



#### Special points of interest:

20 Ways to Calm or Alert ...  
Pgs. 1-3

Sensory Differences....  
Pgs. 4-9

Additional Website Links..  
Pg. 11

Sensory Space Checklist....  
Pgs. 12-13

#### Also In this issue:

Book Reviews **14**

Visuals **15-16**

Autism Consultant Contact **16**

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# Autism Agenda



Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

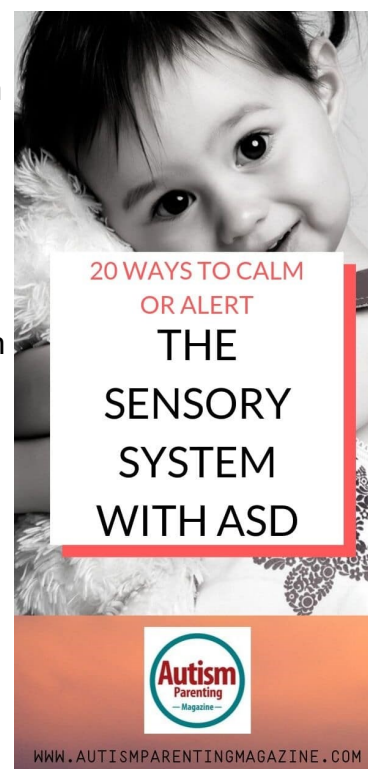
## 20 WAYS TO CALM OR ALERT THE SENSORY SYSTEM WITH ASD

Children on the autism spectrum often require support to process sensory input. Some children display strong reactions to stimuli, while others tend to show little response to input. This may vary from day to day or even hour to hour.

Children who have a strong reaction to sensory stimuli may avoid the bathroom because of the sound of the flushing toilet and the hand dryer. These children may be very particular about clothing and insist on wearing the same shirt every day. Children who are under-responsive to sensory stimuli may not notice food on their chin or seem oblivious to a cut or bruise.

These children may seem sluggish or sleepy. Whatever a child's sensory pattern, there are ways to support sensory regulation which will allow the child to cope and function more successfully.

To regulate the body, children need small sensory snacks throughout the day. Building in sensory regulation opportunities proactively may prevent escalation to a child who feels overwhelmed by input. When supporting a child with a calming sensory snack, the environment also needs to be calm and quiet.



Continued on page 2.

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## 20 WAYS TO CALM OR ALERT CONTINUED....

Follow an alerting sensory strategy with a short calming strategy to help the student control his/her body before moving on to the next activity. It is extremely important to structure any sensory break with specific guidelines and a clear end times. Use a timer, a song, or counting to signal the completion of any [sensory activity](#) that may be open-ended.

Occupational therapists are trained in the area of sensory regulation. If your child receives occupational therapy, it is important to collaborate with the therapist to maximize sensory strategies.

The following are generalized statements. All children will not respond to sensory strategies in the same manner. It is important to take note of your child's reaction to the sensory input to determine if the activity is appropriate.

The trampoline is typically alerting but can be calming due to the proprioceptive input to some kids. Weighted items and heavy work are equalizers. Your child's sensory system, the time of day, and other factors contribute to a child's response to sensory input.

## 10 Alerting Strategies



- 1. Trampoline jump:** Jumping on the trampoline is a fantastic way to increase blood flow and attentiveness.
- 2. Drink water:** Water wakes up our bodies. If a child doesn't like water plain water, add some flavor with water enhancer. Drinking through a straw adds even more sensory input.
- 3. Dance and move:** Kids love to dance, and it is great for getting hearts pumping. There are fantastic websites with music and organized dances that help structure this activity and support control.
- 4. Oral stimulation:** Gum, mints, or lollipops provide alerting input. This may support a child who constantly chews on his or her clothing and pencils. It may even help a child who talks excessively.
- 5. Exercise ball:** Bouncing on an exercise ball provides stimulation. Use a milk crate, purchase a ball with "feet" or purchase a ball chair to add structure for use in the classroom.
- 6. Lighting:** Turn up the lighting to give the visual system a jolt.
- 7. Scents:** Citrus and mint scents are typically alerting. Wearing scented lotions around a child can provide them with this input, as well as candles or warmers at home.

