**ASC Sensory Checklist and Strategies**

This sensory checklist and strategies has been devised for the use of Schools and Families Specialist Services Staff. It has not been written by qualified Occupational Therapists but by staff with experience of working with children with autism and associated sensory needs.

By ticking the checklists you should be able to see if a child is over or under sensitive within each sense. Then look at suggested strategies to help. Be aware that children can move from over to under sensitive within each sense on a daily or hourly basis, but being able to recognise this and to use appropriate strategies will help us to support the child who may not yet be able to self –regulate.

We have referred to the following books during this process:

* National Autistic Society - Sensory Strategies: Practical ways to help children and young people with autism learn and achieve by Corinna Laurie
* The Autism Discussion Page on the Core Challenges of Autism by Bill Nason
* The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder by Carol Stock Kranowitz
* The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun: Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder by Carol Stock Kranowitz
* Building Bridges Through Sensory Integration by Ellen Yack, Paula Aquilla and Shirley Sutton

Visual Checklist

Hyper

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Is very sensitive to bright lights and sunlight |  |
| May be sensitive to certain colours |  |
| Has very fine vision, seeing particles in the air |  |
| Direct vision may be too overwhelming for the child |  |
| May squint, or look with peripheral vision |  |
| Prefers the dark |  |
| Blinks often |  |
| Doesn't like looking at the print in books |  |
| Turns lights down low |  |
| Be uncomfortable or overwhelmed by moving objects or people |  |
| Withdraws from classroom participation and avoid group activities in which movement is required |  |
| Becomes overwhelmed with strong visual changes |  |

Hypo

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Is very attracted to visual stimulation, often stares at light |  |
| Seeks out intense visual stimulation |  |
| Loves turning light on and off |  |
| Loves mirrors, shiny objects, reflecting surfaces |  |
| Stares at spinning objects for prolonged periods |  |
| Likes game shows with printed questions on the screen |  |
| Likes lining things up |  |
| Likes watching moving objects (such as fans, revolving doors) |  |
| Likes to look at his toys while lying on the ground or from unusual angles |  |
| Watching repetitive movements (e.g. book pages turning, opening and closing doors, fingers moving in front of face) |  |
| Looking at things out of the corner of eyes |  |
| Presses eyes with hands, usually at the corners |  |

Visual Strategies

Hyper

* Minimise visual stimulation and have quiet, distraction free zone
* Encourage child to rest eyes by closing them for 60 seconds regularly throughout the day
* Use natural lighting where possible (but be aware that the child may be sensitive to direct sunlight)
* Have assessment for coloured lenses by a qualified professional or cup hands around the eyes to block peripheral vision
* Wear a peaked cap or sunglasses to limit the intensity of light
* Use buff-coloured paper rather than white and use matt laminating pouches to reduce glare
* Keep lights dimmed
* Try to avoid fluorescent lighting

Hypo

* Increase visual stimulation - use a torch in a game to find hidden toys, use colour and movement
* Play tracking games on an iPad or tablet
* Use toys with visually stimulating movement - e.g. bubble tubes, spinners, cheerleader shakers, light up toys
* In school ensure the main area of focus stands out - e.g. different sizes, fonts, colours
* Keep working area distraction/clutter free

Auditory Checklist

Hyper

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Is sensitive to loud noises |  |
| Can hear frequencies others cannot hear |  |
| Covers ears with hands or cries and runs away |  |
| Is distracted by background noises - e.g. humming lights, fridges, fans, heaters, ticking clocks, noises outside |  |
| Fearful of sound of hand dryers, flushing toilets, vacuum cleaners, hairdryers, squeaky shoes, babies crying, dogs barking - may make them avoid places where they're likely to hear them |  |
| Frequently asks peoples to be quiet or stop making a noise - e.g. singing |  |
| Complains of people yelling when they aren't |  |
| Can't cope with more than one person talking at the same time |  |
| Hum or sing to themselves or make repetitive noise to block out unwanted noise. Humming is perceived to be "safe" as they have total control over it |  |
| Refuse to go into loud, echoey environments such as swimming pools, school halls, shopping centres |  |
| May appear to dislike someone with a certain tone or volume of voice |  |

Hypo

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Speaks loudly |  |
| Is a noisy person |  |
| Turns volume up loud |  |
| Hums or makes vocal noises constantly |  |
| Loves items or activities that have distinct sounds (motors, pounding etc.) may not respond to verbal prompts or to their name being called |  |
| Seems to have difficulty understanding or remembering what was said |  |
| Often talks to themselves through a task aloud, not realising it may distract others |  |
| May not acknowledge particular sounds |  |

