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 The slide has a background of overlapping triangles in various shades of blue, teal, and grey. A horizontal blue band across the middle contains the title "Managing Distressed Behaviour in Lockdown" in white. Below the title is the Autism Learns logo and the text "Online learning for parents, carers and professionals". At the bottom, another horizontal blue band contains the text "What's sensory got to do with it?" in yellow, followed by "Identifying how sensory issues may cause certain behaviours and finding ways to minimise triggers" in white. The name "Joy Beaney" is written in yellow at the bottom right.

Managing Distressed Behaviour in Lockdown

Autism Learns Online learning for parents, carers and professionals

What's sensory got to do with it?

Identifying how sensory issues may cause certain behaviours and finding ways to minimise triggers

Joy Beaney

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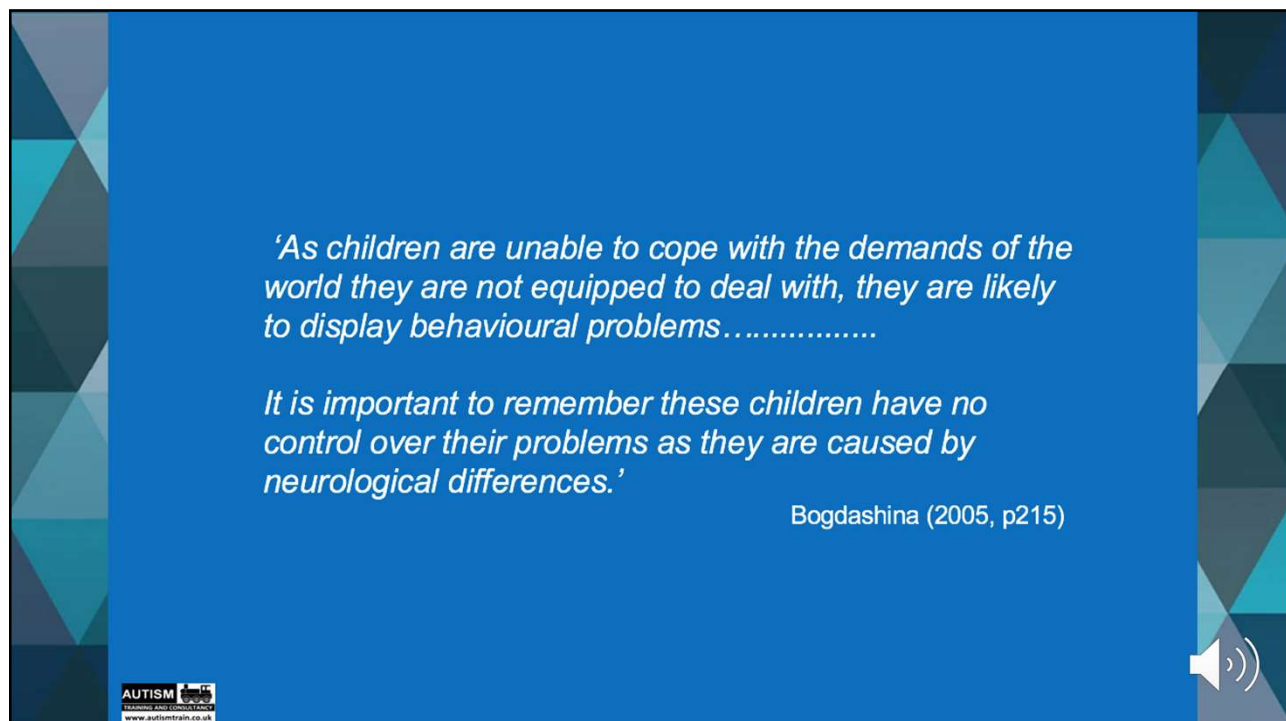
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AUTISM THROUGH A SENSORY LENS



Joy Beaney

3



'As children are unable to cope with the demands of the world they are not equipped to deal with, they are likely to display behavioural problems.....'

It is important to remember these children have no control over their problems as they are caused by neurological differences.'

Bogdashina (2005, p215)




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PROCESSING INFORMATION



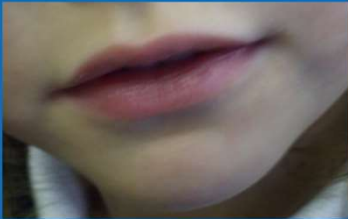
Name the senses

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OUR SENSES



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VESTIBULAR
Balance



PROPRIOCEPTIVE
Movement



BODY AWARENESS



INTEROCEPTION
How my body 'feels'

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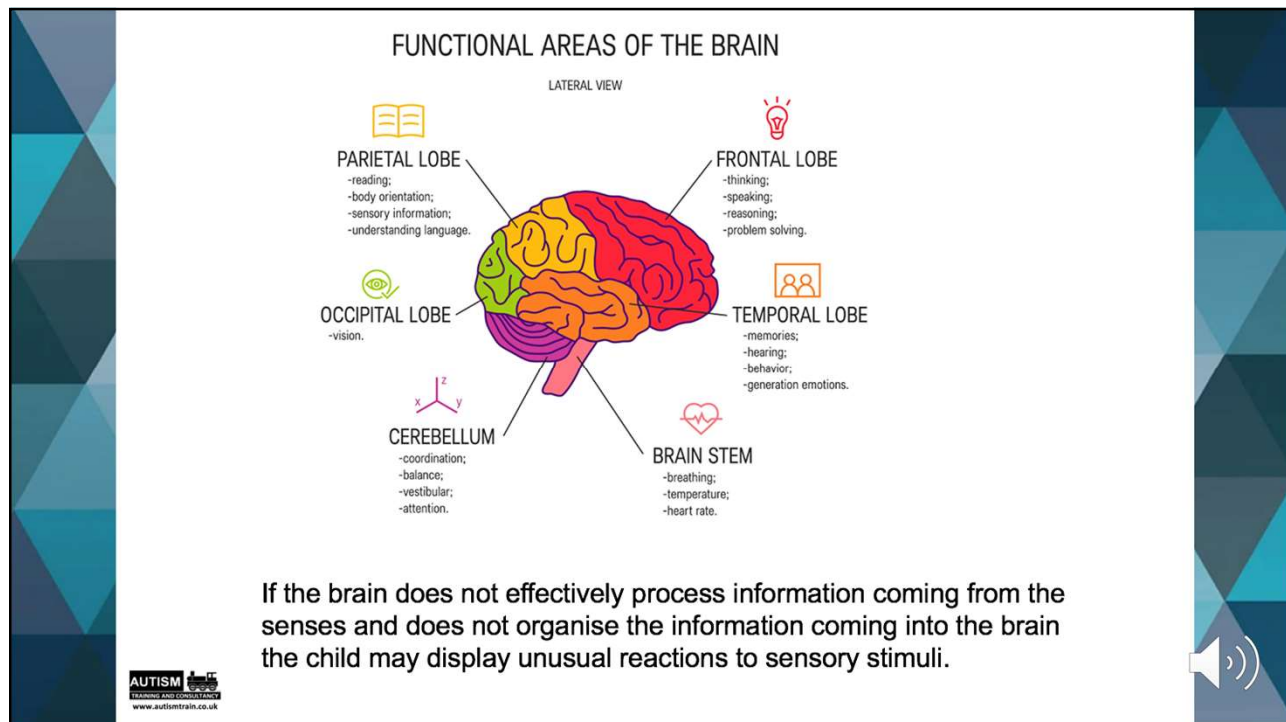
'When we understand how our sensory systems work, we can better understand why we do the things we do or act the way we do. In short our sensory systems help us 'make sense' of the world.'

