

Environmental Adjustments

Sensory processing sensitivity is a common challenge faced by many neurodivergent and highly sensitive children and adults.

This worksheet has been designed to help manage sensory processing sensitivity in a range of environments, such as home, work, college or shared social spaces like restaurants, galleries, museums, parks and so on.

Step 1: Minimize intrusive sounds

Minimizing external sounds like phone notifications and background chatter or noise helps to prevent sensory overwhelm and supports focus and concentration.

Consider the following actions to prevent sensory overwhelm and support periods of focused work:

- Turn off all sound-based device notifications.
- Use noise canceling headphones to minimize intrusive sounds.
- Listen to soothing music at a comfortable volume to further block intrusive sounds.
- Consider listening to binaural beats to help you focus while working. This instrumental background music is designed to regulate your attention. You can find a lot of different binaural beat soundtracks for free online.

Step 2: Adjust lighting and minimize visual stimuli

- Use adjustable lighting options where possible such as a desk lamp you can point away from your direct field of vision, or a lamp or overhead light with a dimmer switch or soft glow bulb.
- Ensure window shades block out bright light at different times of day as needed. Adjustable blinds are a good option.
- Use tinted glasses or sunglasses to soften bright light outdoors or indoors if sharing a brightly lit space with others.
- While working in an office, consider turning your desk to the wall, if possible, to minimize visual stimuli.
- Consider having a visually soothing image to look at when working that has a calming effect such as photos of nature, pets, loved ones, or the ocean. Having plants around can also be soothing to the senses.

Step 3: Minimize exposure to unpleasant textures, tastes and smells

Consider assembling a wardrobe of clothing you always feel comfortable in. You could divide your wardrobe into sections of safe clothing for work, college, and socializing. Donate clothing that is uncomfortable for any reason that can't be remedied, such as removing tags.

Make a list of fabrics and textures you find soothing and ensure that you only purchase clothes, bedding and soft furnishings with soothing textures. Donate anything around the house you find uncomfortable such as scratchy pillows or blankets.

Make a list of safe foods that you can share if invited out to eat, and to assemble a grocery store list.

To manage sensory overwhelm caused by smell, ensure you have a pleasant-smelling handkerchief in your pocket or bag. Put a few drops of a pleasant scent or calming essential oil on it so you can bring it to your face and use it to block unpleasant odors.

Summary

Minimizing sensory inputs can help prevent sensory overwhelm. You can use the suggestions above to assemble your own checklist if you need accommodations at school, college or work.

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