Auditory Strategies

Hyper

* Curtains, blinds, carpets or felt pads under chair legs to muffle sounds
* Close windows and doors to reduce external sound
* iPod, ear defenders, ear plugs
* Have quiet, time out space
* Prepare (if possible) child for moving into noisy environment
* Find out what type of music child responds to - e.g. white noise, classical, distinct beat, hard rock.
* Use quieter voice/whisper
* Sit child away from sources of sound (e.g. interactive whiteboard can hum and be distracting)
* Use calming strategies throughout the day to help child deal with any unexpected stimulation. If going out take bag of fidget toys/distractors specific to individual child's preferences

Hypo

* Allow processing time (10-13 seconds) after you have spoken before expecting a response
* Use visual prompts alongside verbal directions/speech
* Use animated voice and/or sing instead of speaking
* Allow child to listen to background music/noise when needed (e.g. fan, white noise, TV, radio, white noise app)
* Use auditory cues - e.g. ring a bell, clap hands, when you need to get child's attention
* Use visual clues such as traffic lights, noise-o-meters to help child regulate their volume

Smell and Taste Checklist

Hyper

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Finds many common tastes and smells repulsive |  |
| Can be overwhelmed very easily by normal daily scents (perfume, food, cleaning materials, hand cream, shampoo, shoe polish) |  |
| May refuse to eat certain foods because of the smell |  |
| Refuse to eat in certain rooms because of the way it smells (e.g. refusal to sit on carpet as it smells of spilt milk) |  |
| May gag or vomit easily |  |
| Can be very picky eater |  |
| May be distressed by household or cooking smells |  |
| Refuse to go to someone's house due to the way it smells |  |
| Base friendships on way a person smells |  |
| Be seen breathing through mouth rather than nose |  |
| Reluctant to use any public/school toilets |  |
| Only eats bland foods |  |
| Certain textures may cause discomfort so prefers smooth foods |  |

Hypo

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Needs to taste or smell everything - including people |  |
| May not notice odours others complain about - e.g. manure in fields |  |
| Actively seeks strong odours such as urine or faeces |  |
| Put inappropriate objects in mouth, lick things or smell others' hair |  |
| Preference for strong flavours, spice, food |  |
| Eats everything - e.g. grass, soil, materials (this is known as PICA) |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Smell and Taste Strategies

Hyper

* Limit exposure to smells
* Give strategies to help them avoid/deal with unpleasant smells - e.g. smells which are calming such as Mum's shampoo or perfume put on a flannel or handkerchief
* Do regular activities which involve a moderate level of smell in a non-threatening situation - e.g. playing in freshly cut grass or with scented water or play dough. Allow the child to leave if it becomes overpowering.
* If possible ask key adults to refrain from using perfume, deodorant and hand cream

Hypo

* Use strong smelling objects as rewards
* Use strong smelling objects (e.g. scented play dough) to distract from inappropriate strong smells (e.g. faeces)
* Provide opportunities to taste a variety of foods
* Provide opportunities to try foods which will stimulate sensory receptors in the mouth - e.g. crunchy foods, fizzy water
* Use of battery operated toothbrush to stimulate inside of mouth. Allow the child to be in control of the toothbrush

Vestibular Checklist

The vestibular sense provides us with a sense of balance. It detects movement from receptors located within our inner ears. This sense influences all of our other sensory systems.

Movement can have a stimulating and/or calming effect on our body.

Hyper (shows intolerance or reluctance to movement) so may:-

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Dislike swinging, spinning and sliding |  |
| Be cautious, slow moving and hesitant in taking risks |  |
| Be fearful of heights and slightly raised surfaces |  |
| May avoid jumping off a bottom step or walking on a kerb |  |
| Become anxious when feet leave the ground |  |
| Be fearful of going up and down stairs |  |
| Feel threatened when head is upside down or tilted - e.g. when having hair shampooed |  |
| Be fearful when an adult slides the chair a child is sitting on closer to theirs or closer to the table/desk |  |
| Suffer from motion sickness - e.g. be car sick or dislike lifts, escalators, fairground rides |  |

Hypo (shows increased tolerance to movement and tends to seek it out)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Needs to keep moving as much as possible in order to function |  |
| May have trouble sitting still |  |
| Shakes head, rocks back and forth, jumps up and down repeatedly |  |
| Crave intense movement experiences - e.g. bouncing on furniture, using rocking chair, turning in a swivel chair, assuming upside down positions |  |
| Be a thrill seeker - enjoys fast moving or spinning park/ playground equipment or fairground rides |  |
| Does not get dizzy after twirling in circles or spinning rapidly for some time |  |
| Enjoys swinging very high |  |
| Likes see-saws or trampolines or rocking equipment |  |

Vestibular Strategies

Hyper

* Limit unnecessary movement
* Hold on to someone or something when doing a balancing activity, or use mats
* Make sure feet are firmly on the ground when seated
* Introduce different movement activities slowly and at a gentler pace
* Use calming, slow, rhythmic, linear activities as described in proprioception section