(Smith Myles et al, 2000, p18)

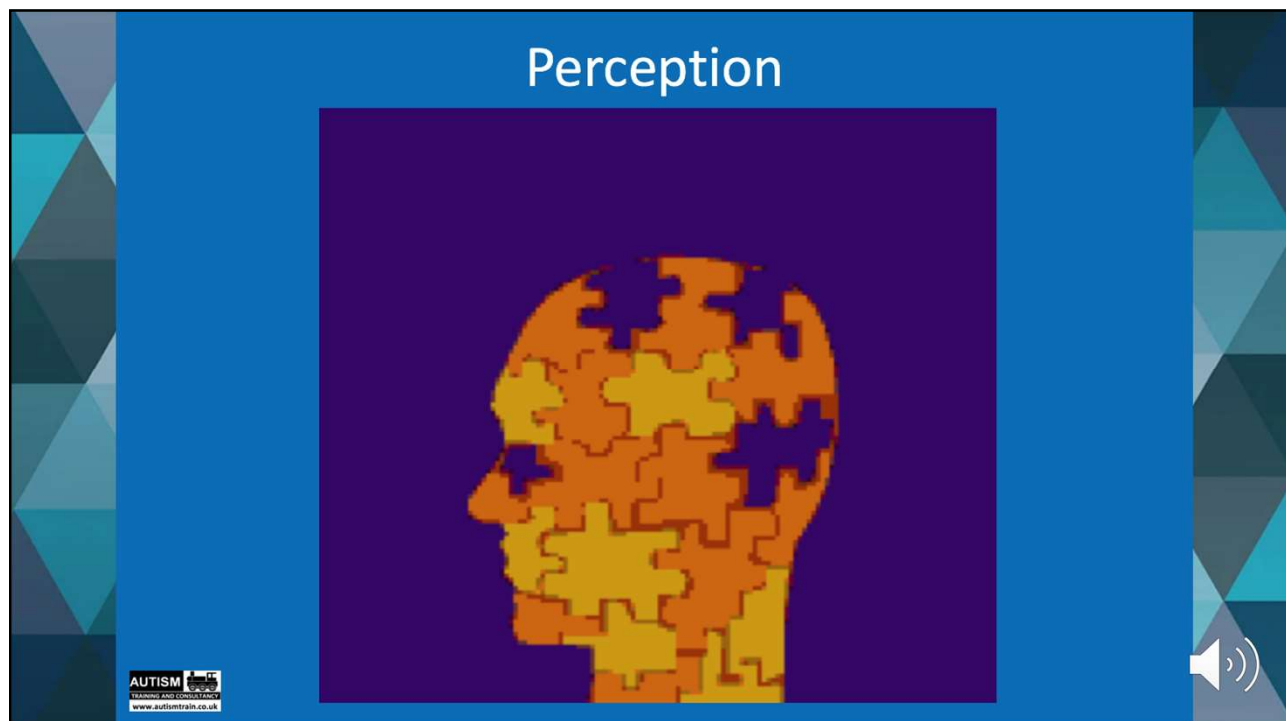
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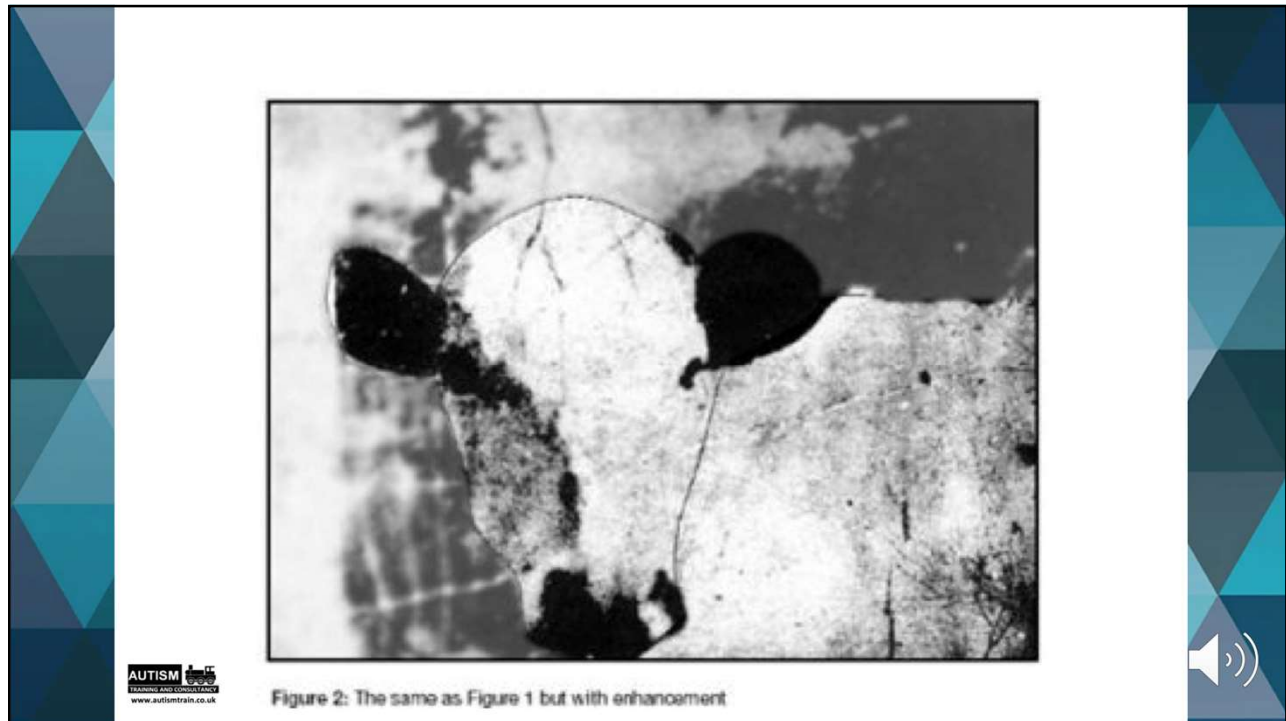
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Autistic children may experience a range of sensory differences:

'What I do realise is that I do not see the world as others do. Most people take the routines of the life and day to day connections for granted, The fact that they can see, hear, smell ,touch and relate to others is "normal". For me these things are often painfully overwhelming, non existent or just confusing'

Lawson 2001, p2



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2 Main Diagnostic Criteria for Autism

- **DSM-5** American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published 2013
- **ICD-10** World Health Organisation's Criteria for Childhood Autism *International Classification of Diseases* published 1992
- **ICD-11 Released June 2018 – comes into effect Jan 2022**



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It wasn't until 2013 in the DSM 5, that sensory difficulties were included in the diagnostic criteria. The inclusion of sensory difficulties in to the diagnosis has been welcomed.

