

Transcript



Welcome to our video on meeting children and young people's sensory needs in the school environment. We have another video in our At School mini-series for education staff where we discuss sensory behaviours and provide strategies that you can try.

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 an occupational therapy practitioner, 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).

This video aims to:-

- ◆ look the school environment from a sensory perspective
- ◆ provide information on general principles and strategies that support a whole school
- ◆ Provide ideas on how to set up a sensory smart classroom
- ◆ Provide some resources/equipment ideas that can be used in a classroom

- ◆ Provide you with further useful reading and resources

The school environment

There is a reciprocal relationship between learners and the environment which includes the physical environment and the people around them. When schools provide appropriately adapted environments, learners can be supported and encouraged to meet their full potential.

Research shows that 20% of the school age population have sensory processing difficulties that impact on their ability to do everyday activities so let's look at the sensory nature of the school environment. As mentioned in our sensory integration videos, we all have different sensory needs and perceive this information in different ways. To explore this further let's talk through these two pictures.



On the left side you see the reality of the classroom. There is some quiet background noise and some of the children and moving around and the lighting is low. However for some children, the image on the right is how they experience their classroom environment on a sensory level. They will perceive there are lots more people moving around them in a busy chaotic way with visual distractions everywhere from the objects and people within the room as well as outside through the windows. They will be more aware of odours such as pet smells and detergent on clothes, food odours and even the perfumes, deodorants or colognes people wear. They could find the lights too bright and noises to be exaggerated. They may find this too overwhelming or stimulating. This will cause them to feel anxious, over alert or unable to cope, leading to challenging behaviour.

Let's now think about the lunch hall. Think of the sensory experiences' children may be experiencing.

- The noise of children chatting, forks and knives hitting together, slurping through straws and crunching or chewing food sounds.
- The smell of the various foods being eaten around them.
- The unstable feeling of sitting on a chair which may not have a back or their legs swinging off the chair and not flat on the ground.
- The sight of lots of people walking

past them. For some that may be ok, but for others that might be more difficult. Remember, we are all different and we perceive our sensory environment in different ways.

The Scottish Government has the Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms on their website. This sensory audit is to help education staff to assess and create an environment that enables the participation of pupils with autism. You don't have to have a diagnosis of a neurodiverse condition to have sensory processing differences although they are more recognised with these diagnoses. It states that it does not cover all aspects but gives ideas on the ways in which a setting might be altered if pupils experience sensory processing difficulties and find it hard or very anxiety-provoking to tolerate certain sensations or situations. You can find a link to this on our webpage.

[Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms \(education.gov.scot\)](https://www.education.gov.scot/education/learning-and-teaching/sensory-audit-for-schools-and-classrooms)

How to create a sensory smart school

How can you help these pupils and develop a sensory smart school? The following, from Rotherham Integrated Care Partnership provides information on general principles and strategies that support a whole school approach which is suitable for all children, particularly those with sensory differences.

- Advocate flexible teaching and learning to take account of auditory, tactile and visual learning styles.
- Celebrate all learning whether within school or outside school so that children can excel in their own interests which can sometimes be very narrow).
- Provide safe, quiet and comfortable, spaces in school for calming at all times. Difficulties can occur especially during playtimes and times of change of routine such as Christmas.
- Ensure that the relevant information is passed onto the next teacher and/or school. Encourage the next teacher to visit your classroom to observe the child in situ.
- Encourage a Whole school ethos promoting activities such as Big move; smart moves; brain gym; yoga; motor control exercises; multi skills; and sensory circuits. We have added a link to a handout for teachers from Cambridgeshire NHS on Sensory Motor Circuits – (A Sensory Motor Skills Programme for Children Information for Teachers) to our webpage.

