



# STARS – Strategies Tips and Resources for Schools

## Sensory Needs

**STARS** is a resource created to save you time and includes strategies, tips, methods and practical advice for supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

This resource provides adaptable advice for both Primary and Secondary settings, catering to the needs of your school and students.

## Sensory Processing

### What is Sensory Processing

Some children struggle to correctly perceive the sensory world around them. Children may experience difficulties relating to one or multiple senses. Sensory sensitivities can co-occur in children with Autism, however, many children with sensory needs are not on the Autistic Spectrum.








There are two main types of sensory processing difficulties, and many children may experience a combination of the two.

Some children are **hypersensitive**, meaning they are overly sensitive to sensory input. As a result, they may avoid certain sounds or sensations because they find them overwhelming.

Some children are **hyposensitive**, meaning they are less sensitive to sensory input. This leads them to seek out more sensory stimulation, often resulting in a need to move around frequently.

### 7 Sensory Systems

Description of the Sensory Systems

System	Location	Function
Tactile (touch) 	Skin—density of cell distribution varies throughout the body; areas of greatest density include mouth, hands, and genitals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides information about the environment and object qualities (touch, pressure, texture, hard, soft, sharp, dull, heat, cold, pain)</li> </ul>
Vestibular (balance) 	Inner ear—stimulated by head movements and input from other senses, especially visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides information about where our body is in space, and whether or not we or our surroundings are moving; tells about speed and direction of movement</li> </ul>
Proprioception (body awareness) 	Muscles and joints—activated by muscle contractions and movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides information about where a certain body part is and how it is moving</li> </ul>
Visual (sight) 	Retina of the eye—stimulated by light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides information about objects and persons; helps us define boundaries as we move through time and space</li> </ul>
Auditory (hearing) 	Inner ear—stimulated by air/sound waves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides information about sounds in the environment (loud, soft, high, low, near, far)</li> </ul>
Gustatory (taste) 	Chemical receptors in the tongue—closely entwined with the olfactory (smell) system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides information about different types of taste (sweet, sour, bitter, salty, spicy)</li> </ul>
Olfactory (smell) 	Chemical receptors in the nasal structure—closely associated with the gustatory system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides information about different types of smell (musty, acrid, putrid, flowery, pungent)</li> </ul>

Source: *Asperger Syndrome and Sensory Issues: Practical Solutions for Making Sense of the World* (p. 5), by B. S. Myles, K. T. Cook, N. E. Miller, L. Rinner, and L. A. Robbins, 2000. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC.



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### What you may see in the classroom

Sensory needs can appear in different forms and may lead to both behavioural issues and functional difficulties.

In the classroom, you may see:

- Slumping or slouching
- Head on the table
- Hands over their ears or eyes
- Seeking movement – getting up out of their chair, moving round the classroom, fidgeting in their seat
- Lack attention and focus
- Impulsive movements or lack of own strength
- Restrictive diet, overeating or overfilling their mouth
- Mouthing objects
- Humming or making sounds
- Poor spatial awareness
- Chews or licks non-food objects
- Particular with clothing
- Walking on tiptoes
- Self-injurious behaviours, e.g. head banging, biting
- Difficulty with fine and gross motor skills
- Having a high or low pain threshold
- Dramatic mood swings
- A dislike of getting messy or seeking messiness
- Fixation on their sensory input, e.g. spinning lights or objects
- Sensory meltdowns

These difficulties can greatly affect a child's ability to independently complete everyday tasks and may result in frustration and challenging behaviour.

### Sensory Diet

A sensory diet is a set of specific and individual activities that are appropriate to assist a child with regulation and activity levels, attention and adaptive responses. These activities are scheduled throughout a child's day.

It is essential to think about the sensory need of any of the child's behaviours and not try to take away a strategy that works for them, without having something to replace it, for example, if getting out of their seat and walking around the classroom helps them to concentrate, but this needs to change as it is becoming disruptive, then as part of their sensory diet, regular movement breaks would be beneficial.



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Effective Sensory diets are tailored to the children's needs and have elements that can be easily incorporated into their normal routine.