Heffernan (2016) says that

'a very significant step on the path to understanding the autistic perspective has been the burgeoning recognition of the part sensory issues play in the lives of people with autism'

Heffernan (2016, p11)



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In the DSM-5 the criteria for a diagnosis are difficulties in the following two areas



- Social Communication and Interaction



- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities.



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2nd section of the DSM5 diagnostic criteria

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities.

Made up of 4 parts

1
Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech



2
Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns or verbal nonverbal behaviour

3
Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus

4
Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment



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- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech**

The child may, for example, line up toys, repeat actions such as rocking, spinning themselves or objects, making repetitive sounds or repeating phrases.



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- **Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behaviour**

The child likes routine and things to be predictable and may get extremely distressed at small changes and finds transitions very difficult to cope with. The child's rigid thinking pattern can result in the child being inflexible and unwilling to change their ideas or behaviour when circumstances change.



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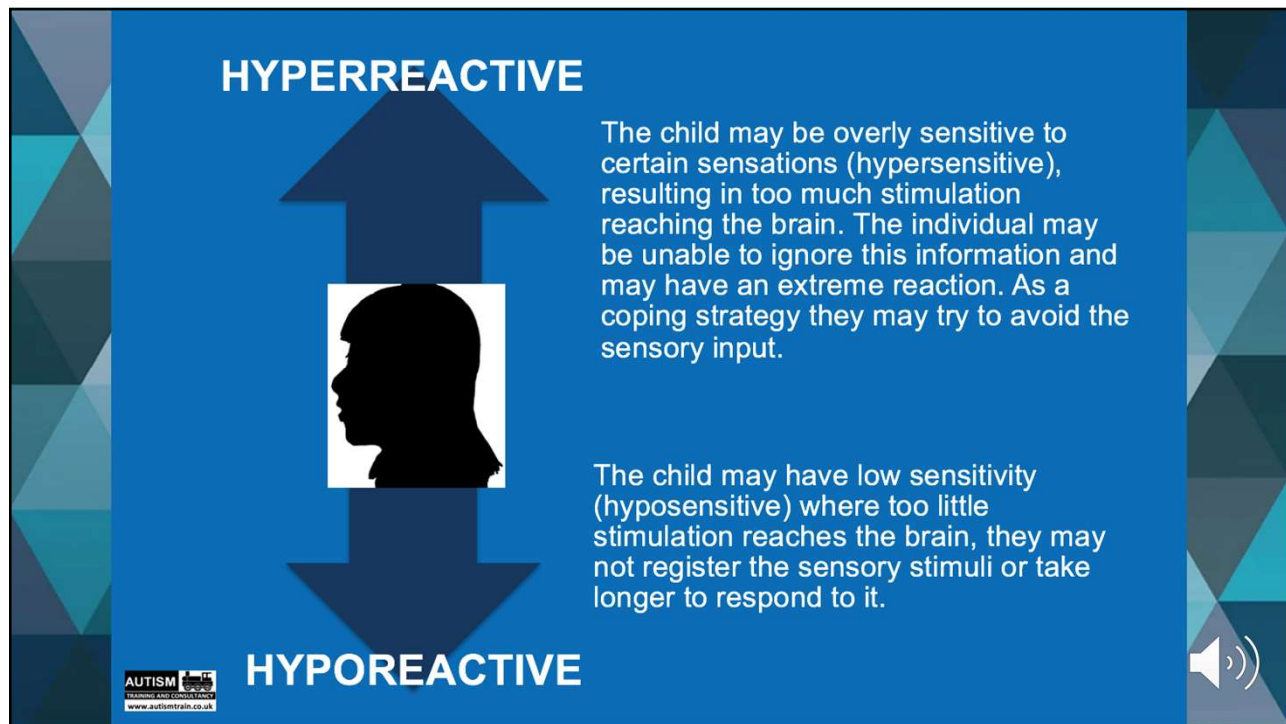
- **Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus**



The child may have an intense interest and may be preoccupied with unusual objects or interests. Sometimes the special interest can become all consuming. They can become very knowledgeable about the subject.



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HYPERREACTIVE

The child may be overly sensitive to certain sensations (hypersensitive), resulting in too much stimulation reaching the brain. The individual may be unable to ignore this information and may have an extreme reaction. As a coping strategy they may try to avoid the sensory input.

HYPOREACTIVE

The child may have low sensitivity (hyposensitive) where too little stimulation reaches the brain, they may not register the sensory stimuli or take longer to respond to it.

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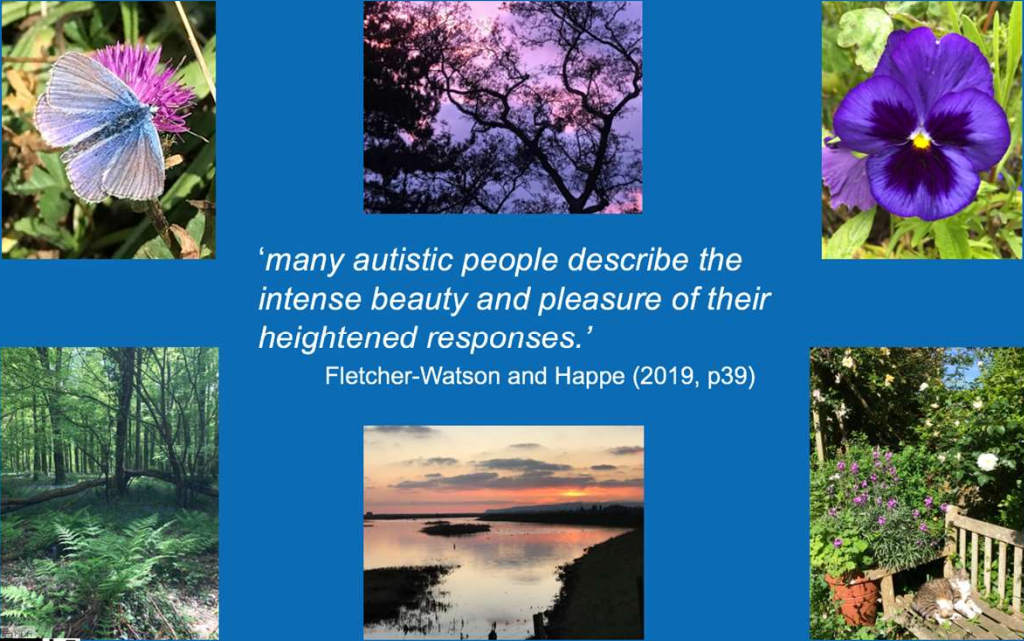
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'the ranges of heightened or reduced sensory processing in all areas, smell, sight, hearing, touch, and taste- that are seen in individuals with an autistic spectrum disorder should not be underestimated. It is most likely that behaviours seen by us as inexplicable and bizarre are in fact reactions to stimuli that are, for them extreme.'

Scott cited in Ariel and Naseef (2006, p258)

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'many autistic people describe the intense beauty and pleasure of their heightened responses.'

