



## Balance and Body Awareness

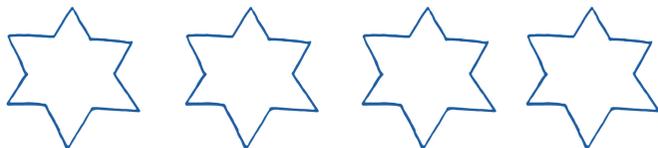
Processing information about balance, posture and body awareness may be different.

Body movements which appear to be self-stimulatory or repetitive such as spinning or flapping may be meeting a sensory need.



Controlling body movements may be difficult; some children with ASD appear clumsy, causing difficulties with PE at school.

Understanding how close to stand to people, moving around the room and manipulating small objects such as buttons, and pencil skills may also be affected.



People with autism can be over-sensitive or under-sensitive to each of these senses which can cause different behaviour, eg. under-sensitivity to touch may result in a child hitting themselves, but over-sensitivity may result in them getting distressed when you are too near them. A person may also experience both over- and under-sensitivity within one sense.

## Additional Advice

Occupational therapists and/or physiotherapists can help provide advice and support regarding specific sensory programmes for your child.

Speech and language therapists may be able to help with eating and feeding issues which are sensory based.

The National Autistic Society (NAS) website has tips on how to help children manage their sensory sensitivities: [www.autism.org.uk/sensory](http://www.autism.org.uk/sensory)

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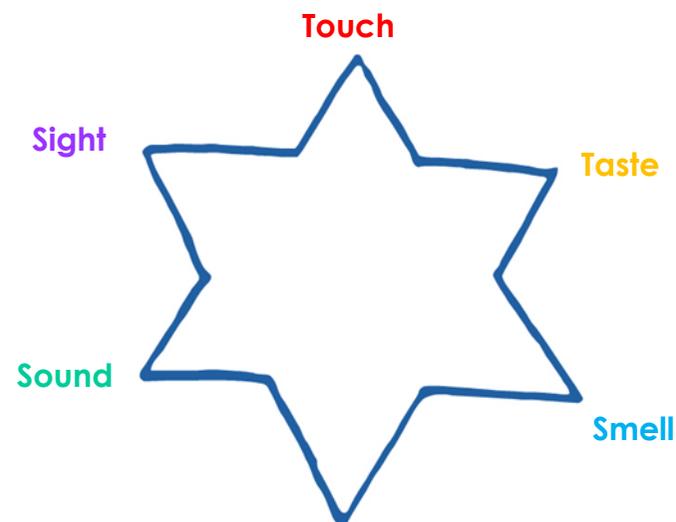
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Helping Children Communicate



With Their World

## How People with Autism Experience the World



Balance and  
Body Awareness



We use our senses to experience the world around us through **Touch**, **Taste**, **Smell**, **Sound**, **Sight** and **Balance and Body Awareness**.

This leaflet discusses sensory experiences from the perspective of people with Autism.

## Touch

Some people may:

Be sensitive to touching particular body-parts or to touch intensity.

This can affect wearing new clothes/shoes; activities e.g. washing hair/cleaning teeth; physical contact with others.



Some people may:

Not respond to levels of pain others may find unbearable. This may involve drinking overly hot drinks; not showing signs of illness or injury; wearing inappropriate clothes for the weather.

Some people may:

Experience extreme discomfort from gentle touch or to seemingly minor bumps and scrapes.

### Example:

"I cannot tolerate the feeling of skin against skin and prefer to wear long pants to deaden the sensation."

## Taste



There may be sensitivity to the taste and texture of food. Bland, smooth foods may be preferred or strong spicy flavours may be chosen.

Some children may need to touch or smell food before tasting it.

Mixing foods on the plate may be difficult to tolerate.

### Example:

"I was supersensitive to the texture of food and had to touch everything with my fingers to see how it felt before I could put it in my mouth. I really hated it when food had things mixed with it like noodles or vegetables, or bread with fillings to make sandwiches."

## Smell



Certain smells may be overpowering, eg air fresheners or cleaning products.

Changes in perfume or washing powder may result in changes in behaviour.

### Example:

Terry's Grandad was upset when suddenly Terry refused to play rough and tumble with him, an activity which they had previously enjoyed. His Grandmother identified that this change had started on Grandad's birthday, and between them they worked out that the new birthday aftershave must smell too strong for Terry.

## Sight



Certain objects or light intensity may cause confusion or discomfort.

Visual processing of space and depth, objects, people and colours may be different.

Poor depth perception may result in clumsiness.

### Example:

"It may be because things that I see do not always make the right impression that I am frightened of so many things that can be seen; people, particularly their faces, very bright lights, crowds, things moving suddenly, large machines and buildings that are unfamiliar, unfamiliar places, my own shadow, the dark, bridges, rivers, canals, streams and the sea."

## Sound



Sudden loud noises such as dogs barking or sirens, prolonged noises such as hair dryers, and busy, noisy places with a confusion of sounds such as shopping centres may all cause anxiety.

### Example:

Charlie became very upset in the supermarket by the sudden loudspeaker announcements. His mum allowed him to take a favourite toy with him and listen to some music with his headphones whilst out shopping.