



Sensory-Friendly Environment



INCLUSION IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

TIP SHEET

What is a Sensory-Friendly Environment?

A sensory-friendly environment is designed to be more calming for the senses. These senses include sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, balance and body awareness. A sensory-friendly environment benefits everyone.

Sensory Sensitivity

Many children with disabilities, including Autism, may have different levels of sensory sensitivity. These can often cause discomfort or distress in certain environments.

- Children who are **hypersensitive** can be extremely reactive to sensory stimuli in their environment and can easily be irritated and distressed.
- Children who are **hyposensitive** often display little behavioural reaction to environmental stimuli and often seek additional stimulation to feel content.

Hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity can be displayed through a range of different behaviours. Some examples are included in the table below.

Hyposensitive behaviours	Hypersensitive behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take physical risks (due to higher pain tolerance) • Often fidgeting • Difficulty understanding personal space • Bumping into objects, may appear clumsy or uncoordinated • Constantly moving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed by places and people • Easily startled by sudden noises • Bothered by bright lights • Cover their ears due to background noise • Avoids touch • Sensitive to smells

How to Create a Sensory-Friendly Environment?

- Reduce bright lights. Use natural, incandescent or dim lighting. Avoid dynamic or moving lights. To diffuse the flickering sensation of fluorescent lights cover with draping fabrics. Sunshades can be set up outdoors. Sunglasses can be worn outdoors and indoors.
- Reduce noise. Turn off background music. Stop noisy equipment. Add soft furnishings and materials to absorb noise. Provide noise-canceling headphones for indoor and outdoor use.
- Reduce clutter. Limit the amount of wall and ceiling displays. Ensure the area is clear and unobstructed. Keep the space organised and simple.
- Eliminate smells. Ensure that perfumes, candles and essential oils are not used. Empty bins and dispose of waste.
- Create quiet zones. A [sensory space](#) or dedicated quiet and comfortable areas can be set up.
- Include amenities. Have plenty of clean and accessible toilets. Provide water stations or ensure that fresh water is available. Offer comfortable and accessible seating.

Note: A child's parent and/or their Occupational Therapist (OT) may provide advice and strategies to support their child's engagement, where sensory sensitivity may be an issue.