Continued on page 3.

## 20 WAYS TO CALM OR ALERT CONTINUED....

**8. Exercise:** Any type of exercise is alerting. Structure a routine with visuals or use a website with structured movement songs. Setting up an obstacle course is a fun way to add this movement to the day.

**9. Wobble cushion:** A wobble cushion provides tactile input as the child sits. These are great for use in a classroom or at the dinner table.

**10. Bare feet:** So many kids with autism love to be shoeless. One reason may be the tactile input received from our bare feet. Feeling the cold, hard tile or going out after a rain and stepping in puddles is a fun way to gain this input.

## 10 CALMING STRATEGIES

**1. Calming touch:** Many kids calm by touching or rubbing objects with different textures. This may include a sequin pillow or clothing, a tub with rice, hard or soft Velcro attached to a desk, a stuffed animal or a live animal!

**2. Minimal visual Input:** Create an area with soft or natural lighting. Structure a work environment without clutter and minimal visuals.

**3. Exercise ball:** Use an exercise ball to provide deep pressure input. Roll the ball over the child's body while continually monitoring the child's comfort level with the pressure.

**4. Weighted blanket:** Use a weighted blanket while completing another activity, such as reading a [book](#). This allows the mind to be occupied while the body receives the calming input.

**5. Swing:** Many children like to lie, tummy down, on a platform swing with their heads hanging over the edge. This allows a different type of input than sitting up on a swing. Sitting up on a playground swing is also calming when moving in a back and forth motion, however; spinning on this swing is alerting.

**6. Scooter board:** Place pieces of an inset puzzle on one side of the [room](#) and place the puzzle board on the opposite side. Direct the child to lie, belly down, on the scooter board and move back and forth across the room, picking up one puzzle piece and placing it into the board until the puzzle is complete.

**7. Push-ups:** Chair and wall push-ups provide deep sensory input. Pushing up on a chair is something a child can be taught to do during class to stay focused and engaged.

**8. Squeeze:** Many children like the feeling of being tightly squeezed. This input may be provided in multiple ways including a hug, rolling up in a [blanket](#), rolling up in a gym mat, compression clothing, a stocking hat or earmuffs.

**9. Breathing strategies:** Find a breathing technique that works for your child. Multiple websites provide visuals that go along with breathing strategies to help children understand this activity.

**10. Headphones:** Noise-cancelling headphones help a child remain calm in a noisy or chaotic environment.

<https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/ways-to-calm-alert-sensory-system/>

## SENSORY ACTIVITIES



©T-ABC

## SENSORY DIFFERENCES

# Sensory differences - a guide for all audiences

Processing everyday sensory information can be difficult for autistic people. Any of their senses may be over- or under-sensitive, or both, at different times. These sensory differences can affect how they feel and act, and can have a profound effect on a person's life. Here we help you to understand autism, the person and how to help.

You can also find out about synaesthesia, therapies and equipment.

### TOO MUCH INFORMATION

Sometimes an autistic person may behave in a way that you wouldn't immediately link to sensory differences. A person who finds it difficult to process everyday sensory information can experience sensory overload, or information overload. Too much information can cause stress, anxiety, and possibly physical pain. This can result in withdrawal, distressed behavior or meltdowns.

"If I get sensory overload then I just shut down; you get what's known as fragmentation...it's weird, like being tuned into 40 TV channels."

- an autistic person

If someone is having a meltdown, or not responding, don't judge them. There are things that you can do to help. This can make a world of difference to autistic people and their families. Often, small changes to the environment can make a difference. Creating a sensory profile may help you to work out what changes are needed. Three points to remember are:

- 1) **be aware.** Look at the environment to see if it is creating difficulties. Can you change anything?
- 2) **be creative.** Think of some positive sensory experiences
- 3) **be prepared.** Tell the person about possible sensory stimuli they may experience in different environments.



