

All Things Sensory Needs

Parent Carer Guide
to Sensory Support



Children with additional needs have unique sensory processing needs. These could be because they are sensory seekers or sensory avoiders.

A **sensory seeker** is someone who actively seeks out sensory input. They crave stimulation and may engage in behaviours that provide intense sensory experiences.

A **sensory avoider** is someone who is highly sensitive to sensory input and tends to avoid or withdraw from situations that provide too much stimulation.

Adaptive Clothing

Adaptive clothing is clothing that's designed to be easier to wear for people with disabilities, limited mobility, and sensory sensitivity. It's intended to improve comfort, independence, and ease of dressing.



Types of Accessible Clothing for Children:

Adaptive Fasteners:

- Velcro closures instead of buttons or zippers.
- Magnetic closures for easier fastening.
- Hook-and-loop closures.

Sensory-Friendly Clothing:

- Seamless clothing to minimise irritation.
- Clothing made from soft, tag free fabrics.
- Clothing with flat seams.

Easy-Access Openings:

- Clothing with wider necklines or armholes.
- Side-opening garments for children with limited mobility.
- Back-opening garments for easier dressing.

Modified Footwear:

- shoes with velcro closures.
- shoes that are wider.
- shoes that are designed to fit orthotics.

Weighted Clothing:

- Weighted vests, or blankets, that provide deep pressure.

Clothing for Specific Needs:

- Clothing designed for children who use wheelchairs.
- Clothing that accommodates medical devices, such as feeding tubes or catheters.
- Clothing that is designed to help children with sensory processing disorder.

Adaptive clothing is available at specialist online stores, such as Fledglings, and some high street stores also offer adaptive clothing such as M&S, Asda, and Primark.

Here is an idea of some of the other accessories available:

- Custom tube tapes for NJ/NG and oxygen tubes
- Custom stoma bag covers
- Bundle Bean - Wheelchair lap cover
- Wheelchair accessories such as wheel covers, organisers and sun shades
- Ear defenders
- Swim incontinence pads
- Incontinence swim costumes
- Bibs & Aprons
- Body Vests & Unitards
- Compression Clothing
- Carers - Bite Proof
- Daywear
- Eczema Clothing
- Hospital Pyjamas
- Orthotic
- Popper Vests
- Thermal
- Tube / Peg Feeding Clothing



[Find more here via Fledglings:](#)



TOP TIPS



Even with planning, getting dressed can be tough for some children. It can also be tough if you're trying to do it and fit everything else in. Build in extra time, and consider using a timer to help you or them to stay on track.





Sensory Toys and Spaces

Sensory toys and equipment can help people feel less overwhelmed, develop skills like balance and coordination and also help with learning, communication, and social skills. Knowing what sensory needs your child has, will help you to know what they may enjoy.

Here are the different types of sensory needs:

Tactile Sensory Items:

- Fidget toys: Small, textured objects like squishy balls, rubber bands, or spinning tops that provide tactile stimulation.
- Playdough: substance with different textures that can be used for shaping and tactile exploration.
- Sensory mats: Mats with various textures like bumpy surfaces, soft fur, or different fabrics.
- Weighted blankets: Heavy blankets that provide deep pressure input, often used for calming and relaxation.

Visual Sensory Items:

- Fibre optic toys: Toys with flashing lights or fiber optic strands that can be visually stimulating.
- Colouring books/crayons: Engaging visual activity that can be calming.
- Mirrored balls: Reflective balls that create visually interesting patterns when moved.
- Light projectors: Can be used for make shift sensory rooms, or to create a calm environment at night.
- Light boxes: By using a light box (either home made or shop bought), your child can enjoy playing with multitude of choices with it.

Auditory Sensory Items:

- White noise machines: Generate consistent background noise to mask distracting sounds.
- Calming music: Soothing music tracks used for relaxation.
- Listening tubes: Tubes that amplify sounds for focused listening.