Fletcher-Watson and Happe (2019, p39)

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Unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment

HYPERREACTIVE



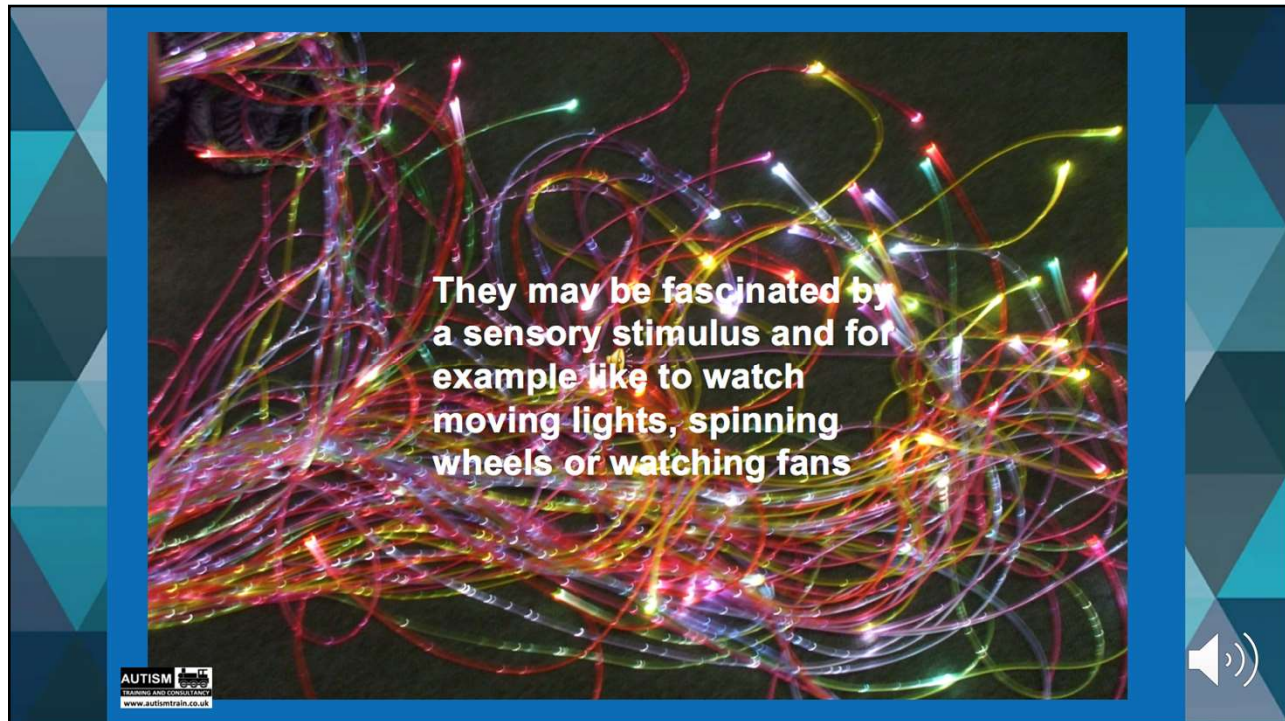
The Hypersensitive child may be fascinated by a sensory stimuli and get intense pleasure from the sensory seeking behaviour. This is the opposite of being upset by the stimulus and it causing pain or overload.

HYPOREACTIVE

The hyposensitive child may be sensory seeking and crave sensory experiences to help them make sense of the environment.

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It can restrict exploration and development

'When left alone I would often space out and become hypnotised. I would sit for hours on the beach watching sand dribbling through my fingers.....'

'I went into a trance which cut me off from the sights and sounds around me.'

Grandin (1996, p44)

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Sensory differences can affect any of the senses

Wilkes asks us to

'Imagine what happens when just one or all of the senses are intensified or not present at all. The difficulty is often called sensory integration dysfunction and it is one that many individuals on the autistic spectrum experience.'

Wilkes (2006, p1)



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TOUCH

Hyperreactivity where the child is over sensitive to touch can result in the following:



- Light touch is painful.
- A dislike of having anything on hands or feet
- Does not like touching a range of different textures
- Does not like wearing certain textures of clothes, irritated by labels in clothes



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Hyporeactivity where the child is under sensitive to the sense of touch can result in:

- ❖ A decreased awareness of pain
- ❖ A delayed response to textures or touch and the need for extra time to process information.

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Unusual interests in tactile sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ The individual craves tactile stimulation
- ❖ Frequently touching objects
- ❖ Fascinated by certain textures and loves to touch them
- ❖ Self injury

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SIGHT

Hyperreactivity where the child is over sensitive to the sense of sight can result in:

- ❖ Overly sensitive to bright lights
- ❖ Does not like certain colours
- ❖ Avoids direct eye contact
- ❖ Hits, rubs eyes when distressed

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Hyporeactivity where the child is under sensitive to the sense of sight can result in:

- ❖ The individual being unaware of contrasting colours
- ❖ The individual appearing not to notice obstacles

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Unusual interests in visual sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ Looking intently at people and objects
- ❖ Moving head very close to objects to look at them
- ❖ Moving fingers in front of eyes to increase stimulation
- ❖ Fascination with brightly coloured objects, moving patterns colours

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HEARING



Hyperreactivity where the child is over sensitive to sound can result in the following:

- ❖ The ability to hear sounds in the distance
- ❖ Dislikes noisy places



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- ❖ Covers ears to block out sounds



'I hear too much all the time and I wish it would stop'



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'When two people are talking at once, it is difficult for me to screen out one voice and listen to the other. My ears are like microphones picking up all sounds with equal intensity.....

In a noisy place I can't understand speech, because I cannot screen out background noise.

When I was a child, large noisy gatherings of relatives were overwhelming and I would just lose control and throw temper tantrums.'

Grandin




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Hyporeactivity where the child is under sensitive to the sense of hearing can result in:

- ❖ An individual not acknowledging certain sounds.
- ❖ A delayed response to a sound or verbal information or instruction and needs extra time to process information.




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Unusual interests in auditory sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ Likes sounds to be repeated
- ❖ Puts ear close to a sound to listen
- ❖ Frequently makes repetitive noises
- ❖ Fascination with certain sounds



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TASTE



Hyperreactivity where the child is over sensitive to the sense of taste can result in:

- ❖ The individual often having restricted diets
- ❖ Certain textures of food causing discomfort



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Hyporeactivity where the child is under sensitive to the sense of taste can result in the following:

- ❖ Eats any food presented to them
- ❖ Shows no preferences for particular tastes

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Unusual interests in gustatory sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ Craves certain foods
- ❖ Licks, bites objects or people-
- ❖ Likes chewing on things for long time, chews clothes, objects
- ❖ Chews non-edible objects

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SMELL

Hyperreactivity where the child is **overly sensitive to the sense of smell** can result in:



- ❖ Smells that are intensified and become overpowering
- ❖ Strong dislike for certain smells which we may think of as pleasant
- ❖ They may hit their nose when distressed



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Hyposensitivity where the child is **under sensitive to the sense of smell** can result in the following:



- ❖ The individual failing to notice extreme odours
- ❖ Has difficulty recognising food smells



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Unusual interests in olfactory sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ The need to smell themselves and others.
- ❖ Frequently smells objects
- ❖ Seeks strong odours
- ❖ Fascinated by certain smells