Continued on page 5.

## SENSORY DIFFERENCES CONTINUED....

### SENSORY DIFFERENCES

Here we look at some of the effects of hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, balance and body awareness, and ways you could help.

#### Sight

##### UNDER-SENSITIVE

- objects appear quite dark, or lose some of their features
- central vision is blurred but peripheral vision quite sharp
- a central object is magnified but things on the periphery are blurred
- poor depth perception, difficulties with throwing and catching, clumsiness.

##### OVER-SENSITIVE

- distorted vision - objects and bright lights can appear to jump around
- images may fragment
- easier and more pleasurable to focus on a detail rather than the whole object
- has difficulty getting to sleep as sensitive to the light.



You could make changes to the environment, such reducing fluorescent lighting, providing sunglasses, using blackout curtains and/or creating a workstation in the classroom - a space or desk with high walls or divides on both sides to block out visual distractions.

#### Sound

##### UNDER-SENSITIVE

- may only hear sounds in one ear, the other ear having only partial hearing or none at all
- may not acknowledge particular sounds
- might enjoy crowded, noisy places or bang doors and objects.

You could help by using visual supports to back up verbal information, and ensuring that other people are aware of the under-sensitivity so that they can communicate effectively. To meet the person's individual sensory need, include experiences they enjoy in their daily timetable.

*Continued on page 6.*



## SENSORY DIFFERENCES CONTINUED...

### OVER-SENSITIVE

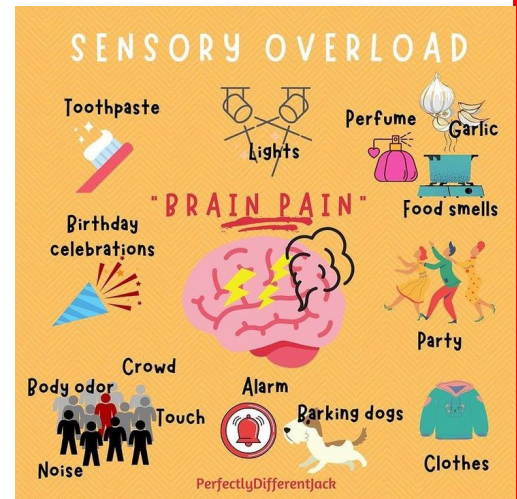
- noise can be magnified and sounds become distorted and muddled
- may be able to hear conversations in the distance
- inability to cut out sounds – notably background noise - leading to difficulties concentrating.

"Do you hear noise in your head? It pounds and screeches. Like a train rumbling through your ears."

- Powell, J., in Gillingham, G. (1995), page 41

#### You could help by:

- shutting doors and windows to reduce external sounds
- preparing the person before going to noisy or crowded places
- providing ear plugs and music to listen to
- creating a screened workstation in the classroom or office, positioning the person away from doors and windows.



### Smell

### UNDER-SENSITIVE

- some people have no sense of smell and fail to notice extreme odors (this can include their own body odor).
- some people may lick things to get a better sense of what they are.

You could help by creating a routine around regular washing and using strong-smelling products to distract people from inappropriate strong-smelling stimuli (like feces).

### OVER-SENSITIVE

- smells can be intense and overpowering. This can cause toileting problems
- dislikes people with distinctive perfumes, shampoos, etc.

"Smells like dogs, cats, deodorant and aftershave lotion are so strong to me I can't stand it, and perfume drives me nuts."

- Gillingham, G. (1995), page 60

You could help by using unscented detergents or shampoos, avoiding wearing perfume, and making the environment as fragrance-free as possible. *Continued on page 7.*

## SENSORY DIFFERENCES CONTINUED...

### Taste

#### UNDER-SENSITIVE

- likes very spicy foods
- eats or mouths non-edible items such as stones, dirt, soil, grass, metal, faeces. This is known as pica.