### Sensory Profile

Where a child's sensory needs are complex, it may be beneficial to request a sensory profile assessment (usually completed by an Occupational Therapist) to look at their sensory needs in detail, this is completed in conjunction with home by a professional.

### Sensory Strategies

<p><u>Movement</u></p> <p>Movement breaks are essentially a break from seated learning which involves movement.</p> <p>The purpose is to help students either increase or decrease their arousal level so they can engage and participate in their learning.</p>	<p>A grid of 12 icons illustrating movement activities. The top row is a blue header with 'Movement' (stick figure) and 'Choices' (hand with ball). The grid contains: walking, running, jumping, rolling, marching, hopping, pushing, trampoline, push ups, bike/scooter, sit up, and spinning.</p>
<p><u>Deep Pressure/Touch</u></p> <p>Deep pressure can be calming and relaxing for many children.</p> <p>Light touch is often perceived as alerting and even agitating to some people, while deep pressure touch is typically calming and organizing to the sensory systems.</p>	<p>A grid of 12 icons illustrating deep pressure and touch activities. The top row is a blue header with 'Deep' (hand with arrow), 'Pressure / Touch' (hand with arrow), and 'Choices' (hand with ball). The grid contains: finger painting, water play, back scratch, fidget toy, texture play, stuff toys, playdough, sand, weighted blanket, massage, bear hug, and exercise ball.</p>

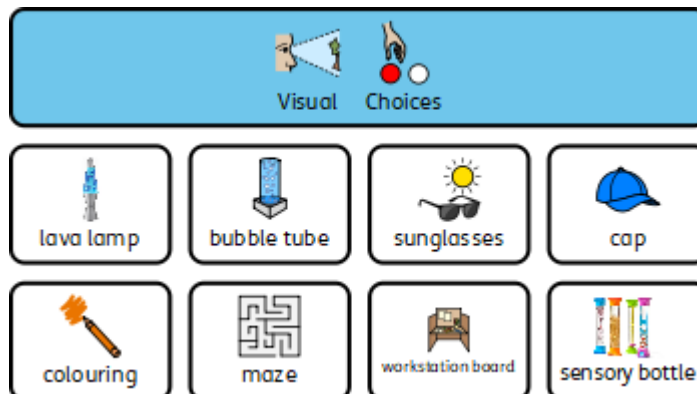
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### Visual

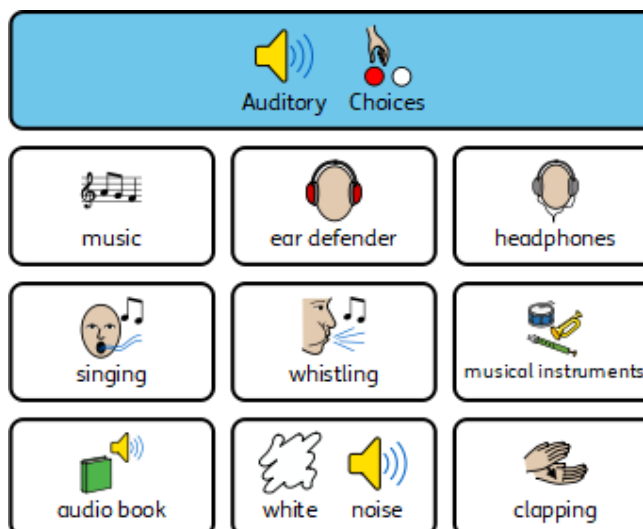
Vision is an important member of the sensory system because it is linked to so many other areas.

Possibly the biggest connection is to our balance, through the vestibular system and proprioception senses.



### Auditory

With this sound sense, children sometimes have great challenges with being sensitive to various sounds, while other children may love and seek out loud noises.



### Oral/Taste/Smell

There may be an over sensitivity or under sensitivity to smell and taste, although it is less common to be under sensitive. This may cause a child to become distracted, avoidant, or upset.

Many children will be better able to concentrate and have a more appropriate level of arousal if they are allowed to access a specific sensory input using these senses.

