

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS: *Strategies for home and school*

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Sensory

The nature of ASD is such that many children will be over or under reactive to sensory stimuli. The latest Diagnostic Standards Manual DSM-5 that came out in May 2013 finally recognised that sensory processing difficulties are a part of ASD. Some children will have a dual diagnosis of a Sensory Processing Disorder. Others it will just be part of their ASD.

It is easier to change the environment than change the child.

Simple changes in the environment can make a big difference to a child's engagement and learning outcomes. You could spend all day asking a child to "sit still" on the mat or you could give them a "sensory mat" to sit on that helps them sit still.

Dean Beadle found sitting on the mat hard but at a table where he could feel the table and his body against the chair he could sit still. On an airplane he likes to have the tray table down for the same reason.

Often sensory can be the underlying cause of so much distress and behaviour. Children can be hypersensitive (over sensitive) or hyposensitive (under sensitive) to touch, taste, smell, sound, sight and/or movement. Occupational Therapists are normally the specialists who assess children's sensory processing and implement programmes to regulate their senses or address sensory needs. In my experience many children need sensory adaptations in the classroom.

By regulating the amount and intensity of stimulation it helps to keep the nervous system calm, organised and focused. Children can be under-aroused and sluggish one moment, and overwhelmed and anxious the next. Meeting sensory needs can include using sensory tools to regulate behaviour or adapting activities to reduce sensory stimulation. For example some children can sit for longer periods with a sensory tool/fidget tool. While other children may need clothing adaptations, e.g. socks with no over-locking for them to wear shoes and socks. See below for some great adaptations.

Sensory Tools

Remember just like glasses – everyone has their own script, each child will have their own requirements and they may change over time.

Fidgetpod: This pod is appropriate for all ages who seek sensory input for calming. By running their palm or foot over it for instant sensory stimulation it can increase concentration levels in school children.



Liquid Timers: Just like the lava lamp that we had as kids, the liquid motion offers a calming visual stimulant as well as teaching action/reaction. Simply turn it over and you're ready to go. 3 minutes or 15 seconds.



Twist Puzzle: Instantly calms sensory seekers. Works great as a hand fidget as well as a fine motor skill builder. Encourages hand coordination while relaxing the user and building concentration.



Sensory Mat: Offers instant calming for people who have a hard time staying in one place for long periods of time. Use to sit on mat or chairs, or rub feet over for stimulation.



Chewy Tubes: Wonderful for children who bite their clothes, bodies or seek objects to chew.



Sensory Stixx: Pocket sized fidget offers instant sensory input, instantly calming. Great as a small tactile roll, or as a sensory brush.