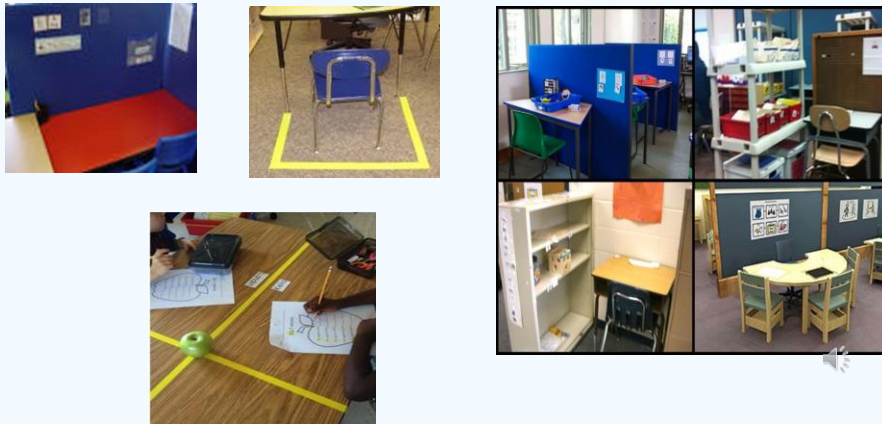
- Encourage out of hours activities e.g. drama club, football, rugby, dance, gymnastics, swimming, music.
- Consider specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia and dysgraphia.
- Celebrate different recording/learning styles through school display, ICT performances and tournaments.
- Increase awareness of all staff to sensory difficulties. Ensure lunchtime staff and playground staff understand the issues both during meal breaks and in the playground. Our videos are appropriate for all members of the education staff.

How to create a sensory smart classroom

You can also set up a sensory smart classroom by using these general classroom strategies.

- Check the class environment meets the needs of different children. To do this you identify an area (if possible) where there is less sensory stimuli so that they can work at times without distractions, and they don't distract others. The area could be away from others where the lights are less bright, noise is less prevalent and there is reduced visual distraction on the walls, hanging from the ceiling or from the window.
- Have an area where they can go to calm down. These areas need to be separate from the facilities used for isolation and exclusion. They should be seen as areas of safety and be of low stimuli. It is recommended within the General Teaching Council Scotland professional guide for teachers on meeting the needs of autistic learners that all children with an autism presentation have an individual safe space in a form that suits them. It is a learning area they can choose to go to when they feel overwhelmed or need time and space to regulate. Further information on safe spaces is available on the National Autism Implementation Team website.
- Clearly display timetables which are visual and interactive if possible. These should be capable of being changed on a day-to-day basis. They may be for the whole class or for the individual. Display keywords/topic vocabulary where they can be seen easily. Clearly label areas and resources in the classroom and have expectation, objectives and rules clearly displayed.
- Ensure odours are as neutral as possible.

Workstations



- Individual workstations can be very beneficial for pupils. It centres their learning in one area and provides an unchanging environment in which they can work. They can minimise distractions for your pupils and the other pupils in the classroom. These photos provide some examples of how to set up an individual or small group workstation in the classroom.
- Consider splitting the lessons that involve a lot of sitting for refocusing and calming through learning breaks.
- Adapt lessons to take account of their social skills. You could use paired learning rather than in a group; staff modelling cooperative skills; mix group by social ability as well as learning styles.
- Facilitate consistency in routines, rule and boundaries from all adults including supply teachers and lunchtime staff. Provide predictability as this is likely to encourage calmness and better regulation in your pupil. Provide an environment where you are predictable and the routines, structures, interactions and learning supports are also predictable.
- Plan transition times around classroom activities, lesson to lesson (which is particularly important on secondary school), playtime to the classroom. Children with sensory differences find change, crowds, noise and smells difficult to cope with.
- Have a range of resources at your disposal such as different size/colour/shapes of writing implements; allow different methods of recording; provide or permit fiddling aids such as blue tac, elastic bands, small stress balls; different resources for calming.

- Don't assume what makes us feel safe/happy is the same for all.
 - Some children find creative play/cooking/textiles really challenging.
 - Eating can be difficult for some children due to their reaction to touch or smells.
 - Crowded situations including lining up can be difficult for some.
 - Playtime can be difficult across a whole range of sensory differences.
 - PE whilst good, for many children their sensory differences make it difficult for them and may lead to them withdrawing.
 - Art can be stressful for children who have motor control issues or who have difficulties with their sensory visual system.

