

This environmental audit can help review and create spaces that support children and young people with sensory processing needs. It offers suggestions for adjusting the environment if a child shows signs of anxiety, behaviour changes, or sensory reactions due to difficulty coping with certain sensations or situations. This tool is adapted from the AET (Autism Education Trust) and the Derbyshire Sensory Processing Needs Toolkit

We recommend using the videos and resources on the Sensory Processing page of the Families Information website alongside this audit tool to better understand sensory processing and how to adapt environments to support individual needs. Review the audit points below and complete the action plan at the end, including a review date

General sensory needs

Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
A system of support is available for children/young people experiencing sensory overload/ receiving too much sensory information • Remove expectation to sit and allow children to use different positions to carry out activities eg standing at meal times, tummy lying at carpet time • Movement breaks are allowed when necessary • There is a clear system/routine to follow if they feel they need to withdraw due to sensory overload and staff are aware of what this is for individual children's needs • There is a clearly designated place available for them to withdraw to eg a quiet corner, dark den or table with a covering		
Children/young people are encouraged to let staff know if they are finding a sensory aspect of the environment distressing • All staff have an awareness of how our sensory environment may be distressing and how this could be observed in a child eg through behaviour		

• There is a designated key person who has an awareness of the child's needs and how to recognise and support. This could be the sensory lead or their key person • They are supported to communicate their sensory needs in a manner that is appropriate to their abilities eg pictures, physical signal		
Environmental organisation takes into account child/young person's individual needs • Environmental organisation and seating plans take into consideration individual sensory concerns following consideration of their sensory needs and trial of strategies (e.g. a child/young person who is sensitive to light does not sit by a window) • children/young people who are anxious because of other people being close to them are allowed extra personal space e.g. around their seat		
Children/young people are calm and regulated when moving through busy areas such as corridors (Some children/young people with sensory processing needs can become anxious in busy corridors due to anxiety over being touched/in close proximity to others; sensitivity to loud noises; feeling confined within a limited space with lots of other people) • They are allowed to leave slightly earlier or later than peers to avoid noisy/busy times/spaces		
Dinner halls and queuing systems do not cause distress (due to the noise levels, smells and crowds etc.) • They are allowed to enter the dining area before or after peers to avoid queuing and crowds • An adult or buddy may help them		

Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
Uncomfortable clothing is avoided wherever possible unless there are safety issues (Some children/young people with sensory processing needs are extremely sensitive to the feel of itchy or scratchy fabric; material which is stiff and inflexible and seams/labels within their clothes) • The uniform/dress code policy is flexible enough to allow for variations which will help them to find appropriate alternative clothing options. Understand that some children may not be able to wear some items such as shoes and adaptations will be needed		
Alternative arrangements are made for children/young people who find writing to be uncomfortable, physically painful or difficult • Policies are flexible in allowing them to use alternative forms of recording their work such as a laptop, iPad or handouts to demonstrate their learning		
Activities can be accessed in any position that is comfortable for the child • Activities can be presented in different ways eg on the floor or on tables to allow high kneeling or standing • Have alternative floor coverings available if the main floor surface is uncomfortable for children when on the floor • They are allowed movement breaks within the lessons/sessions/day to reduce seated time		

Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
There is a clear system/routine for children/young people to follow if they feel that the level of noise becomes too much for them • There is a clear system/routine to follow if a child needs to withdraw due to noise overload and staff are aware of what this is for individual children's needs • There is a clearly designated place available for them to withdraw to eg a quiet corner, dark den or table with a covering • They are supported to communicate their sensory needs in a manner that is appropriate to their abilities eg pictures, physical signal		
Sounds from outside are kept to a minimum in order to avoid problems within Doors and windows kept closed at times of unusual/increased noise		
There are strategies in place to reduce noise when rooms are in use. Wherever possible • There are soft furnishings in place to reduce unnecessary sound in the environment eg rugs, cushions, ceiling drapes and pads on the bottom of chairs • The acoustics of larger areas are checked and modified to lessen echo eg rooms with high ceilings, older buildings • Awareness of doors banging and reduction of this whenever possible • Only use music for a specific purpose not as background noise and be aware of the general noise of all children		
Sounds from equipment within the environment are, wherever possible, kept to a minimum. • All electrical equipment within the room is to be switched off when not in use		

- Any child/young person sensitive to environmental noise to be positioned away from this equipment
- Be aware of children who may be sensitive to noises such as hand driers and florescent lighting

Child/young person is warned in advance if a loud, sudden noise such as the fire alarm or transition bell is going to sound

- Clear, well defined strategies are put in place to support them and help them to tolerate loud, sudden sounds

Vision

Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
The environment is uncluttered, organised and not visually overwhelming to ensure that the child/young person can easily find the information needed without inducing anxiety • The impact of wall displays is considered. Busy and colourful wall displays can be appealing to some but can be visually distracting and a cause of anxiety for others • Environments to be organised so that specific activities have clearly designated areas in order to give clarity to children/young people with sensory processing needs • If necessary, they have the opportunity to work at a workstation or at an area which is sectioned off in order to focus their attention		
Environmental lighting is suitable for children/young people with sensory processing needs • Lights are turned off if they are not needed in order to reduce visual stress or use less harsh lighting where possible • Flickering lights are turned off and changed as soon as possible • Staff are aware of the effects of light coming into the room – for example: the reflection from metal or shiny objects, the sun		

shining on certain areas of the room, patterns created by light coming through blinds etc.

Smell

Good practice and evidence to look for within the environment	Current Situation	Possible Actions
Staff are aware of the effect smell may have on children/young people with sensory processing needs • Staff are aware of everyday smells such as cleaning materials, air fresheners, some ink in pens and highlighters, paint and glue. Open windows if possible • Staff are aware that the smell of some perfumes and deodorants may be upsetting or overwhelming • Staff are aware that they may react to the smell of other people, such as the smell of coffee on someone's breath, washing powder		
Smells from outside the room are monitored and reduced, where possible • Alternative toileting arrangements are allowed (e.g. possible use of staff or disabled toilets) • The smell of cooking from the cafeteria or food technology rooms is reduced		
Are smells made available for children to explore and accessible to them if they find it comforting • Consider familiar smells from home or with happy memories		

Sensory Environment Action Plan

Environment/setting: _____

Date: _____

Audit lead/team: _____

Identified Action – what needs to be done?	Who will carry out the action?	By when?	How will we know it is effective?

Review date: _____