Hypo

* Give child frequent opportunities to move as much as possible - toilet breaks, running errands, fetching things
* Intersperse "thinking" activities with "movement" activities - always do movement before thinking
* Allow child to stand up and have a "wriggle" whenever possible
* Use a wobble cushion to sit on
* Rocking over a physio roll therapy ball (gym ball requires more adult support as it is a different shape and less stable)
* Rocking chair
* Scooter boards
* Rolling, tumbling
* Jumping
* Swinging - on a swing or suspended swing
* Running - zig zag direction is alerting, running in a straight line is calming
* Skipping
* Turning, rotating, spinning
* Hopscotch
* Chasing games
* Zip wires
* Bouncing (in circles is alerting)
* Slides
* Dancing to music
* Somersaults
* Balance sitting down on gym ball or physio roll and reach for objects (adult slowly increases reaching distance) - use reaching up and to the side
* Jumping in and out of a hoop on the ground
* Lie on the floor, body in a straight line, roll across a mat (arms can be at sides or extended above the head)
* Catch balls or beanbags whilst jumping on a trampoline

Proprioceptive Checklist

The proprioceptive sense allows us to know where our body is in space without having to look at it - i.e. body awareness. Proprioception is the resistance within muscles and joints. This organises the nervous system and can be used either to calm or alert us to an optimum level of functioning.

Children with poor proprioception may exhibit the following behaviours:-

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lean on or bump into objects or people |  |
| Trip over or crash into objects/people |  |
| Stamp feet while walking to feel where they are going |  |
| Kick heels against the floor or chair |  |
| Bang a stick or other object on a wall or fence |  |
| Touch walls as they walk or stay to the perimeter or edge of an activity or place (e.g. playground) |  |
| Presses, bangs or bites fingers, wrists and objects |  |
| Pulls, twists or chews objects |  |
| Likes clothing to be tight, and shoes to be fastened securely |  |
| Likes to be swaddled and/or wrapped in blankets, tucked in tightly at bedtime - this makes them feel safe |  |
| Likes to squeeze into tight spaces |  |
| Frequently break toys and equipment as they do not understand their own strength or how much force to use |  |
| May hurt other children - for similar reason as listed above |  |
| Have difficulty with tasks requiring fine manipulation skills |  |
| May pick an object up with more force than necessary, resulting in spillage or breakage |  |
| May use too much or too little pressure when writing or drawing |  |
| Grinds teeth or cracks joints |  |
| Seeks out rough and tumble play |  |
| May rock backwards and forwards or fidget continuously |  |
| Flaps hands, claps, jumps and hops |  |

Proprioceptive Strategies

If a child displays signs of a poor proprioceptive sense, the following strategies may be helpful. These strategies can alert or calm depending on the child and the activity. Generally slow, soft, rhythmic stimulation tends to calm. Fast, intense, irregular stimulation tends to alert

* Movement breaks
* Wheelbarrow walking
* Lifting, carrying, pushing and pulling weighted items - e.g. weighted backpack
* Hit, kick, bounce and throw a ball
* Climb
* Scoot on a scooter
* Rolling/kneading play dough or clay
* Tie theraband around legs of chair. Child can kick against it safely
* Crawl - e.g. do different types of walk such as crab, bear, frog, turtle, seal (see “Burning Bridges” book)
* Opportunities for rough and tumble play
* Weighted lap pad or shoulder wrap (seek professional advice before using - from Occupational Therapist or physiotherapist)
* Outdoor activities such as raking and sweeping
* Hanging by the arms from monkey bars or climbing frame
* Rolling a physio roll (peanut ball) or gym ball over child while lying down (be aware of child's safety - use gentle pressure on stomach area, avoid neck and head)
* Play in a ball pool
* Lie under blankets or cushions \*Do not cover head and ensure child can move freely\*
* Bouncing on trampoline (this can alert or calm. Linear bouncing when holding adult's hands is calming and organising)
* Blowing bubbles
* Sucking through a straw
* Riding a bike
* Bouncing on a gym ball whilst supported by an adult

Tactile Checklist

Our sense of touch is not limited to certain parts of the body but exists all over - including in our mouths. It has 2 functions - one is protection, e.g. pain, temperature, light touch. The other helps develop refined fine motor skills. When both are working together a child will be comfortable and more able to interact with objects and people, and be in an alert but calm state, ready to learn. Light touch may easily be misinterpreted as pain and puts a child into fight or flight mode