#### OVER-SENSITIVE

- finds some flavors and foods too strong and overpowering because of very sensitive taste buds. Has a restricted diet
- certain textures cause discomfort - may only eat smooth foods like mashed potatoes or ice-cream.

Some autistic people may limit themselves to bland foods or crave very strong-tasting food. As long as someone has some dietary variety, this isn't necessarily a problem. Find out more about over-eating and restricted diets.

### Touch

#### UNDER-SENSITIVE

- holds others tightly - needs to do so before there is a sensation of having applied any pressure
- has a high pain threshold
- may be unable to feel food in the mouth
- may self-harm
- enjoys heavy objects (eg weighted blankets) on top of them
- smears feces as enjoys the texture
- chews on everything, including clothing and inedible objects.

What it  
looks like



What it  
feels like



#### You could help by:

- for smearing, offering alternatives to handle with similar textures, such as jelly, or corn flour and water
- for chewing, offering latex-free tubes, straws or hard sweets (chill in the fridge).

Continued on page 8.

## SENSORY DIFFERENCES CONTINUED...

### OVER-SENSITIVE

- touch can be painful and uncomfortable - people may not like to be touched and this can affect their relationships with others
- dislikes having anything on hands or feet
- difficulties brushing and washing hair because head is sensitive
- may find many food textures uncomfortable
- only tolerates certain types of clothing or textures.

"Every time I am touched it hurts; it feels like fire running through my body."

- Gillingham, G. (1995), page 3

### You could help by:

- warning the person if you are about to touch them - always approach them from the front
- remembering that a hug may be painful rather than comforting
- changing the texture of food (eg purée it)
- slowly introducing different textures around the person's mouth, such as a flannel, a toothbrush and some different foods
- gradually introducing different textures to touch, eg have a box of materials available
- allowing a person to complete activities themselves (eg hair brushing and washing) so that they can do what is comfortable for them
- turning clothes inside out so there is no seam, removing any tags or labels
- allowing the person to wear clothes they're comfortable in.

### Balance (vestibular)

### UNDER-SENSITIVE

- a need to rock, swing or spin to get some sensory input.
- You could encourage activities that help to develop the vestibular system. This could include using rocking horses, swings, roundabouts, seesaws, catching a ball or practicing walking smoothly up steps or curbs.



### OVER-SENSITIVE

- difficulties with activities like sport, where we need to control our movements
- difficulties stopping quickly or during an activity
- car sickness

Continued on page 9.



## SENSORY DIFFERENCES CONTINUED...

- difficulties with activities where the head is not upright or feet are off the ground.

You could help by breaking down activities into small, more easily manageable steps and using visual cues such as a finish line.

### Body awareness (proprioception)

Our body awareness system tells us where our bodies are in space, and how different body parts are moving.

#### UNDER-SENSITIVE

- stands too close to others, because they cannot measure their proximity to other people and judge personal space
- finds it hard to navigate rooms and avoid obstructions
- may bump into people.

#### You could help by:

- positioning furniture around the edge of a room to make navigation easier
- using weighted blankets to provide deep pressure
- putting colored tape on the floor to indicate boundaries
- using the 'arm's-length rule' to judge personal space - this means standing an arm's length away from other people.



#### OVER-SENSITIVE

- difficulties with fine motor skills, eg manipulating small objects like buttons or shoe laces
- moves whole body to look at something.
- You could help by offering 'fine motor' activities like lacing boards.

### SYNESTHESIA

Synesthesia is a rare condition experienced by some autistic people. An experience goes in through one sensory system and out through another. So a person might hear a sound but experience it as a color. In other words, they will 'hear' the color blue.

For more information and references from this article please go to: [Sensory differences - a guide for all audiences \(autism.org.uk\)](https://www.autism.org.uk/resources/for-parents/sensory-differences-a-guide-for-all-audiences)

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## SENSORY RESOURCE

# SENSORY SEEKING VS. SENSORY SENSITIVE



Often people strive to understand what exactly the difference is between *sensory seeking* and *sensory sensitive*. Basically there are two ways in which people with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) respond. When people under react to sensory input, they may seek out more input. However when people overreact, they become easily overwhelmed and may seek out methods in which avoid the input.

