

Some ideas for addressing students sensory needs so they can access the learning environment

## Visual

Hyper (over sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Squints or covers eyes when lights are bright	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create divided off workstation in classroom to block out visual distractors</li> <li>• Reduce fluorescent lighting</li> <li>• Use black out curtains</li> <li>• Wear sunglasses</li> </ul>
Frightened by sharp flashes of light	
Notices tiniest pieces of fluff on carpet	
Looks down	
Has difficulty in bright or dimly lit rooms	
Easier to focus on smaller objects	

Hyper (under sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
May stare at sun or bright lights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the use of visual supports</li> <li>• Keep room brightly lit</li> <li>• Highlight edge of surfaces with tape</li> <li>• Provide a desk light</li> </ul>
Fascinated by brightly coloured objects/reflections	
Moves fingers and objects in front of eyes	

## Auditory

Hyper (over sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Distracted by sounds not normally heard by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create work station</li> <li>• Listen to music that is calming to that student</li> <li>• Slowly increase volume of music to desensitize</li> <li>• Prepare child before going to noisy places</li> <li>• Does child have to go to noisy place?</li> <li>• Shut doors and windows to reduce external sounds</li> <li>• Wear ear plugs</li> </ul>
Inability to cut out background noise	
Frightened by sounds e.g. bells	
Struggles with assemblies, music lessons	
Makes repetitive sounds to block out noise	
Sensitive to sound	

Hypo (under sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
May not respond to name or verbal cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use pupil's name to gain attention before giving instruction</li> <li>• Use visual supports to back up verbal information</li> <li>• Use visuals to check for understanding</li> <li>• Be aware of tone and cadence of voice</li> </ul>
Oblivious to certain sounds	
Attracted to noisy environments	
Enjoys banging and tapping noisy objects	

## Tactile

Hyper (over sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Becomes frightened, anxious or aggressive with light or unexpected touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students to complete activities themselves (e.g. washing) so they can do what is comfortable</li> <li>• Gradually introduce different textures</li> <li>• Remember that a hug or touch may be painful</li> <li>• Warn the child if you are about to touch them</li> </ul>
Avoids standing close to people	
Avoids touching certain textures	
Refuses to wear some textured clothing, shoes and socks	
Dislikes messy play	
Wears inappropriate clothing for weather	
Difficulties washing or brushing hair	

Hypo (under sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Craves touch – needs to touch everything	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only with OT and parental permission apply deep pressure therapy</li> <li>• Use weighted blankets</li> <li>• Give student jobs throughout the day that requires them to push or carry heavy things e.g. push a trolley of books to different rooms</li> <li>• Fidget toys, sensory objects</li> <li>• Timetable a sensory diet into the day's activities</li> </ul>
High pain threshold	
Not aware when face or hands are dirty/nose running	
May hurt themselves deliberately	
Enjoys and seeks messy play	
Pushes against/into people, holds others tightly	
Enjoys heavy objects on top of them	

## Vestibular (balance)

Hyper (over sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Frightened of walking on uneven surface/walking up or down stairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer to OT for strategies</li> <li>• Break down activities into small easily manageable steps using visual clues e.g. finish line, stop sign etc.</li> <li>• Incorporate gross motor skills into daily program</li> </ul>
Frightened of jumping, hopping, balance on one foot	
Loses balance easily and may appear clumsy	
Moves slowly and cautiously	
Car sickness	
Difficulties stopping during a physical activity	

Hypo (under sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Need to rock, swing or spin to get sensory input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage</li> <li>• Refer to OT for strategies</li> <li>• Swings, rocking horses, roundabouts, trampoline</li> <li>• Catching a ball</li> <li>• Walking up steps</li> <li>• Therapy balls, textured cushions</li> </ul>

## Proprioception (position of body in space)

Hyper (over sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Moves whole body to look at something	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer to OT for advice and strategies</li> <li>• Practice fine motor activities e.g. lacing boards</li> <li>• Practice moving only one body part</li> <li>• Incorporate technology and handouts to reduce failure in activities that require fine motor skills</li> </ul>
Difficulties with fine motor skills	

Hypo (under sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Hard to navigate rooms and avoid obstructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use arm's length rule to judge personal space, always use consistent language</li> <li>• Put coloured tape on floor to indicate boundaries</li> <li>• Position furniture</li> <li>• Model good proximity</li> </ul>
May bump into people	
Stands too close to others, can't judge personal space	

## Gustatory – Taste

Hyper (over sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Certain textures cause discomfort, eat only mash potatoes, ice-cream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce different textures around the child's mouth e.g. introduce different foods at a slow pace</li> <li>• Encourage activities that involve the mouth e.g. whistles, bubble wands</li> <li>• Change texture of the food</li> </ul>
Sensitive taste buds; finds some flavours too strong, restricted diet	

Hyper (under sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Eats everything e.g. soil, grass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer to dietician and speech therapist</li> <li>• Finds it relaxing to chew on clothes etc, offer alternative e.g. tubes, straws</li> </ul>
Likes very spicy food	
Chews on clothing	

## Olfactory – Smell

Hyper (over sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
Dislikes people with distinctive perfumes, shampoos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use unscented detergents and shampoos</li> <li>• Avoid wearing perfume</li> <li>• Make environment as fragrance free as possible</li> </ul>
Smells can be intense and overpowering. can cause problems	

Hyper (under sensitive)	
Behaviour	Suggested strategies
May lick things to get better sense of what it is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use strong smelling products as a reward</li> <li>• Distract from smell appropriate stimuli e.g. bowel motion</li> <li>• Introduce alternative strong smelling things</li> <li>• Use visuals and social stories to support understanding</li> <li>• Incorporate into PDHPE program</li> </ul>
Some may have no sense of smell and fail to notice smells including their own body odour	