



## Sensory Challenges

Many people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) experience sensitivities to different types of sensations. Some people may over-react to sensations and others may under-react. They may be overwhelmed by bright lights or loud noises or may seek out sensory input such as active play or chewing crunchy foods. These sensitivities can change in different environments and at different times of the day.

- When going on errands and outings, let people know ahead of time about the child's needs. Adaptations may be able to be made to make it easier for the child to tolerate. Provide some suggestions of how they can help. If going to a new place, try to make the first visit at a time when there are minimal crowds and other sensory challenges. The child may only be able to tolerate a few minutes at the location, but try to increase the time each visit.
- During sensory-challenging activities like hair cuts, you place a heavy toy on the child's lap for comfort.
- Provide the child extra time to listen or to complete tasks. He or she may need some extra time sorting through the sensory input.
- When the child seems to feel overwhelmed, provide him or her with a quiet area. The child may also be calmed by a certain toy, object, or activity. A stress ball or heavy backpack may help to calm the child.
- If a child has difficulty engaging in stimulating activities like craft projects, amusement parks, or hair cuts, try activities such as playing with beans, rice, or pudding beforehand. This can help prepare the child for the sensations in the following activity. If the child needs additional sensory stimulation or to help him or her before a sensory-stimulating activity, arrange for outside play, exercise, or experiences with sensory stimulating activities such as clay, squishy balls, instruments, swinging on a swing, or finger painting, jumping jacks, or running. Chewing on crunchy or chewy snacks may be helpful. Children with ASD may need this extra sensory input to help them to focus and remain calm.
- Ear plugs or earphones may help reduce noises for those with sensitivity to sounds.
- Prepare a social story or activity schedule to show what is involved in an activity or what the person can expect at a location.
- Occupational therapy can help identify those things that help to calm the child and work through challenging sensations. It may take some time, but the child can become more aware of his or her body and find ways to comfort themselves before, during, and after sensory-challenging experiences.

## Helpful Resources

- **Building Bridges Through Sensory Integration: Therapy for Children with Autism and Other Pervasive Developmental Disorders**  
Paula Aquilla, Shirley Sutton, Ellen Yack; Future Horizons; ISBN 1932565450
- **The Out-of-Sync Child**  
Carol Kranowitz; Perigee Trade; ISBN 0399531653
- **Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder**  
Lucy Jane Miller Ph.D OTR, Doris A Fuller; Perigee Trade; 0399533079
- **The Sensory World of Autism**  
<http://www.autism.org.uk/sensory>
- **Understanding Your Child's Sensory Signals: A Practical Daily Use Handbook for Parents and Teachers**  
Angie Voss; CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; ISBN 1466263539

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