Our brains constantly take in information, and for a majority of the population that information isn't a problem, however for some children and adults, a stream of input can become quite a struggle for those with sensory processing disorder. (Click the link below to read the rest of the article)

<https://sensorystore.au/sensory-seeking-vs-sensory-sensitive/>

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## ADDITIONAL SENSORY WEBSITES AND ARTICLES:

*Below is a resource list of additional sensory websites and articles to support families, schools, and communities. They are all suggested resources found by our Autism Team.*

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sensory-issues>

<https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-strategy/autism-strategy-sensory/>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/sensory-strategies>

<https://leader.pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/leader.FTR2.24042019.56>

<https://autism.org/sensory-integration/>

<https://behavioral-innovations.com/blog/types-of-sensory-issues-in-autism-examples-and-treatment-options/>

<https://veryspecialtales.com/sensory-activities-for-kids/>

## Sensory Supports for the classroom:

<https://www.griffinot.com/sensory-strategies-and-supports-for-the-classroom/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit-excerpt/supporting-sensory-needs-school>

## Sensory Meltdown/ Tantrum:

<https://www.theottoolbox.com/sensory-meltdown-or-tantrum>

YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/A0zbCiakiaA?feature=shared>

### Sensory Equipment resource:

<https://nationalautismresources.com/sensory-ot/>

<https://difflearn.com/collections/aba-tools-sensory-supports>



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## SENSORY FRIENDLY SPACE CHECKLIST

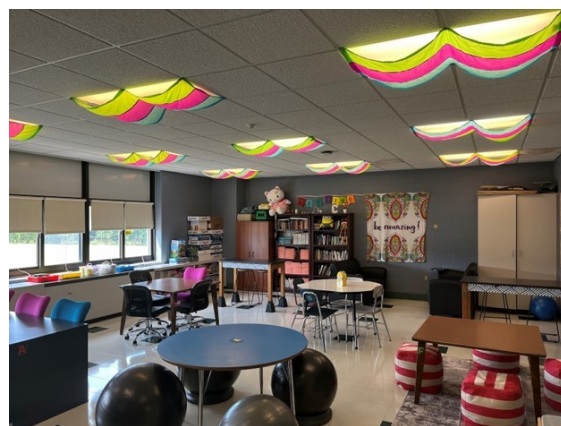
# Sensory Friendly Space Checklist

A Bridges Learning System resource for professionals working with neurodivergent youth

Creating a sensory-friendly space (i.e. classroom, office, area, room) is a great strategy to increase access for autistic and neurodivergent individuals.

There are two key points to keep in mind when creating a space that is truly sensory-friendly:

1. **The space and the items within it need to be catered to the unique needs of the individuals it serves.** Sensory needs vary greatly from one person to the next. Getting to know the neurodivergent individuals you serve and their unique sensory needs is key to creating a space that works for them.
2. **Minimize the sensory input that individuals cannot disengage from without leaving the space.** Think of it as a buffet in which the space is an empty plate. Individuals are not simply handed a plate filled with food they didn't want or ask for. They choose what to add to their plate (i.e. playing with a fidget toy, smelling a scented marker, bouncing on a yoga ball, etc.) but can also choose to leave their plate empty.
  - a. Examples of important sensory input to minimize: Noise pollution, harsh lighting, and inescapable smells (good or bad)



With those key points in mind, review your space and use the checklist that follows to aid you in making your space more sensory-friendly. While this list is a great starting point, it is not exhaustive and may not encompass individual needs. Remember to work closely with individuals to create a space that benefits all!

