

The background of the entire cover is a dense, repeating pattern of stylized human figures in various poses (walking, jumping, sitting, etc.). The figures are colored in a palette of orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and red, with some having white outlines. They are scattered across the entire surface.

FREE RESOURCE



BECOMING A SENSORY AWARE SCHOOL

**A Toolkit to Develop a
Whole School Approach
for Sensory Wellbeing**

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and **TESSA HYDE**

A **Speechmark** Book

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Introduction

Becoming a Sensory Aware School: A Toolkit to Develop a Whole School Approach for Sensory Wellbeing

Sensory needs are often misunderstood and, as a result, neglected across many schools. However, it is clear that Sensory Aware Schools have the potential for happier and more productive learning environments. Therefore, we wanted to offer a Freebook collection bringing together selected useful extracts of our Sensory Aware School Toolkit that can help you start on your journey of becoming a Sensory Aware School.

The book as a whole enables schools to move beyond sensory awareness towards sensory inclusion and sensory wellbeing. The whole resource includes the following:

Chapter 1 - Introduction- The importance of being sensory aware.

Chapter 2 - What is a Sensory Aware School?- Defining the standards.

Chapter 3 - Understanding our Sensory World- Understanding how our bodies respond to inputs across the 8 senses.

Chapter 4 - You are a Sensory Individual- Tools for understanding your own sensory needs.

Chapter 5 - Recognising and Responding to Sensory Needs- Strategies for professionals in the classroom.

Chapter 6 - Developing your Sensory Curriculum- A comprehensive Sensory Curriculum for students.

Chapter 7 - The Sensory Aware School Environment- Audit tools and suggested strategies to improve the school sensory environment.

Chapter 8 - Whole School Approach to Becoming a Sensory Aware School- Considering Staff, students, parents, wider professionals, leadership and training.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion and Next Steps- Bringing the learning together into an action plan for change.

Further Reading

This Freebook includes the following useful resources:

- **The Sensory Aware Schools Self-Assessment Tool** - An audit tool to self-assess your provision across core and quality standards.
- **Our Sensory States** - A model to help you understand sensory states.
- **School Space Sensory Audit** - An audit tool for school spaces (excluding classrooms)
- **Classroom Sensory Audit** - An audit tool for classrooms.
- **Sensory Me Audit** - An audit tool to help recognise individual sensory preferences and needs for staff and students to use.
- **Sensory Spider Web** - A resource for students to identify whether they are over responsive, just right or under responsive for each of the eight senses.
- **My Sensory Stars** - A resource for students to identify things that bring them sensory joy (glimmers).
- **My Sensory Spiders** - A resource for students to identify things that are sensory triggers.

























By downloading the free book you will get a taste (no sensory pun intended!) of the breadth of useful content the whole Sensory Aware School Toolkit has to offer. We of course would recommend you use the full resource to gain a fuller understanding of how to become a Sensory Aware School. Therefore we would also like to offer you a discount code **BSAS20** so that you can order copies of the full books from Routledge.com, in hard or e-copy at a 20% discount.

Good Luck with your journey to developing your whole school approach towards Sensory Wellbeing.

Alice and Tessa.































Setting the standards for Sensory Aware Schools – A Self Assessment Tool: Core and Quality Standards





































Go through each of the success criteria marking with a tick where you think your school is for each Area of Focus. If you are just starting out with sensory awareness, you should focus on the Core Standards and only move onto the Quality Standards once you are in green on the Core Standards. Use the completed form to identify areas to work on. Revisit on an annual basis to check progress. Use the Notes/Evidence column to record your evidence and notes for action.