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VESTIBULAR



Hyperreactivity where the child is over sensitive with Vestibular can result in

- ❖ Dislikes activities involving changes in head position
- ❖ Dislikes walking on uneven surfaces



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- ❖ The individual may be frightened of activities where their feet leave the ground.
- ❖ Can be sick with lots of movement- when on swings, roundabouts

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Hyporeactivity where the child is under sensitive to the vestibular sense can result in:

- ❖ Doesn't get dizzy if spins for extended amount of time
- ❖ Appears unaware of risks when climbing or running

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Unusual interests in Vestibular sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ Craving rocking or spinning sensations.
- ❖ Frequently turning upside down
- ❖ Unable to sit still, constantly moving
- ❖ Always running rather than walking



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PROPRIOCEPTION



Hyperreactivity where the child is over sensitive to the proprioceptive sense can result in the following:

- ❖ Dislikes certain movements
- ❖ Dislikes fast moving activities
- ❖ Difficulty with gross motor skills



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Hyporeactivity where the child is under sensitive to the sense of proprioception can result in:

- ❖ Has difficulty knowing the position of their body
- ❖ Unaware of how much force to use when doing a task



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Unusual interests in Proprioceptive sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ Likes to be hugged very tightly or squeezed
- ❖ Seeks rough and tumble play
- ❖ Likes to get into small, tight places
- ❖ Likes to lean on furniture/ against walls
- ❖ Fascinated by movement



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'I seemed to always have a need to move, climb tall trees, and spin around on lawn toys and otherwise seek activities that provided a lot of sensory input. Today an occupational therapist would diagnose me as being hyposensitive in the vestibular and proprioceptive senses. In other words I needed more stimulation by movement and deep pressure than most people to find myself within the environment'

Shore S, cited in Ariel and Naseef (2006, p202)



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INTEROCEPTION



Hyperreactivity where the child is oversensitive to the interoceptive sense can result in

- ❖ Feeling pain more acutely or for longer periods of time than other people.
- ❖ May be excessively bothered by a small injury
- ❖ Feeling very hot or cold in comparison to others



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Hyporeactivity where the child is under sensitive to the sense of interoception and may have a reduced awareness of body sensations which can result in the following:

- ❖ May not recognise they are hungry or thirsty, too hot or too cold
- ❖ May not recognise they are ill
- ❖ May be aware that something is wrong but be unable to accurately identify where these sensory signals are coming from or recognise what they mean.
- ❖ The individual may not be aware of pain signals unless they are extremely intense.

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Unusual interests in Interoceptive sensory aspects of the environment:

The individual may display sensory seeking behaviour which can result in the following behaviours.

- ❖ May eat excessively
- ❖ May drink excessively
- ❖ Fascinated by internal bodily sensations

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ACTIVITY: Scenarios

The image shows three activity cards for sensory difficulties scenarios. Each card has a title and a table for recording sensory difficulties.

Card 1: List the sensory difficulties an autistic child might experience going to the supermarket

TOUCH	VISION	AUDITORY	TASTE	SMELL	VESTIBULAR	PROPRIOCEPTION	INTEROCEPTION

Card 2: List the sensory difficulties an autistic child might experience going to the doctor

TOUCH	VISION	AUDITORY	TASTE	SMELL	VESTIBULAR	PROPRIOCEPTION	INTEROCEPTION

Card 3: List the sensory difficulties an autistic child might experience going to a party

TOUCH	VISION	AUDITORY	TASTE	SMELL	VESTIBULAR	PROPRIOCEPTION	INTEROCEPTION

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Inconsistency to Stimuli



'The ability to tolerate sensory experiences fluctuates with a variety of factors including our levels of stress, how much we slept the night before or how predictable the situation is at hand. A young person with autism is no different. When a young person is stressed, sleep deprived or in an unpredictable situation, the ability to tolerate sensory experiences goes down.'

Mahler (2018, p6)

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Fragmented Perception

Isaacs (2015), describes his difficulty making meaning of sensory input.

'I can only process my surroundings one piece at a time, much like a floating jigsaw puzzle. This is also the same with people; I focus on one area and "lose" another part of them'

Isaacs, P. writing in Attwood et al (2015, p23)

Being Hyperreactive and hyporeactive

Some children may be both hyperreactive and hyporeactive in the same sensory system depending on the stimulus.



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Monotropism

Most people are able to use their senses simultaneously.

Lawson (2001), describes 'monotropism' as being able to absorb information from only one sensory channel at a time.

Filtering sensory information

Being able to filter out from all the sensory information entering the brain what is important and what we can ignore is a vital skill.



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Sensory differences and a link to social difficulties

- ❖ Thye et al, (2018), suggests that there is a stronger relationship between sensory difficulties and social interaction than was previously thought.
- ❖ Difficulties processing sensory information could be the cause or they could exacerbate many of the social difficulties the autistic person experiences.

Modulating a response to stimuli

- ❖ As sensory information is processed the child may receive too much stimulation and become over aroused or too little stimulation and be under aroused.



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Interoception and its link to emotions

- ❖ The sense of interoception allows us to 'feel' what is going on inside our bodies. Mahler (2018) explains that when we can clearly recognise these signals from our body they become clues to what emotion we are feeling.
- ❖ For example, you can recognise you are scared when you experience sensations such as your heart beating faster.



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We all have sensory preferences and dislikes



- For example some people love intense flavours like Marmite, others hate it.
- For some people, however, their sensory experiences create significant problems that interfere with their ability to function.