## Lighting and visuals

- ♦ The space takes advantage of any natural light available.
- ♦ The space avoids use of fluorescent overhead lighting. If fluorescent lights must be used, they are covered by fire-safe filters that soften their impact.
- ♦ There are multiple options of lighting within the space. In a classroom or large office, this could look like leaving the larger space open to natural light and/or with lights on as well as including a sectioned off area using curtains or fabric with darker or softer lighting.
- ♦ Visual clutter is minimized as much as possible. There are limited items out and on display, and items that are used irregularly are in storage that is visually separated (i.e. in a bin rather than on a shelf).

 Bridges Learning System 2021

Continued on page 15

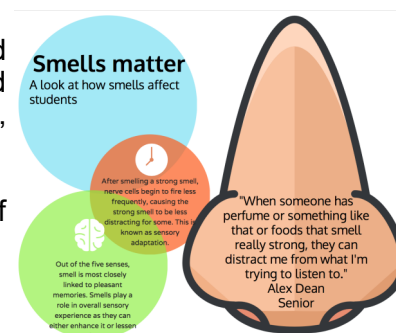
## SENSORY SPACE CHECKLISTS CONTINUED...

### Movement, stimming and regulation

- ♦ The space is oriented in a way that gives individuals options for how they sit, stand, lay, move, etc.
- ♦ There are seating and standing options outside of chairs/desks, such as floor pillows, couches, yoga balls, hanging chairs, kneeling chairs, balance boards, etc.
- ♦ Individuals have clear permission to move how they need to, even while doing listening activities. Clear permission might look like written into classroom rules, frequent verbal and written reminders, or visual reminders on the wall of the space.
- ♦ There is a designated “calm corner” for individuals to decompress. This creates an opportunity for individuals to get a break without requiring them to leave the space entirely.
- ♦ There are numerous and diverse options of toys and tools that give tactile and proprioceptive sensory input. This might include fidget toys, coloring pages, weighted blankets, lap pads/ wraps, etc.

### Textures and smells

- ♦ There are multiple options of textures for students to engage with and disengage from as they choose. This can include textured pillows, blankets, other upholstery, fidget toys with various textures, a bin with scraps of fabric with various textures, etc.
- ♦ There are multiple options of smells for students to engage with and disengage from as they choose. This can look like having a bin of scented items like scratch and sniff stickers, scented markers, bubbles, playdough, etc.
- ♦ Room fresheners or diffusers that prevent individuals from disengaging if they need to are NOT used.



### Sound

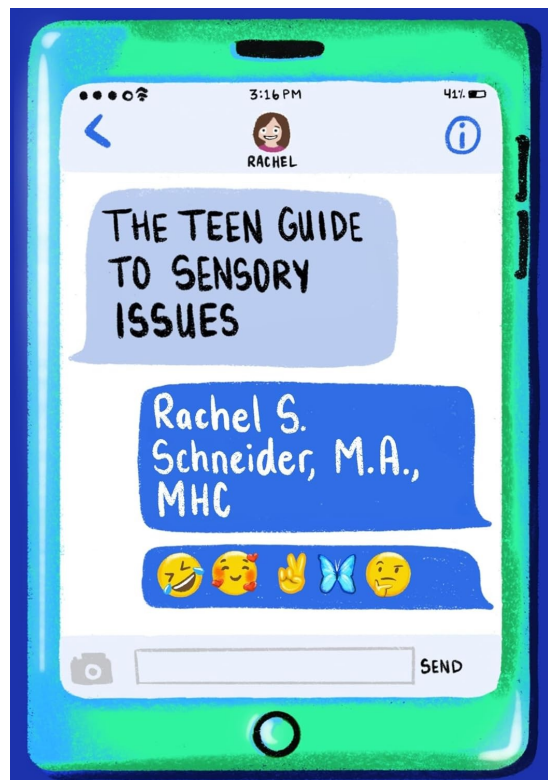
- ♦ The space is free from noise pollution or the space has adequate sound absorbing materials to minimize noise pollution, such as fabric, upholstery, carpet, acoustic panels, or anything else soft.
- ♦ Individuals can disengage from the noises in the space, as needed (i.e. take a break from the room, put on headphones, etc.).

