

Sensory Friendly School

A sensory friendly school promotes the student's ability to learn, focus, attend, function socially, and behave positively, as well as help lower stress and anxiety levels. This will benefit **all children** so whole school approaches are recommended.

Academic learning cannot take place effectively if students are struggling to cope with the sensory demands from their environment.

To understand the impact of sensory processing difficulties within an education setting, a free training video (for all staff) and resources are available on our website. <https://www.shropscommunityhealth.nhs.uk/CHOT-schools-nurseries>

The following strategies and ideas will help make your school to become more sensory-friendly:

❖ **Self**

- A dysregulated adult will find it difficult to be able to support regulation in a child.
 - Have you looked after yourself? Do you need a drink, the toilet, something to eat?
 - Consider activities that make you feel more regulated.
- Now consider how you dress. Are your clothes bright or more neutral?
- Do you wear strongly smelling perfume/aftershave? Is your shampoo strongly smelling?
- How fast/loud do you speak?
- Do you pace when you teach, or make lots of arm movements?

❖ **Visual**

- Where possible, **limit the use of artificial lighting** (especially bright LED lighting).
 - Open blinds
 - Turn lights off.
 - If possible, change to dimmer switches or swap bulbs for lower wattage/warm light.
 - If not, use alternative lighting with orange/yellow 'warm' bulbs.
- **Walls/displays**
- Have at least one wall without distractions such as posters or bulletin boards and encourage the student to sit facing it. If you work from the white board, make this wall the distraction free wall.
 - Use pastel paint on walls (such as light green, grey)
 - Use hessian backing on display boards (rather than brightly coloured paper) and avoid using a border.
 - Evaluate classroom displays:
 - Are they actively used by and do they serve a purpose for the children?

- If they cannot be easily read, they are just wallpaper and visually distracting.
- Is there repetition of information?
- Can you display information in a more accessible way (photocopy on table)?
- Limit display boards to one wall at back of the classroom.
- Sit/stand at the student height when looking at your school spaces to see what they see.
- Reduce/eliminate clutter and visual distractions.
 - Keep books/equipment in boxes/drawers.
- Use highlighter or different coloured pens on whiteboard or handouts.
 - Use accessibility settings on whiteboard to change background colour to grey (rather than white)
 - Remove unnecessary images/text.
 - Change colours between paragraphs.
 - Remove 'clutter' around teaching focus such as whiteboard.

❖ Furniture and sitting position.

- Ensure that tables and chairs are the correct height.
- Consider seating position in class – avoid seating the student near heavy traffic areas or where they might be bumped, touched, or jostled by others. The side of the classroom/table is recommended.
 - Experiment with seating positions and ask students which feels more comfortable.
- **Do not stop fidgeting.**
 - Some people need to move to help them to concentrate.
 - Consider providing fidget objects – thick elastic band, stress ball, hairband, or blue tack. This can provide sufficient sensory feedback to aid concentration.
 - Be aware that fidgeting only supports concentration 'in the moment'. It stops supporting regulation when it stops happening.
 - **Chewing or sucking** can help aid concentration (fidgeting for the mouth).
 - Try chewy, crunchy, or sucking foods (apple/carrot sticks, dried fruit, chewing gum, lolly, hard boiled sweet, bagel, cream crackers)
 - Drinking bottle with straw

❖ Sound

- Reduce/eliminate distracting noise.
 - Close doors
 - Use furniture to create noise barriers such as using bookshelves to form a reading corner.

- Do not expect eye contact. It may be difficult for a student to process auditory and visual information simultaneously.
- Allow extra processing time. Provide a 6 second gap before repeating instructions or providing new ones.
- Try not to talk/provide additional instructions when students are completing tasks.
- Allow time out if required.
 - Provide an area where sensory stimuli is reduced (quiet with limited visual clutter, comfortable seating, natural light or low wattage warm lighting and soft furnishings) to allow students sensory systems to 'reset'.
 - Make the space freely accessible during the day.
- Allow students who struggle with noises to enter school hall/assembly first (rather than walking into an already noisy space)
 - Some students will not cope with sensory demands of a busy dining hall, school play, sports day, or assembly and may need alternative provision.

❖ Transitions

- Arriving/leaving school, moving between classes, break time, and lunch time are all times that can make students feel dysregulated.
 - Consider timing - Can a students come in or leave earlier when it is quieter?
 - Environment
 - Think about the lighting, wall colours, posters and clutter. What can be removed/reduced throughout the school (including corridors and hall)
 - Some students will need to follow a different routine to their peers to enable them to remain regulated.

❖ Predictability

- Provide a clear structure for the day so the students are aware of expectations and timings.
 - Ensure that there is a clear start and end to tasks.
 - You may need to use a visual prompt to help (visual timetables, visual timers, calendars).

❖ Uniform

Consider changes to uniform policy. Tracksuit bottoms and a t-shirt may be more comfortable (less dysregulating) than school trousers and a shirt. Allow flexibility across the school.

❖ Melt down.

- Look out for signs of sensory 'overload'.
 - 'Shutting down', switching off, 'hitting out' hiding or running away could be signs of an overloaded/dysregulated student.



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- Recognise that responding this way is not a behavioural response and behavioural approaches will not work.
- Keep the student safe but limit words, move slowly, allow space.