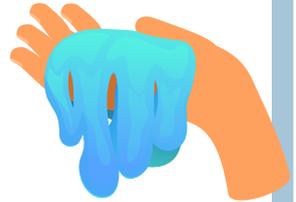


Vestibular Sensory Items:

- Swinging: Gentle swinging motion to stimulate the vestibular system
- Spinning chairs: Rotating chairs that can provide vestibular input
- Balance boards: Boards that require users to maintain balance, providing vestibular stimulation

Proprioceptive (Deep Pressure):

- Weighted blankets or vests.
- Compression garments.
- Beanbag chairs or pillows.
- Deep pressure massage tools.



Olfactory (Smell):

- Essential oil diffusers with calming scents like lavender or chamomile.
- Scented candles or incense (use with caution and ensure proper ventilation).
- Scented playdough or sensory toys.

Creating a Sensory Space

Creating a sensory space for your child can be a wonderful way to provide them with a safe and stimulating environment.

These spaces can be pricey, but they don't have to be.

Here's a guide to help you create a sensory space that meets your child's individual needs:



Understand Your Child's Sensory Preferences:

- **Observe:** Pay close attention to what sensory inputs your child seeks out or avoids. Do they love bright lights, soft textures, or deep pressure?
- **Identify Triggers:** Note what sensory experiences cause your child distress or overstimulation.
- **Consult Professionals:** If your child has specific sensory needs, consult with an occupational therapist or other relevant professionals for personalised advice.

Choose a Location:

- **Dedicated Space:** If possible, dedicate a specific room or corner of a room to the sensory space.
- **Adapt Existing Space:** If a dedicated space isn't available, you can adapt an existing area, such as a bedroom or playroom.
- **Consider Size:** The size of the space will depend on your child's needs and the available resources.

Incorporate Sensory Elements:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Tactile
- Vestibular
- Proprioceptive
- Olfactory (Smell)

Create a Safe and Comfortable Environment:

- **Soft Surfaces:** Use soft flooring, such as rugs or mats, to prevent injuries.
- **Safe Furniture:** Choose furniture that is sturdy and safe for your child to use.
- **Minimise Clutter:** Keep the space organised and free of clutter to prevent overstimulation.
- **Safety Precautions:** Take necessary safety precautions, such as securing heavy objects and covering sharp edges.

Each person's sensory needs are unique, so it's important to assess individual preferences and select appropriate sensory equipment.

Consulting with a therapist or occupational therapist can help identify the most beneficial sensory interventions and equipment.

Shopping Centre Sensory Kits

Increasingly, shopping centres are beginning to recognise the need to create more inclusive environments, and one way they're doing this is by offering sensory packs. These packs are designed to help individuals with sensory sensitivities, such as those with autism, navigate the often overwhelming environment of a busy shopping centre. Typically, these packs contain items like noise-cancelling headphones, fidget toys, and visual aids, which can help to reduce sensory overload and create a more comfortable experience. By providing these resources, shopping centres are taking steps to make their spaces more accessible to a wider range of visitors.

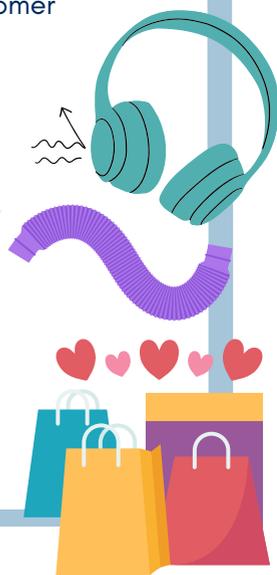
Bridges Shopping centre Sunderland

Sensory Bags are now available to hire from our Customer Service Desk for a refundable on return fee of £10.

Each sensory bag contains:

- Wearable Press Stress Relief Wristband
- Colourful Beanbags
- Kids Ear Defenders-Noise Cancelling Headphones
- Colourful Monkey Stringy Balls
- Pull & Pop Tube Sensory
- Sensory Shapes with Water Beads
- Transformable Fidget Spinner Toy
- Visual Communication Cards

All items will be hygienically cleaned between uses.