(Watch our video meeting sensory needs - A Practical Approach for Education Staff which provides strategies you can try to help your pupils participate in these activities.)

- Ensure that you make opportunities available for friendships to flourish in the classroom, encourage paired working and or group working. Friendships develop in the classroom; the playground offers more opportunities to strengthen friendships but it's necessary to foster them in the first place.
- Take into account that Your pupil is likely to require extra supervision to stay on task.
- Make learning meaningful. It's important to match activities and expectations to each pupil's learner's profile. If they refuse to participate it's possible that it doesn't make sense to them, and they don't know why they are expected to do it. Try to build their interests and sensory preferences into activities to increase their motivation.
- Verbal instructions should be repeated and ideally written down so that they can be referenced as required. The use of symbols may be necessary if literacy is low.
- Ensure it's neither too hot or too cold in the room.
- Ensure the pupil is only required to write what is necessary, provide lesson notes rather than expect them to copy from the board. Use alternative methods of recording such as scribe, voice recording on their iPad where allocated, or computers. Try voice to text apps if available.
- Allow sufficient breaks during the lesson to help refocus and to optimise learning opportunities.

- Offer incentives to speed up a desirable behaviour. For example, if you finish this, then you can do that next. This gives the child a goal to work towards as the work itself may not have any intrinsic value for the child. You must set clear boundaries such as time limits and follow up with the promised incentive if they complete the desired behaviour.
- After an incident has occurred allow your pupil sufficient time to calm down. When they appear to be calm, allow them the opportunity to redo or undo a given behaviour. This helps them to understand that it is possible to retrieve a situation. Seek to understand why and identify possible explanations for the incident however avoid “post-match analysis” with the child or young person. It is helpful for the adult to reflect but not always with the pupils. If appropriate, opportunity should be given to help them to understand why things went wrong on this occasion and strategies should be offered to show how to do it differently next time. Make adaptations to avoid the situation arising again.
- It may be useful to write a social story with your pupil. Social stories are mainly produced for autistic children, but they can also be beneficial for other children. It is a simple method to help a child understand what is expected of them in a given situation.



We often suggest small pieces of equipment for children to help their sensory integration such as fidgets, weighted equipment, pencil grips, oral chews, carpet tiles or use spots on the floor for visual markers, visual timers, therapy balls for calming/alerting activities, visual planners and angled writing slopes. Please note that NHS Borders can only recommend equipment and does not supply. Parents may be able to provide their children with oral chews, pencil grips and fidget toys. You can find a list of suppliers of some of the most

commonly used items, in the useful links tab on our website. You can also find our handout “Information on weighted blankets for parents” on our website.



You can tie theraband securely around the legs of their chair. This provides them with resistance to bounce their legs against and for some children provides them with the vestibular input they need which helps to decrease fidgeting in their chair and their need to stand up and move around as often. Make sure the band is secured as in this image, by tying around one back leg, looping it around both front legs and securing on the remaining back leg. Theraband should only be removed from the chair by an adult.



Move n sit cushions are a wedge shape with disco sit cushions being circular. They have a bumpy side and a flat side. It is important to have them inflated correctly so they give the child the sensory input to their proprioceptive and/or vestibular systems they need. Before starting, make sure you have a pump and a stopper. This video demonstrates how to inflate them to the NHS Borders Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Service

correct level. Ensure the stopper is secure and in place and that there is not too much air or too little air inside, it should be fairly flat but with some resistance. Too much air makes the cushions firm and provides too unstable a base. Make sure they can still place their feet securely on the floor.



Other resources are available online from the Scottish government, the General Teacher Council Scotland as well as other NHS Occupational Therapy services. Books on sensory integration that are specific to schools as well as those focusing on sensory circuits are also available to purchase.

Further information on sensory integration and strategies can be found on our website and Facebook page. You can also find details on how to contact our service on our website.

Thank you for watching!