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Sensory Overload

The child may react with the



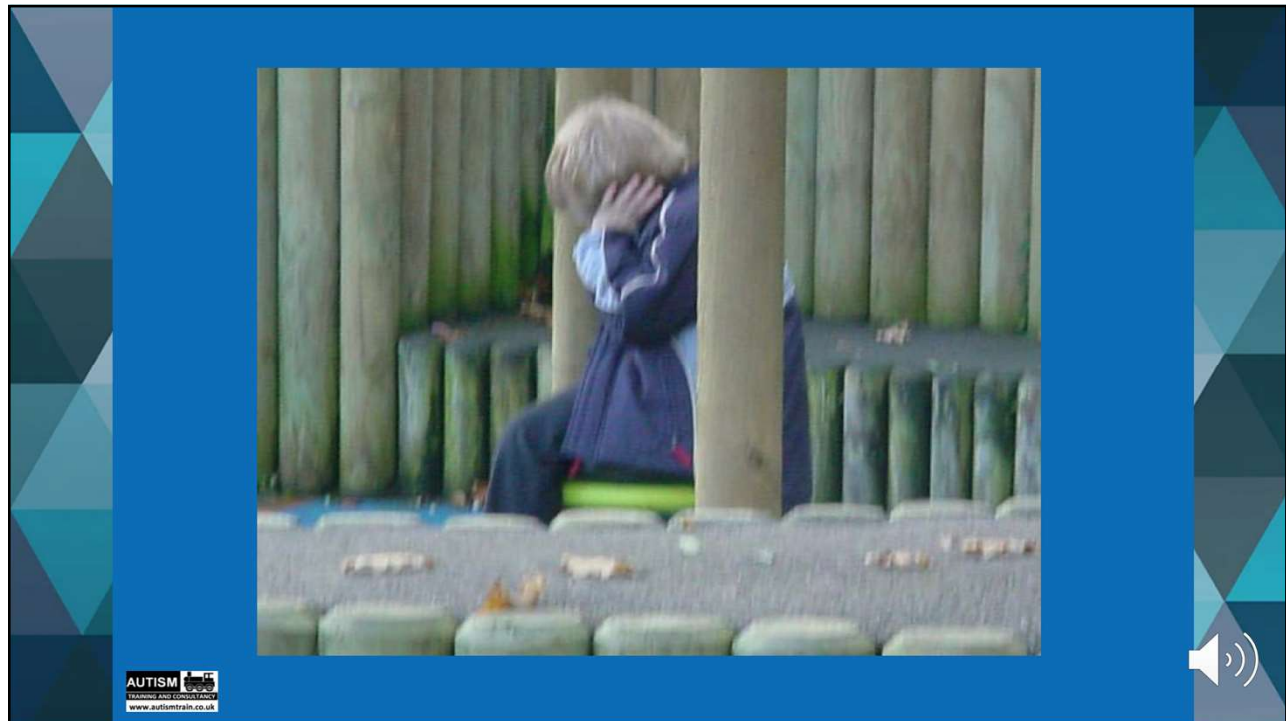
fight



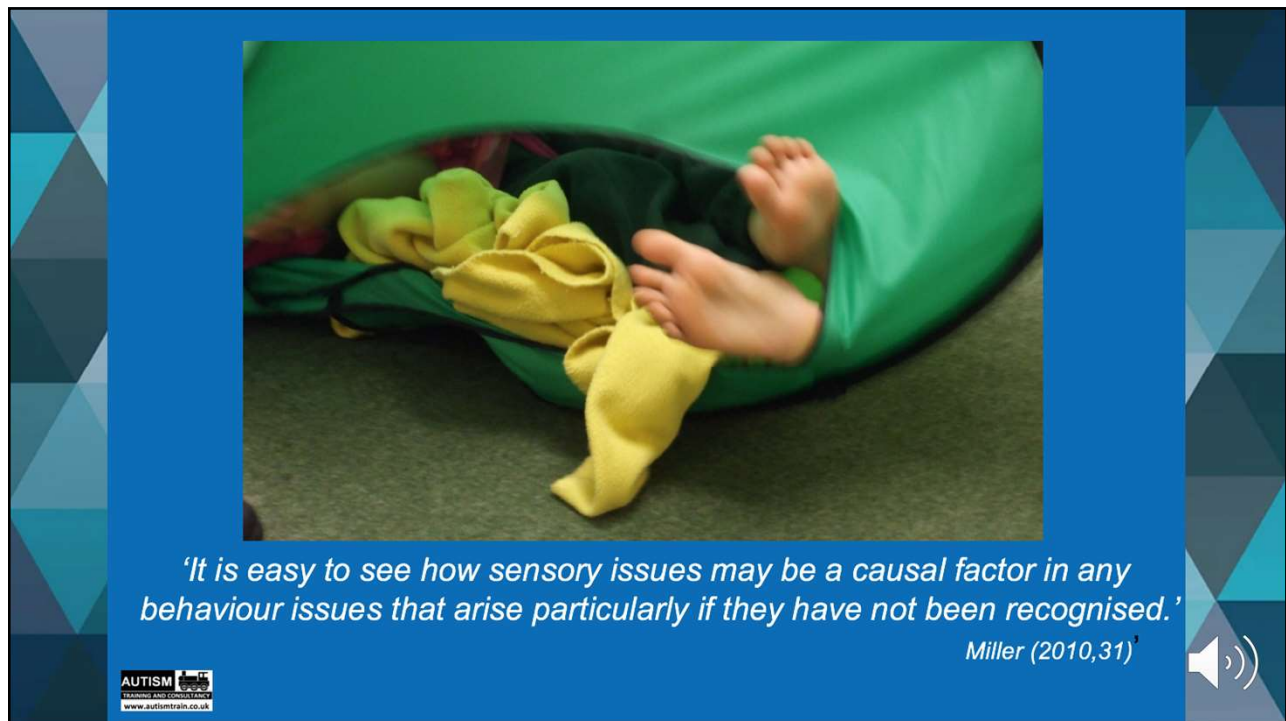
Or flight response



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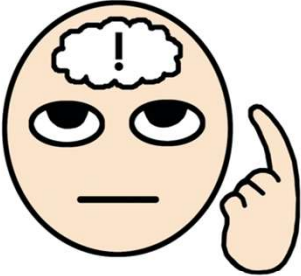


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THINK AUTISM



THINK SENSORY

Not all behaviours result from sensory differences but many behaviours do appear related and taking a problem-solving approach and considering if a sensory difference is causing an issue can lead to a better understanding of the child's behaviour.

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Every child's sensory needs are unique and as Miller (2010), points out

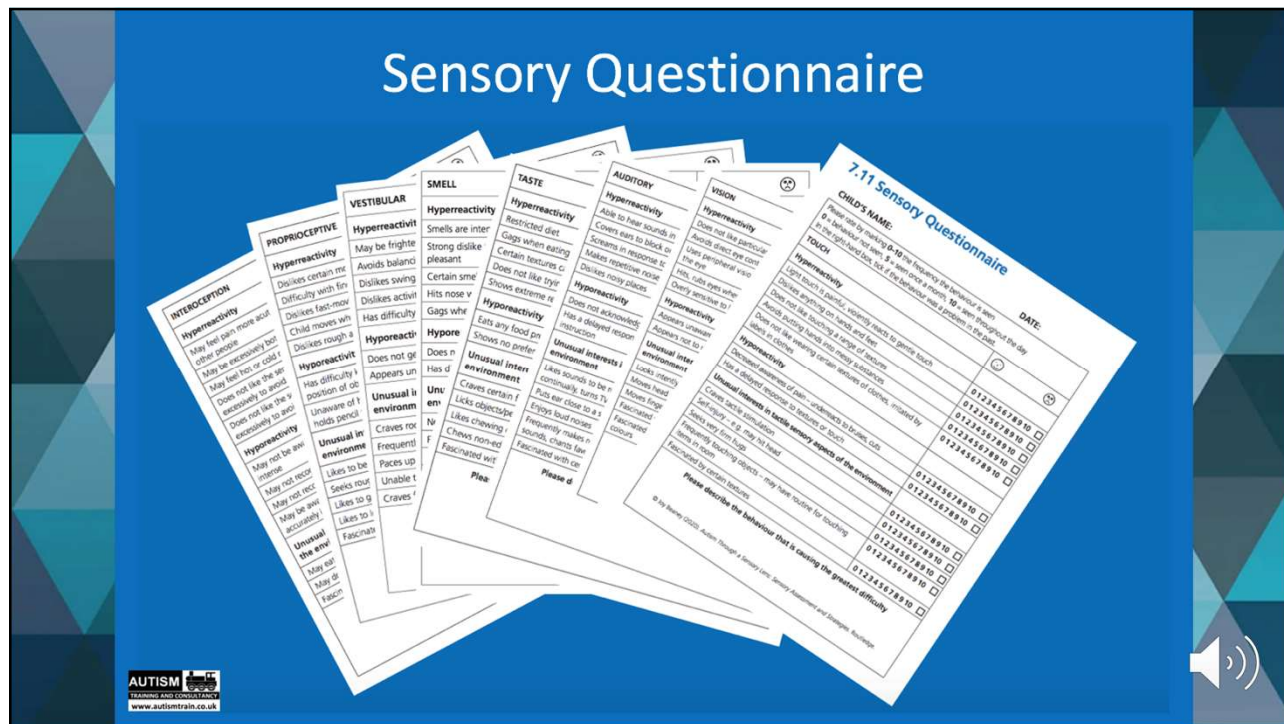
'The implications sensory issues may have in relation to behaviour are significant, and understanding an individual's sensory profile is an important element when planning an appropriate environment...'

Miller (2010, p31)

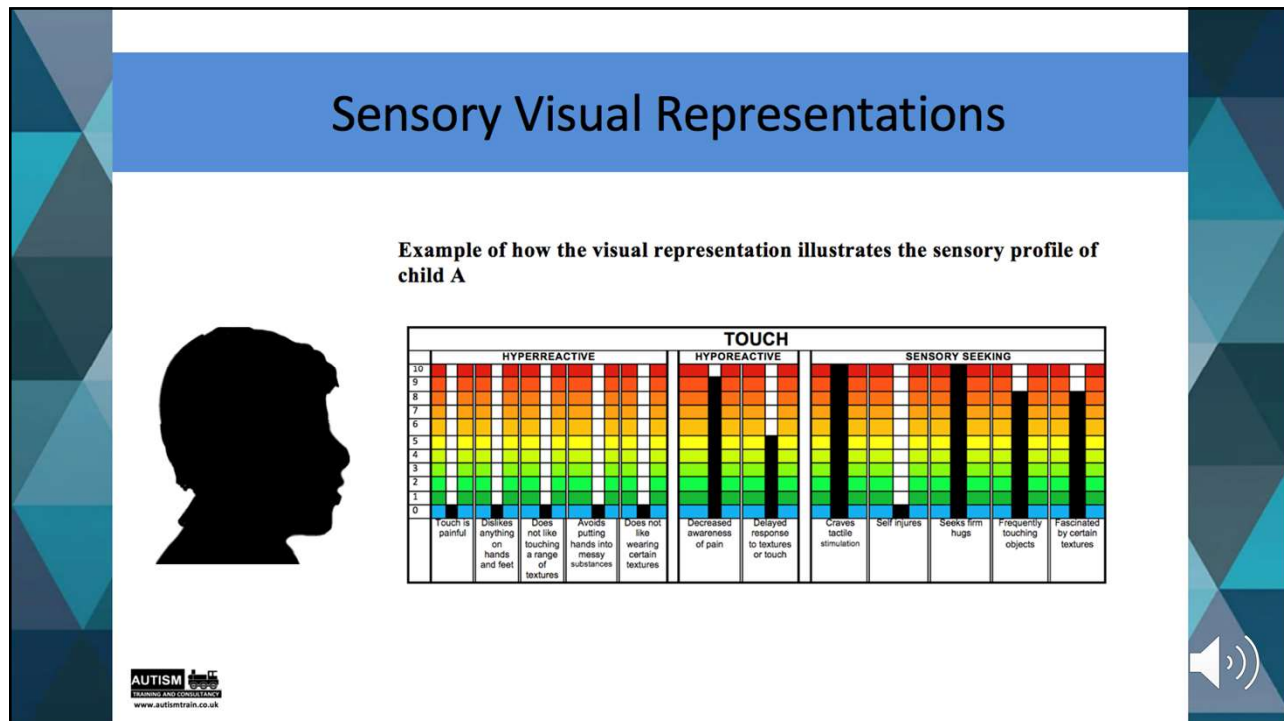
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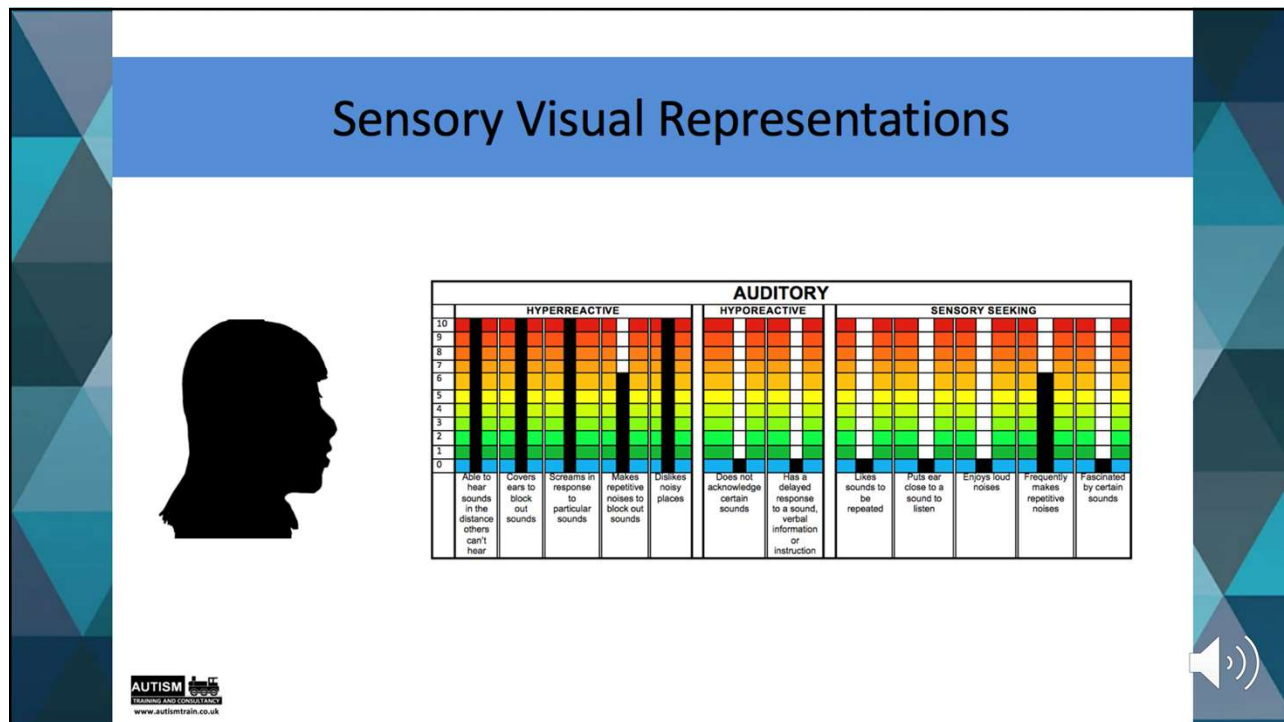
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Creating a sensory supportive environment The school environment

The classroom or nursery can be a busy, noisy and overwhelming place for the autistic child. It is vital that practitioners have received training on autism and are able to recognise and be sensitive to the child's individual needs as without an understanding of sensory differences they may misinterpret the child's behaviour.

the school environment can present autistic children with a multi-sensory onslaught in terms of sounds, smells, textures and visual impacts that constitutes both a distraction and a source of discomfort.'

Woods (2019, p46)

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The Autism Education Trust's Sensory Audit



national autism standards

Supported by
Department for
Education

Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms

Devised by Ian Attfield, Amy Fowler and Val Jones

This sensory audit is to help staff to assess and create an environment that enables the participation of pupils with autism. It does not cover all aspects, but gives ideas on the ways in which a setting might be altered if pupils experience sensory processing difficulties and find it hard or very anxiety-provoking to tolerate certain sensations or situations.

Visual

Good Practice and Evidence to look for	Current Situation	Possible action (if needed)
Classroom illumination is suitable for pupils with autism. - Fluorescent lights are regularly checked and changed. (Flickering lights can be very disturbing.) - The effects of light coming into the room through blinds and creating distracting patterns are minimised - Light reflecting on objects such as metal or shiny surfaces in the classroom is minimised.		
The classroom is orderly and not cluttered so that pupils can make sense of the environment. - The impact of wall displays is considered. (Busy and cluttered wall displays can be distracting) - Designated areas for specific activities to give clarity to the classroom organisation. - Pupils have the opportunity to work at		



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Ideas to support the child in the school environment

- If the child is nervous about approaching an activity, demonstrate it and allow plenty of time for them to observe the activity.
- Find ways to adapt the activity so that they can still do the learning without having to experience something they are uncomfortable with. e.g. the child could wear gloves while exploring playdoh
- In the classroom, problems can often arise when the children have to line up and others might brush against the autistic child. Perhaps the child could either be at the end or the beginning of the line or not be part of the line and leave the classroom before or after the other children.
- Create an organised and uncluttered environment.
- Be aware of the child's difficulty tolerating movement and balancing during Physical Education lessons and do not insist they have to complete an activity they are uncomfortable with.
- Consider how you position items in the room to avoid obstacles.
- Offer regular movement breaks to allow the child to take a few minutes to move and then refocus.
- Mindfulness exercises can help the child to regulate their emotions.



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Environments causing sensory overload

Chris Packham (2019) describes how stimuli from different sensory systems can cause real difficulty

'I rarely go into supermarkets. I find that environment really challenging, all of the bright lights, the confusion of the enormous complexity of goods in there, plus all the smells and the sounds. It's a difficult environment'.

NAS Website 2019



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Sensory first aid

Sometimes it is impossible to avoid an environment or situation that you know will be difficult for the child to cope with and could result in their hypersensitivity causing distress.

BE PREPARED

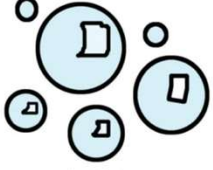
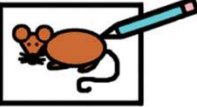
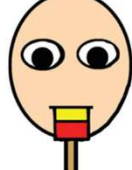


Make up a bag or box for the child which contains items to distract and calm the child.



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Calming activities choice board

 bubbles	 jump	 drawing
 hug	 quiet place	 suck

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Calming sensory space

Create an area the child can go to that will support their sensory needs. This could be their bedroom, a pop up tent or even a table which you could turn into a den by covering it with a blanket.



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Ideas to support the child who is over-sensitive and hyperreactive

- ❖ Certain textures of clothing may be uncomfortable. Allow the child to wear fabrics they like- when you find clothing the child likes buy several items in different sizes as they can get very attached to a particular item of clothing.
- ❖ Autistic children are often particularly sensitive to labels and seams in clothes. Remove labels in clothing and wear socks inside out to lessen the effect of the seams.
- ❖ Background noises such as ticking clocks, humming electrical devices, and lawn mowers can be very irritating and prevent the child from concentrating. Consider how these sounds can be reduced.
- ❖ Acknowledge the child's fear. Always warn the child about when to expect a sensory stimulus they don't like. Sometimes if the child is in control of when the noise is going to happen it can reduce anxiety.
- ❖ Do not pressurise a child to eat foods that they find unpalatable.
- ❖ Some children do not like different textures of food mixed together. Offer one type of food on each plate.







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Ideas to support the child who is over-sensitive and hyperreactive

- ❖ Respect the child if they say a smell that you find pleasant is intensified and unpleasant to them and try to find a way for the child to avoid it. The smell of certain foods cooking can be distressing and the child may need to leave the room. Putting a scent of something the child does like on to a wristband or tissue that they can smell when encountering an unpleasant smell can help to mask the unpleasant one.
- ❖ Use unperfumed soaps, shampoos, washing powder and cleaning products.
- ❖ Encourage the child to do some physical exercise before they need to concentrate on an activity. running, skipping, jumping on a trampoline will all give input to the muscles and be calming for the child.






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Ideas to support the child who is under-sensitive and hyporeactive

- ❖ Ensure people are aware that the child is under-sensitive or hyporeactive and may not respond to a sensory stimulus or have a delayed reaction. Safety is therefore a paramount consideration. In order to ensure the child's safety, activities need close supervision.
 - Lock cupboards containing hazardous materials when not in use.
 - Use electric plug covers
 - Make sure the water temperature for baths and washing is not too hot
 - Label objects such as radiators warning that they may be hot.
 - Near busy roads the child may not be aware of the traffic. For young children that do not like holding an adult's hand the child could wear a back pack with safety reins.
- ❖ Provide movement activities such as swinging, jumping and spinning will stimulate the vestibular system.
- ❖ Provide activities that involve the whole body such as pushing or pulling, oral actions such as chewing or sucking and activities involving the hands such as squeezing or pinching actions will all give increased proprioceptive input.
- ❖ Some hyporeactive children present as lethargic -Allow movement breaks and opportunities for the child to get up and stretch.



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Recognising how your body feels

Recognising how my body feels chart



Think about what your body is doing	Think about why	Think about what you could do to make yourself feel more comfortable

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My skin feels itchy and it is red		I may have a rash caused by an allergy to a food	I could tell an adult and ask for some cream
		I may have been bitten by an insect	I could tell an adult and ask for some cream
		The texture of my clothes might have been irritating my skin	I could change my clothes



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Fun activities for sensory exploration and play



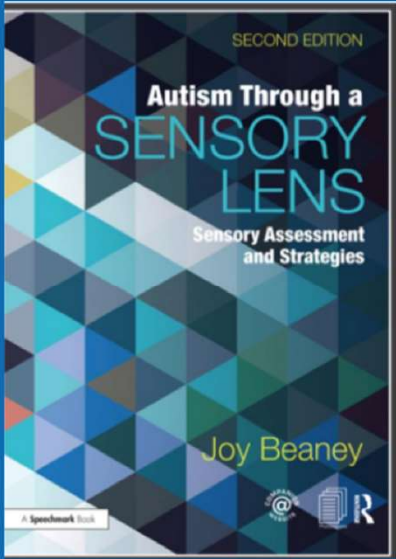
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Occupational therapy

If you are concerned about the child's development refer to an Occupational Therapist.

The ideas here are not to replace the valuable work that occupational therapists do. However not everyone can access an assessment and advice from an occupational therapist when it is needed and I hope that the information in this presentation has increased your understanding and the suggested adaptations and strategies will help your child.

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**Thank you for giving up your time today
to attend this session**

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