



Sensory needs

Practice brief

The practice

Teachers accommodate the sensory needs and preferences of students.

How does it help?

Sensory differences can present students on the autism spectrum with a variety of challenges. Students may have difficulty taking in information, paying attention for extended periods, writing, responding to the teacher, and staying in a calm and organised state that is optimal for learning.

Sensory needs are highly unique to the individual. Some students are:

- hypersensitive – they experience sensory input more than the average person, e.g. they may perceive noises more loudly than you do
- hyposensitive – they are less responsive to particular sensations and need more of that sensory stimulus to recognise the sensation and/or feel comfortable.

When a student's sensory needs are met, they may find it easier to remain calm and pay attention to the lesson.

What is it?

The accommodation of sensory needs involves:

- understanding that students may require different sensory input to remain calm and engaged in a lesson
- providing the student with the support they need to achieve this.





How does it work?

Sensory needs can be vastly different from person to person, however some common strategies for use in the classroom are:

- adjust the seating plan of the classroom to help the student to remain focused. This could include seating the student under a bank of lighting that is turned off, at the end of a row where they won't be touched, or on the side of the room furthest from the hallway;
- if fluorescent lighting is a cause for discomfort for the student, consider using a filter for the lights, dimming the lights or removing some of the fluorescent tubes;
- allow sensory or movement breaks where students can remove themselves from the classroom if they are overloaded or require additional movement;
- allow students to wear headphones if they need to cut out extra noise, or to play soft background music if helpful;
- do not insist on eye contact when talking to the student, as they may be able to process auditory information and express speech far better if they don't have the additional task of focusing on eye contact at the same time;
- to satiate the need for oral sensory input, allow student to chew gum;
- allow students to sit on fit balls instead of chairs or consider a variety of seating options.

How do I do it?

- Identify students who may benefit from sensory support.
- Identify sensory processing differences that may be affecting a student's behaviour, learning, and performance. Consult with the student, their family, and relevant specialists about what sensory needs the student has, and what support may help them.
- Implement the necessary support.
- Reflect on the efficacy of support and adjust as necessary.

It works better if the teacher:

- asks for input from the student, parents/carers, and specialists around the student's sensory supports.

It doesn't work if:

- the teacher assumes what sensory support might be useful for the student without consultation
- the teacher removes sensory supports to punish the student.



How will I know if it's working?

The student will appear more focused and on task for greater periods of time and will demonstrate challenging behaviours and meltdowns less frequently.

Where can I go to find out more?

- [video: sensory overload](#)

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)

Implementing this practice will meet the Australian Professional Standard/s for Teachers:

- 4.1 – Support student participation