Hyper

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Easily ticklish |  |
| Withdraws from cuddles |  |
| Reacts negatively to light touch |  |
| May react negatively to the possibility that they may be touched |  |
| React negatively when touch is outside field of vision - e.g. if approached from behind |  |
| Hates wearing hats |  |
| Resists messy play/getting hands dirty |  |
| Picky about clothing - e.g. textures, labels |  |
| Sensitive to seams in socks |  |
| Reluctant to wear shoes |  |
| Prefers short sleeves and trousers due to sensation of clothes rubbing on skin |  |
| Prefer long sleeves and trousers to avoid feeling wind and sun on skin |  |
| Overreact to minor cuts, bumps, insect bites |  |
| Hates having face or hands washed or wiped |  |
| Dislikes and will resist having nails cut |  |
| Dislikes and will resist having hair cut/brushed |  |
| Dislikes baths |  |
| Dislikes brushing teeth |  |
| Avoid being barefoot on grass, sand or in water |  |
| Be a picky eater - e.g. only choosing to eat certain foods or textures including hot and cold, may prefer crispy or mushy food |  |

Hypo

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Unaware of touch unless firm |  |
| Unaware of messiness around mouth and nose |  |
| Shows little or no reaction to pain |  |
| Insists on holding an object in hand |  |
| Tries to touch/handle everything |  |
| May touch too forcefully |  |
| Craves touch, is clingy |  |
| Doesn't notice if clothes are twisted |  |
| Have difficulty holding and using tools such as crayons, scissors and forks |  |
| Seeks out messy experiences often for long durations |  |
| Rub or bite own skin excessively |  |
| Prefer extra spicy or excessively sweet foods |  |
| Use mouth to investigate objects even after age of 2 years - The mouth provides more intensive information than hands |  |

Tactile Strategies

Hyper

* Put child's chair or desk towards edge of group so child can see who is moving and where they are going
* Soft cotton aprons are preferable to stiff plastic ones for messy play
* Provide seamless clothing
* Turn socks inside out to remove ridge or the seam
* Use chewy tubes or chewellery to give deep pressure to the mouth
* Introduce aversive textures slowly and gradually to build up tolerance
* Use battery operated toothbrush, starting on outside of cheek, or back of hand before using inside mouth - let child control it
* Use tools rather than fingers for messy activities - e.g. spoon in corn flour, paintbrush for painting
* Incorporate favourite toys into messy play - e.g. use a care in a paint tray
* Deep pressure activities may be soothing - e.g. firm massage, rubbing back, squeezing arms

Hypo

* Provide a variety of fidget toys - toys which can be squeezed or stretched are best (ideas for fidget toys in NAS)
* Play dough or theraputty to squeeze
* Theraband to pull and stretch
* Provide a variety of messy play activities
* Hide favourite toys in play dough (lot of ideas in The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun)

Interoception Checklist

Interoception is the internal sense which impacts on body signals. When it is working properly it will alert us that our internal balance is off and motivates us to take actions, to do something which will restore the balance and help us feel more comfortable e.g. if we feel thirsty - we get a drink, if we feel full – we stop eating, if we feel cold – we get a sweater etc. Interoception also helps with self-regulation, self awareness, problem solving, intuition, flexibility of thought, social understanding and perspective taking.

Hyper:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Experience intense reactions to hunger or needing to use the bathroom. They may even describe hunger as being painful |  |
| Is very sensitive to pain e.g. overly dramatic |  |
| Get intense feelings inside their body they can’t interpret which become overwhelming |  |
| Have difficulties with focus and attention (they may be too preoccupied with their internal stimuli) |  |
| Always feels sleepy or sleeps at inappropriate times |  |
| Always thirsty or constantly drinking |  |
| Is always hot or cold |  |
| Experience extreme anxiety over minor dilemmas |  |
| Always needs to use the toilet e.g. asks multiple times in a short period of time |  |
| Always feels anxious |  |
| Can’t describe how they feel pain or where pain is coming from |  |

Hypo:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Has an extremely high pain threshold  |  |
| Doesn’t feel hungry or has to be encouraged to eat |  |
| Eats to the point they get heartburn or vomit |  |
| Doesn’t drink or needs reminding to drink. |  |
| Doesn’t appear to be able to regulate temperature i.e. wears inappropriate clothing |  |
| Won’t use the toilet in school |  |
| Can’t always control their bladder |  |
| Goes to the toilet infrequently or needs reminding to go |  |
| Has toileting accidents (soiling, wetting) |  |
| Experiences constipation |  |

Interoception strategies

* Zones of Regulation
* Breathing exercises
* Emotional recognition exercises, such as emotions sorting game or naming emotions
* Heavy work activities that involve pushing, pulling or lifting rather heavy object for sensory stimulation
* Mindfulness Yoga
* Creating a sensory diet to address sensitivities
* Repetitive and rhythmic vestibular input (such as swinging, rocking etc.)
* Visual prompts, cues or communication devices that encourage children to identify body functions and feelings
* Verbally labelling emotions as we see them and also responding appropriately to encourage functional responses.
* Help to communicate wants, needs, emotions, and feelings by first recognizing them and then communicating them appropriately (social stories could be helpful for this)