Metrocentre Gateshead

To hire a backpack please go to the customer service desk in upper Platinum Mall, and lower Green Mall.

The bags have similar sensory aids as the one above, however, the child must be at least five years old to use them.

Shopping centres and supermarkets will offer quiet hours during the week. Although these can be helpful, there is still times where they can be still busy.

Using Social Stories

Social stories are a tool used to help individuals, particularly children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other social communication challenges, understand and navigate social situations. They are short, personalised stories that describe a specific situation, skill, or concept in a clear and structured way.

Purpose of Social Stories:

- **Improve Social Understanding:** Help individuals understand social cues, expectations, and perspectives.
- **Teach Social Skills:** Provide explicit instruction on how to behave in specific social situations.
- **Reduce Anxiety:** Prepare individuals for unfamiliar or potentially stressful situations.
- **Promote Positive Behaviour:** Encourage appropriate behaviour by explaining why it's important and how it benefits everyone involved.



How Social Stories Work:

- Describe the Situation: The story begins by describing the situation in a clear and concise manner.
- Explain Social Cues: The story explains the social cues and expectations that are relevant to the situation.
- Provide Perspective: The story explains the thoughts and feelings of others involved, helping the individual understand their perspectives.
- Suggest Appropriate Responses: The story provides examples of appropriate behaviours and responses.
- Reinforce Positive Outcomes: The story emphasises the positive outcomes of using appropriate behaviours.



You can find some examples and templates here, via Twinkl:



PECS

PECS stands for the Picture Exchange Communication System. It's a type of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) system that uses pictures to help individuals with communication difficulties, often those with autism, to communicate.

- PECS relies on the use of pictures or symbols to represent objects, actions, or desires.
- Individuals using PECS learn to exchange pictures with another person to communicate their needs and wants.
- It's designed to help people who have limited or no verbal communication skills to express themselves effectively.
- PECS progresses through stages, starting with simple exchanges of single pictures and gradually moving towards making sentences and answering questions.

Find free templates here:





Communication Buttons

Communication buttons for children who are limited in speech or non-verbal can be very expensive, usually costing £50+. However, for the exact same thing, but much cheaper... You can now purchase dog communication buttons, which can be used for children to express their needs and prompt communication.

These buttons, at half the cost, can have recorded messages by you tailored to your child's needs. This could be asking for a drink, snack and much more. Great tool, at a much lesser cost and can be used for a multitude of things!



You can find them via most stores online, we found them here on Amazon:



Salad Spinner Sensory Toy

You can create so many great sensory toys and aids in your own home! For example, this wonderful sensory spinner. You can follow the QR code below to see a step-by-step video!



There are so many more ideas and options out there. The QR code below will take you to a sheet of options to make a multitude of different things yourself!



Sensory

Each person's sensory needs are unique, so it's important to assess individual preferences and select appropriate sensory equipment. Consulting with a therapist or occupational therapist can help identify the most beneficial sensory interventions and equipment.

Here you will find more ideas for children who are complex or considered PMLD



Why is play important?

Play brings joy and laughter, creating happy memories for all the family. It also helps children engage with their surroundings, develop communication skills and self-awareness, and connect with others. It's a fundamental part of childhood and, of course, it's a lot of fun!

How to play with your disabled child by Sense Charity



Sensory Processing Tips and Strategies



Ten simple sensory strategies for autistic children:

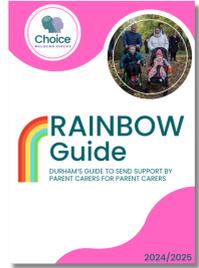


Here are just a few more guides we have available!



Guides on specific subjects

Rainbow Guides



Transitions Guides

Your Child, Your Choice

Because one size doesn't fit all

Find our website here:

