Top Tips
Understanding Sensory Processing Differences
For parents, young people & teachers

✓ Sensory processing is the way in which our brain organises the information it gains from our 7 senses:

- Visual (sight)
- Olfactory (smell)
- Gustatory (taste)
- Vestibular (balance)
- Auditory (hearing)
- Tactile (touch)
- Proprioception (body awareness)

✓ If our brain organises this information correctly then we will receive just the right amount of information
✓ With a sensory processing difference then you may receive too much or too little information
✓ Everyone has a varying range of sensory processing differences, it is only when they impact on our ability to function in daily activities that they become a concern
✓ Sensory differences can fluctuate and can be worse at times of stress or anxiety
✓ Sensory differences are best supported through management strategies throughout the day that work for the individual child
✓ We cannot make sensory processing differences disappear, they are a part of our individuality but we can often reduce the problems caused by them and help to manage this.
✓ Some people also use sensory based activities to calm at time of anxiety or stress
Top Tips
Sensitivity to Sound
For parents, young people & teachers

✓ Try ear defenders for children struggling with noise – only use for short periods of time
✓ For older children try wireless headphones with or without music to cancel out difficult sounds
✓ Be aware that is not just loud sounds that can be challenging – think about white noise from electronic devices and also noise made by others
✓ Use a fiddle toy as a distraction technique
✓ Always explain to the child/young person what the noise is – this can decrease anxiety
✓ Be aware that children may struggle to listen to stories or follow instructions if there are other noises within the classroom
✓ Provide the child with a ‘calm area’ where sound is reduced and also visual stimuli
✓ Warn the child if you know a noise will be made that they could find challenging (this will enable them to be prepared)
Top Tips
Chewing
For parents, young people & teachers

- Be aware that sucking and chewing is calming and can also aid concentration
- When asking a child to stop chewing on something unsafe try to offer them an alternative such as a ‘chewy tube’ or ‘Chewellry’
- Sucking through a straw or sports cap can help
- Sucking thick milkshakes or smoothies through a straw
- Blowing activities such as blow painting
- Try offering something to fidget with in replacement
- Try and find out if a child is anxious about something – you may then be able to deal with the reason the child is needing to chew or suck
- Regular healthy snacks can be helpful – try crunchy cereal, raisins, apples, cereal bars
Top Tips
Sensitivity to touch and clothing
For parents, young people & teachers

- Remove labels and avoid motif patterns if these can be difficult to tolerate
- Try seam free clothing (available online and in some Marks and Spencer stores)
- Allow the child to have ‘safe clothing’ e.g. clothes they know are comfortable to wear when others feel challenging
- Be aware that if a child or young person is distracted by clothing or texture then their concentration levels will be affected
- Allow time with messy play (as the child will tolerate) but always have a cloth or facilities available for the child to be clean whenever they wish
- Have a textures book or board
- Be aware that touch can be calming and a child may benefit from something to fiddle with or stroke
- Children with sensitivity to touch may find lining up or sitting on the carpet challenging – try to allow them to be at the start or the end of the line and on the outskirts of the mat at carpet time (perhaps with their own marked area or using a cushion)
Top Tips
Sensitivity to self care tasks
For parents, young people & teachers

Teeth brushing
✓ Try flavour and foam free toothpaste (Oranurse)
✓ Try different textured toothbrushes
✓ Try powered toothbrush (appropriate for the child’s age) – sometimes children like the vibration

Bathing & showering
✓ Allow time playing in the water
✓ Ensure the temperature of the water and the room are right for the child (they may feel temperature differently to us)
✓ Allow a cloth for the child to wipe their face whenever needed
✓ Give them some control of the shower

Hair Brushing
✓ Use a soft brush or tangle teaser
✓ Use detangling spray
✓ Use a mirror so the child can see what you are doing
✓ Use fiddle toys or other activities to distract whilst you are doing their hair
Top Tips
Movement Break Ideas
For parents, young people & teachers

Children with sensory processing needs may seek movement or require regular intervals of movement to enable them to focus on other activities such as learning.

- Jumping, on the spot, star jumps, from spot to spot
- Pretend to be a bear and walk around on hands and feet
- Run errands: ask a child to take something to another room e.g. a heavy book to Mr Smith or toy to their bedroom
- Marching – heavy and light steps, big and small movement
- Sitting or lying over a gym ball or space hopper
- Obstacle courses

(Remember spinning can be disorganising. It should also be avoided with children diagnosed with epilepsy)