

## Sensory behaviours and their impact

### 1. Observable sensory behaviours

Increased reactions to sensations	Decreased reactions to sensations
Hearing	
Is easily distracted by background sounds Overreacts to sounds Has unpredictable reactions to sounds Holds hands over ears to block noise Screams or cries at sounds in the environment Responds physically as if sound is a threat	Does not respond to name being spoken Seems oblivious to sounds of surrounding activities Creates constant sounds as if to stimulate self Does not respond to any kind of sound <u>(check hearing)</u>
Seeing	
Is disturbed by bright lighting or avoids sunlight Covers part of visual field- puts hand over part of the page of a book Responds physically to appearance of certain objects or colours	Is unaware of the presence of other people Is unable to locate desired objects, people Does not pay attention to visual prompts
Touch	
Does not like to be touched Avoids tasks with a strong tactile element (clay, water play, paint, food preparation) Complains about discomfort of clothing, refuses to wear certain clothes Responds negatively to textures in food, toys, Furniture	Does not seem to notice touch of others Frequently puts things into mouth Has a high pain threshold, is unaware of danger because of low response to pain
Balance and movement	
Seems to tire easily when engaged in movement activities Is generally slow to move, or usually lethargic Takes a long time to respond to directions to move	Seems to need constant movement Rocks, jumps
Smell and taste	
Eats a limited variety of food Gags, refuses food Spits out foods, medications Overreacts to smells in environment Avoids places or people with strong odours	Licks objects in the environment Chews on objects inappropriately May ingest dangerous substances despite their unpleasant taste Sniffs objects and people in unusual ways

**Source:** Alberta Learning, *Teaching students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Alberta, Canada. 2003. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/512925/autism3.pdf>

### 2. Consider the following to reduce the impact of sensory factors

### ***Auditory:***

Are there fans, loudspeakers, fire alarms, several people talking at once, air conditioners, bells, dogs barking, or scraping?

What are the general sound level and the predictability and repetitiveness of sounds?

What can be done to minimise the negative effect these stimuli may have on the student with ASD in the class?

What is the time typically required by the student to process auditory information and/or to shift attention between auditory stimuli?

### ***Visual:***

Are there distracters, such as light, movement, reflection, or background patterns, that affect the student's ability to attend to the learning activity?

What is the eye level of the student, the position of the teacher in relation to the student, and the distracters that may interfere with attention?

How much time is required to shift visual attention?

What effort is given to reducing the effects of aversive visual stimuli, so that the management of the student's behaviour is facilitated, and his ability to learn is enhanced?

### ***Tactile:***

Are there textures that seem to be abrasive?

Are temperatures appropriate to minimise negative effect on the student?

Does the student demonstrate a need to explore through touch, and yet avoid being touched?

What is the level of ability or defensiveness in the use of certain objects intended to support instruction?

### ***Vestibular:***

How is the student's need to move and exercise accommodated?

What are the individual's reactions to movement?

How can the student's program incorporate needed movement without unduly jeopardising the attention and learning of other students in the class?

### ***Gustatory and olfactory:***

What are the student's preferences in taste and smell with foods and other materials?

How are the student's responses to the smell of materials incorporated into decisions made about activities?

What is the appropriate behaviour, as affected by these smell preferences, suitable to teach for snack or mealtimes?