### Interoception

- ♦ There are no unnecessary bathroom rules such as hall pass required, only bathroom breaks when we're in between activities, etc. Autonomy to use the bathroom at any point is a nonnegotiable need for many people who have hypo- and hyper-sensitive Interoception. This applies to all age groups, including adults.
- ♦ There are frequent opportunities AND reminders to snack and hydrate.



## BOOK REVIEWS



## The Teen Guide to Sensory Issues

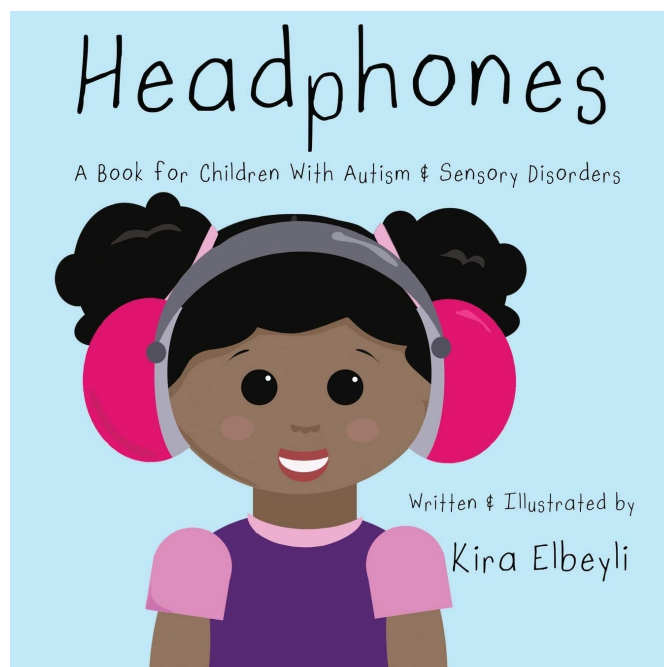
by Rachel S. Schneider

It's hard to be a teen, but it's even more challenging when they have sensory processing differences. Teens with sensory processing disorder or autism are frequently misunderstood when they over- or under-react to sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touch, movement, balance, and feelings within their bodies. Rachel S. Schneider, MA, MHC, is an SPD advocate and award-winning author. In this guide, written especially for teens and those who love them, she breaks down the challenges of sensory teen hood into hilarious, thoughtful, and manageable chunks. Through personal stories about her own experiences as an undiagnosed sensory teen, as well as tips and tricks to survive and thrive during these years, Rachel reminds readers that they are not alone.

## Headphones: A Book for Children with Autism and Sensory Disorders

by Kira Elbeyli

This book was written to help children with autism & sensory disorders feel comfortable and confident in their new headphones, and to help their friends, siblings, and classmates relate to their sensory differences. Throughout the book, a cute rhyme is repeated and can be easily memorized. This will allow noise-sensitive children to remember to use their headphones in loud environments, rather than reacting with unwanted behaviors. The author shows several types of headphones, and encourages children to choose headphones that they will like. To aid inclusion, the author also explains how loud environments may feel to a person with autism or sensory disorders. It is the perfect book to purchase for a child who is just beginning to wear headphones, and was written for the author's preschool-age son with autism.



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# SELF—CALMING STRATEGIES VISUAL

## Self- Calming Strategies



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## VISUALS



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Bear Hugs (squeezes)



# Sensory Break Ideas

@dogs\_of\_BA



Shaving  
Cream



Slime



Slinky



Fluffy Slime



Ball Pit



Sensory Block



Sleeping  
Bag



Sensory Bin



Sensory Tent



Squeeze Toy



Chill Out Bottle



Feathers



Projector



Music



Fidget



Water Beads



Finger Paint



Kinetic Sand



Sequin Pillow



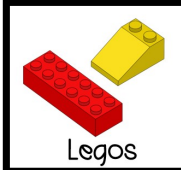
Bubble Wrap



Busy Board



## break TIME Choices



Legos



drawing



sensory room



sensory toy



book corner



keyboard



trampoline

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