and your pupil, consistently for around 3 months before knowing for certain that they work. Be prepared for them not to work each and every time so have a few sensory strategies that can be used in these situations.

Finally!

- Remember
- Everyone has different sensory responses to stimuli. By thinking of your pupil's sensory systems and observing how they react to small changes, you can gain a better understanding why they may be feeling, thinking or behaving differently to sensory feedback.
- There will likely be times when your sensory strategy doesn't work so have a toolbox full of strategies to dip into as needed.

- Give time for strategies to work. Through consistently implementing the strategies they respond well to; you will help them to find a more positive sensory experience and meet their sensory needs.

Further Reading and Websites

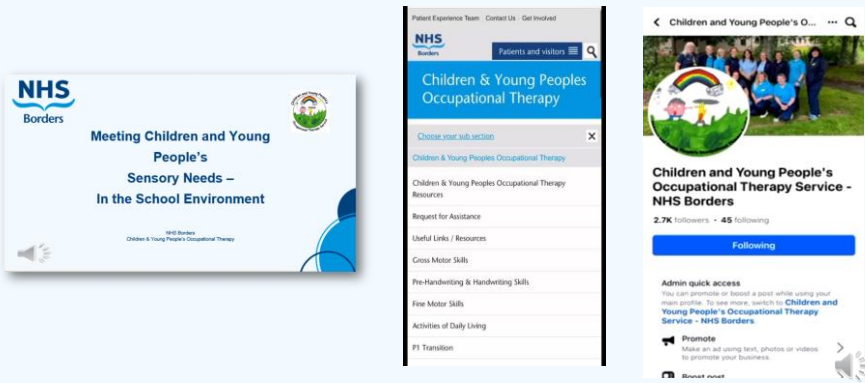


Websites

- <https://education.gov.scot/resources>
- <https://schools.sensoryintegrationeducation.com/>
- <https://gtcs.org.uk>

Books on sensory integration that are specific to schools are available as well as resources from the Scottish Government and General Teaching Council Scotland. Have a look at their websites for further guidance and recommendations.

For further information on sensory integration and strategies, please visit our website or Facebook page.



Watch our next video in our education mini-series where focus on the school environment from a sensory perspective and provide ideas on how to create a sensory smart school and classroom. Further information on sensory integration and strategies can be found on our website and Facebook page. Thank you for watching.