The Self Assessment Tool					
Area of Focus	Core Success Criteria Rating Red = Not at all evident Amber = Emerging evidence Green = Consistently evident		Quality Success Criteria (The school meets the Core Standard <i>and</i> the Quality Standard) Rating Red = Not at all evident Amber = Emerging evidence Green = Consistently evident		Notes/Evidence
School Values and Ethos	Sensory awareness is mentioned somewhere in the school's ethos/values/mission statement/policies/ website.	  	The school ensures that sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing are embedded across the school's ethos, values and mission statement. It is clearly mentioned in policies and on the school website.	  	
Leadership and Management	The Head, senior leaders and Governors are aware of the value of sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing in schools and are starting to develop their approach.	  	School leaders are embracing sensory aware approaches within the school and actively lead on sensory wellbeing. There is a designated Sensory Wellbeing Champion in the school who is adequately trained, supported by senior leadership and advocates for sensory wellbeing across the school.	  	
Policy Development	The school has a section on sensory awareness in a relevant school policy such as behaviour policy, SEND policy, disability, accessibility and equalities policies.	  	The school has a Sensory Wellbeing School Policy which is developed in consultation with staff, students and parents and the content aligns with all other school policies. This policy is regularly reviewed and updated.	  	
Planning and Implementation	The school includes sensory awareness in its development plans and goals. Sensory awareness is in the process of being implemented across the school.	  	The school has a sensory awareness Assess Plan Do Review Cycle – revisited every 2 years as a minimum. Sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing are embedded across the school. Sensory informed practice is adopted by staff.	  	

Budgeting and Resourcing	There is a budget allocated to sensory awareness for specific resources for identified children. Sensory resources are regularly checked and evaluated for effectiveness.		There is adequate resourcing for sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing across the school, with a ringfenced budget which includes allocated additional preparation and planning time, a training budget and funding for purchasing of sensory resources. Sensory resources are carefully selected for their suitability and reviewed for effectiveness once in use.	
Sensory Audits of the Environment.	The school audited some spaces for their sensory characteristics and has considered some reasonable adjustments to help named students cope in those spaces.		The school has audited all the spaces in the school for the sensory characteristics and made a whole school action plan for implementing any necessary improvements for all students and staff.	
A Sensory-friendly School Environment	The school has at least two different spaces in the environment that are designated 'sensory-friendly' for staff and students to access. Development plans are in place for further sensory improvements.		The school has several different spaces across the environment that are designated 'sensory-friendly' for staff and students to access. This should include a bookable Sensory Room, as well as at least one open access space for designated students to use as needed. Development plans are clearly in place for further sensory improvements with timeline and budget allocated. Sensory wellbeing is embedded in any future new building work at the school.	
Sensory Audits of Staff and Students	The school offers some staff and students the option of sensory checklists and/or other tools to help identify their own sensory profile.		The school offers all staff and students the opportunity to identify their own sensory profiles.	
Curriculum and Learning Opportunities	Sensory awareness appears somewhere in the school curriculum. Students are given learning opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding of sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing.		Sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing are integrated across the curriculum for all students. A wide variety of teaching and learning strategies are used to learn about sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing.	

(continued)

Area of Focus	Core Success Criteria		Quality Success Criteria		Notes/Evidence
School Day	Sensory awareness is also considered outside of lessons at one other key time of the school day at least; for example, lunchtimes.	  	Sensory awareness and wellbeing are considered throughout the whole school day including break times, lunchtimes, assemblies and student movement across school.	  	
Uniform	There are optional adaptations to support individual sensory needs with uniform where appropriate.	  	The school has designed the school uniform with students' sensory needs in mind. There are a variety of options available to meet individual needs.	  	
Staff Role and Responsibilities	Sensory informed practice. Most teaching staff (including teaching assistants) feel knowledgeable and confident around sensory awareness and understand their role and responsibilities for, and the benefits of, adopting sensory aware approaches.	  	Sensory informed practice. The majority of all staff (including lunchtime and site staff) feel knowledgeable and confident around sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing and understand their role and responsibilities for, and the benefits of, adopting sensory-friendly approaches through a common sensory approach.	  	
Supporting Staff and Student Sensory Needs	Staff and students are supported to develop understanding of their own sensory needs. The sensory experiences of students, such as those with identified special educational needs and disabilities, are acknowledged and supported. Students feel comfortable to adopt their chosen sensory strategies in lessons without feeling embarrassed or different.	  	All staff and students understand their sensory needs and know their personal specific sensory strategies for (a) engaging/focusing, (b) soothing/calming. They support their own sensory wellbeing through sensory welldoing. Students feel able to experiment, change and be flexible with sensory strategies over time. Students are able to use their chosen sensory strategies responsibly and appropriately so as not to distract other students or teachers.	  	
Offering Reasonable Adjustments	Teaching staff and school leaders understand the importance of implementing reasonable adjustments (both in class and across the school day) for the individual child, considering the impact on the whole class.	  	All teaching staff (including teaching assistants) are able to adopt 'best fit' approaches, for the greatest number in the class, across the school day, taking into account both individual sensory needs and the needs of the whole class. These adjustments are supported by senior leaders.	  	

Behavioural Approaches	Staff are mindful of the possibility of sensory reasons or triggers for observed behaviours.	  	Where behaviour incidents are recorded, there are opportunities to record any possible sensory reasons or triggers for the episode, to establish any patterns and develop pre-emptive sensory strategies.	  	
Staff Training and Development	Teaching staff (including teaching assistants) with an interest in sensory awareness and needs are identified and supported to develop their skills. Professional development opportunities are regularly provided.	  	The school ensures that all staff (including support and site staff) receive appropriate professional development, training and ongoing support on sensory awareness and sensory wellbeing. Staff feel able to experiment and be flexible with sensory strategies for the students in their care.	  	
Supporting Staff Sensory Needs	Staff are supported to understand their own sensory needs and make reasonable adjustments to support themselves.	  	Staff identify their own sensory needs and are able to make adjustments for their own sensory wellbeing through sensory wellbeing. All staff feel supported to find a balance between their own sensory needs, and those of their students.	  	
Student Voice	Students with specified sensory needs have a voice in feeding back on the sensory aware approaches that are developed for them.	  	Student voice (of a wide range of students across the school) is included in developing, implementing and evaluating sensory aware approaches for sensory wellbeing across the school.	  	
Parents and Carers	The school works in partnership with parents and carers. Opportunities are provided for parents of named children with identified sensory needs to share with the school what they know of their child's sensory needs.	  	Parents are seen as vital for the success of meeting sensory needs at home and at school. The school has a strong home/school partnership with all parents and carers around sensory needs. Opportunities are provided for all parents to share with the school what they know of their child's sensory needs, and the school endeavours to act on these with reasonable adjustments.	  	
Wider Partnerships	The school is aware of the wider local support services, such as occupational therapy, for additional support for students and training for staff.	  	The school works in partnership with wider local support services such as occupational therapy, to access further training, support and evidence-based best practice. Supportive networks are established to share good practice on sensory wellbeing.	  	

Further relevant audit tools are found in Chapter 7. School space sensory audit (page 210), classroom sensory audit (page 213), action feasibility assessment (Page 232) and in Chapter 9 the action plan (page 271).

OUR SENSORY STATES



SLUG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My body feels low in energy and tired. • My sensory input needs to be increased. • I am slow and less responsive.
COMFORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My body feels safe and comfortable. • My sensory input is enjoyable or unnoticeable. • I am regulated and calm.
ENGAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My body feels engaged and focused (and still safe). • My sensory input is interesting and stimulating. • I am regulated and ready/alert/awake.
OVERLOAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My body feels stressed and unsafe. • My sensory input is overwhelming and I need something to change. • I am dysregulated. • I may meltdown or shutdown to help me cope.

School Space Sensory Audit			
Date:		Number of doors and windows to the space:	
Who carried out the audit:		Maximum occupancy of the space:	
Space name and location information:		Approx measurements if relevant (length, width and height):	
Predominant use of the space:		Brief overview of contents of the space (include any soft furnishing such as carpets, curtains):	
Prompt questions These are just questions to help stimulate your thoughts and perceptions of the space; you do not need to answer every question, and this is not an exhaustive list.	Current situation Use the questions but also your own thoughts and feelings about the space. Ensure you note whether this is a strength or weakness of the space		Possible action points to improve sensory experience of this space. Jot any initial thoughts on possible actions to improve the space.
What can you see? (Visual) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you see? Is there too much on the walls? Too little? • Does the space feel visually calm or busy? Does this change at different points in the day? • What are the paint and colour choices in the room? • Does this area feel spacious or cramped? • Does it feel like an organised or chaotic space? • How is the lighting? • How much natural light is there? • Are fluorescent lights flickering? • Are projectors using white or purple light? • Is there reflection of light on certain surfaces? 			

Prompt questions (cont.)	Current situation (cont.)	Possible action points (cont.)
<p>How can you move around in the space? (Proprioception)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can children move freely in the space or is it crowded with anyone in? • Are there any obstructions to movement and flow around the room? • What moveable objects/ furniture are in the room? • Does this change with different times of the day? • Are there any one-way or queuing systems in place? • Are there different zones for different types of movement? 		
<p>What can you hear? (Auditory)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you hear? How much does this vary at different points in the day? • Is there a school bell? How does this sound in this space? • Are there any sounds (for example, mains hum) from equipment (for example, servers or air conditioning units) in the space? • When the space is full, how does it sound if everyone is chatting? Is there anything to absorb the noise (for example, curtains, blinds, carpets, ceiling sound dampers)? • How are the acoustics in the room? Is there an echo in the room? • Can you hear noises from other areas? 		

Prompt questions (cont.)	Current situation (cont.)	Possible action points (cont.)
<p>What can you feel? (Tactile, vestibular and proprioception) (N.B.: School uniform is considered separately on page 244)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the space is full, does it feel squashed/overcrowded or is there a sense of space? Are students likely to bump into each other? • As students move about the space, are there different textures for them to run their hands along? (for example, wood, carpet, plastic, metal) • What seating is available? Are there various options of varying comfort or movement levels? (for example, cushions/spinning chairs) 		
<p>What can you smell? (Olfactory)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the space smell? What smells are they (consider food, cleaning products, human scents)? • Do the smells change with the time of day? • Can you make any changes to the smell if you feel it is an issue for the space? • Do the windows open to allow the flow of fresh air? Is there a ventilation system in place for air exchange? 		

A classroom audit: Prompt questions

In a school it might not be possible for one person to audit every classroom, but if teachers are allocated particular rooms, it would be useful if they could audit their own classroom as well as a classroom unfamiliar to them and vice versa. Different people will spot different things going on within the classroom so getting a variety of perspectives could be helpful. Involve the students in doing these classroom audits as they will spot things you don't. Perhaps it could be useful to carry out these audits in pairs.

Spend up to 30 minutes in a classroom sitting or standing in at least three different areas of the classroom. Note down any thoughts or observations about the following. Again, it would be a good idea to revisit these notes at different points in the day to see if anything changes; for example, light levels or smells.

Classroom Sensory Audit			
Date:		Number of doors and windows to the classroom:	
Who carried out the audit?		Maximum occupancy of the classroom:	
Classroom name and location information:		Approx measurements if relevant (length, width and height):	
Use of the classroom across the week – full time? Part time?		Brief overview of contents of the space (include any soft furnishing such as carpets, curtains):	
Prompt questions These are just questions to help stimulate your thoughts and perceptions of the space; you do not need to answer every question, and this is not an exhaustive list.	Current situation Use the questions but also your own thoughts and feelings about the space. Ensure you note whether this is a strength or weakness of the space.		Possible action points to improve sensory experience of this space. N.B.: Jot down any initial thoughts on possible actions to improve the space.
What can you see? (Visual) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you see? Is there too much on the walls? Too little? • What are the paint and colour choices in the room? • Does the space feel visually calm or busy? Does this change at different points in the day? • Does this area feel spacious or cramped? • Does it feel like an organised or chaotic space? • How is the lighting? • How much natural light is there? Is it a light or dark space? • What is the view out of the window like? • Are fluorescent lights flickering? • Is there a reflection of light on certain surfaces? 			

Prompt questions (cont.)	Current situation (cont.)	Possible action points (cont.)
<p>How does the layout in the classroom affect movement and being in the space?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can children move freely in the classroom or is it crowded with anyone in? • Do children have designated spaces? • Are there any obstructions to movement and flow around the room? • What moveable objects/ furniture are there in the room? • Does this change with different times of the day? • Are there any one- way or queuing systems in place? • Are there different zones for maintaining regulation? For example, calm down zone (dark den), activate/wake up/ fiddle zone. • Are there alternative seating options such as wobble stools or wobble cushions, or stretchy bands on chair legs to bounce feet on? • Are there different zones children could utilise in the classroom if they need a movement or sensory break? • Is there the option of solo 'workstation' desks at the side of the classroom or desks with pop-up privacy partitions for children who want to focus? 		
<p>What can you hear? (Auditory)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you hear? How much does this vary at different points in the day? • Is there a school bell? How does this sound in this space? • Are there any sounds (for example, mains hum) from equipment (for example, lights, servers or air conditioning units) in the space? 		







Prompt questions (cont.)	Current situation (cont.)	Possible action points (cont.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the classroom is full, how does it sound if everyone is chatting? Is there anything to absorb the noise (for example, curtains, blinds, carpets, ceiling sound dampers)? • What general classroom noises can occur – central heating pipes, fans, creaky chairs, scrape of chairs on floors, drawers/cupboards closing? Can any of them be adjusted if needed (for example, pads on feet of chairs)? • How are the acoustics in the room? Is there an echo in the room? • Can you hear noises from other classrooms or corridors? Does this change significantly if the door is open or closed? 		
<p>What can you feel? (Tactile) (N.B.: School uniform is considered separately on page 244)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the classroom is full, does it feel squashed/overcrowded or is there a sense of space? Are children likely to bump elbows or work when sitting in certain table/chair configurations? • As children move about the space, are there different textures for them to run their hands along (for example, wood, carpet, plastic, metal)? • How do the chairs feel to sit in? Do they have backs? • Are the writing surfaces/tables smooth or rough? Are there opportunities for children to have angled writing surfaces? 		
<p>What can you smell? (Olfactory)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the classroom smell? What smells are they (consider food, cleaning products, human scents)? • Do the smells change with the time of day? • Can you make any changes to the smell if you feel it is an issue for the space? • Do the windows open to allow fresh air? 		









You may want to consider developing a rating tool for each space. We have provided an example one below. It is important to acknowledge there will be limitations on the classroom environment that may be outside of your control, such as the size of the room and budget to change things. However, that shouldn't impact the development of a scoring scale such as the one below.

Sample Sensory Classroom Score

- 4 –** The room still feels calm, light, airy and spacious, even when at capacity. The walls, floors and surfaces are decorated in calm colours, with careful selection of displays. There is a wide variety of sensory seating options and sensory inputs available, ensuring all students can find a comfortable and stimulating learning environment tailored to their needs. Natural light is maximised, and artificial lighting is gentle and non-flickering. Noise levels are consistently managed to minimise distractions. Ambient noise from elsewhere is soothing and not distracting.
- 3 –** The classroom is organised and has some elements of calm and light, but may feel slightly crowded or less spacious at capacity. The decoration includes calming colours, but the balance between stimulating and calming visual inputs isn't always maintained. Sensory seating options are limited, with a few available choices. Natural light and noise control are somewhat addressed, but may not be optimised for sensory needs.
- 2 –** The room has minimal attention to sensory needs. It may feel cramped or overly busy when full, with limited calming colours or sensory-friendly decorations. Sensory seating options and inputs are scarce or not thoughtfully integrated. Lighting is primarily artificial, and there may be occasional issues with noise levels or acoustics, making the environment less conducive to focused learning for sensory-sensitive individuals.
- 1 –** The classroom lacks sensory awareness in its design. It feels crowded and overstimulating when at capacity, with bright or harsh colours and cluttered spaces. There are no specific sensory seating options or sensory inputs provided. Natural lighting is overlooked, and artificial lighting may be harsh or glaring. Noise levels can be distracting, and little effort is made to control acoustics, challenging students with sensory sensitivities.

Sensory Me

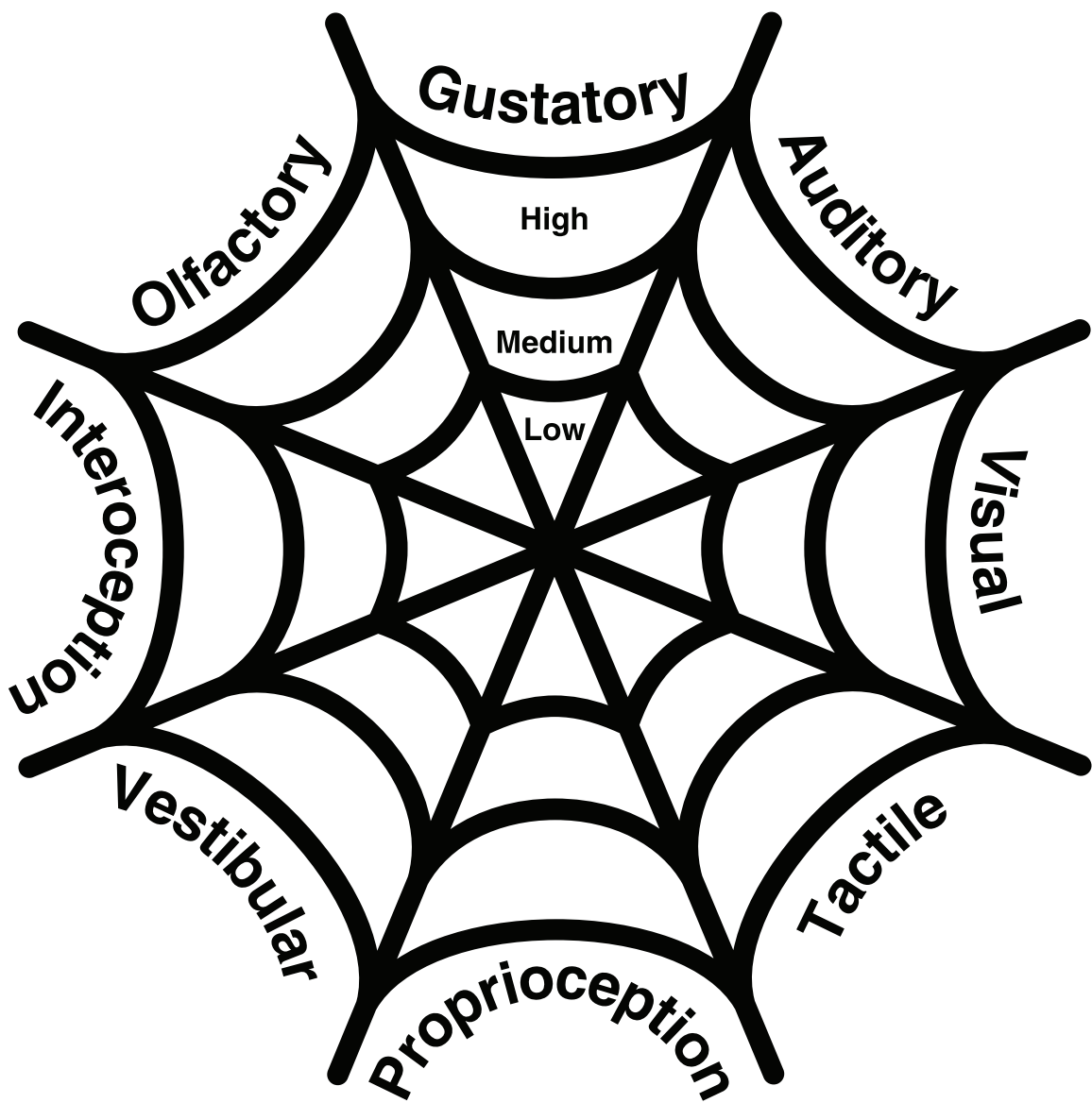
Reflection Questions for Sensations I Enjoy/Can Cope with	Reflection Questions for Sensations I Don't Enjoy/Might Try to Avoid/Ignore
<p> Auditory (sound) What sounds do you enjoy?</p>	<p> Auditory (sound) What sounds do you avoid?</p>
<p> Visual (sight) What do you enjoy looking at?</p>	<p> Visual (sight) What don't you enjoy looking at?</p>
<p> Tactile (touch) What things do you like to touch and feel (for example, fabrics or textures)?</p>	<p> Tactile (touch) What things do you not like to touch and feel (for example, fabrics or textures)?</p>

<p> Olfactory and Gustatory (taste/smell) Do you prefer mild or spicy food, sweet, salty or sour? Are there certain tastes, textures or smells you really love/regularly seek?</p>	<p> Olfactory and Gustatory (taste/smell) Are there any foods you never eat or dislike due to taste, texture or smell? Are there any smells you don't like or avoid?</p>
<p> Vestibular/Proprioception (movement) Do you enjoy activities such as going on roller coasters, climbing, horse riding, racing bikes, swinging upside down?</p>	<p> Vestibular/Proprioception (movement) Do you get car sick? Do you avoid certain movements like spinning or being upside down, or going excessively fast?</p>
<p> Interoception (internal body feelings) Do you feel hunger and thirst, so remember to eat and drink regularly? Do you always know when you need the toilet? Does your clothing usually match the season (for example, warm coat in snow)?</p>	<p> Interoception (internal body feelings) Do you sometimes get 'hangry' (easy to anger when hungry) because you haven't realised you are hungry? Do you sometimes leave it until the last minute to go to the toilet because you either haven't realised you needed to go or are ignoring the sensation? Do you feel the cold?</p>
<p> Conclusion: Your sensory day Think about your ideal sensory day and what clothing, experiences, foods would be included in this day.</p>	<p> Conclusion: Your sensory day Think about your sensory nightmare day – what clothing, experiences, foods would be included in this day?</p>

SENSORY SPIDER WEB

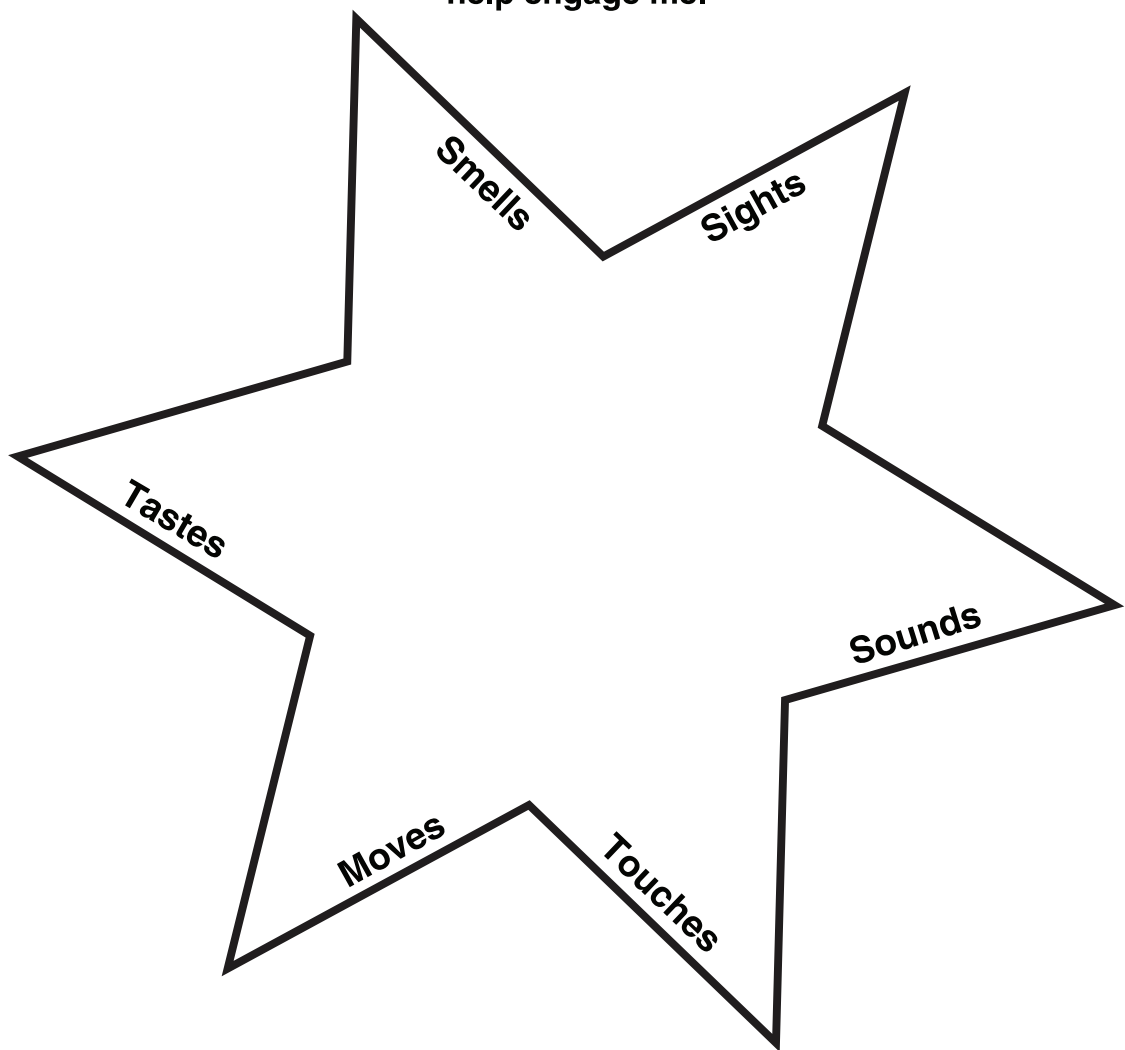
How sensitive am I?

Colour in this sheet according to whether you are highly sensitive to the sensory input or not very sensitive (low) or in the middle (medium).



MY SENSORY STARS

These are all my favourite sensory inputs that I like to experience which help spark sensory joy and/or help engage me.

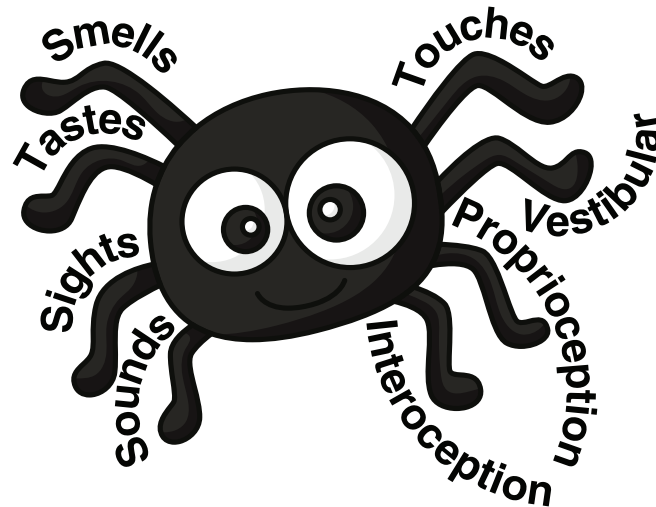


Draw and write around the inside and outside of this sensory star. Be as colourful and creative as you like! Keep this to refer back to. Do things change?

MY SENSORY SPIDERS

(or things that make me go EEEK!)

We love spiders really but we know sometimes they can make people go EEEK! Or trigger a negative reaction. What sensory things make you go eek and you actively avoid them? We sometimes call these sensory triggers. When you have noted these down, can you colour code them Red, Amber, Green where Red = 'Cannot tolerate.', Amber = 'Can tolerate in some situations.', Green = 'Don't like but can cope with.'



For example our Reds might be things like wearing wool (touch) and eating fish (taste) as we cannot do them AT ALL, our ambers might be things like disco lights (sights) and concert music (sounds) but we can do it in small doses, and our greens are feeling hangry (interoception) or running (proprioception) where we aren't keen but it's okay really. Think of as many examples for each leg as you can and there is no right or wrong answer as this sheet is personal to you.