

Tool 40: Observing behaviour to identify sensitivities

System	Example of hypersensitive behaviour	Examples of hyposensitive behaviour
Tactile	• Touch can be painful and uncomfortable and some children may withdraw from aspects of touch. This can have a profound effect on relationships. • Only tolerates certain materials for clothing • Dislike of having anything on hands or feet	• Holds others tightly • Has high pain threshold (pain/temperature) • Self harming • Enjoys heavy objects on top of them • Prefers tight clothing
Visual	• Distorted vision occurs, objects and bright lights can jump around • Fragmentation of images, as a consequence of too many sources of visual stimuli • Focussing on particular details (sand grains) can be more pleasurable than looking at something as a whole • Distracted by certain lighting	• May see things darker, lose features and lines • May concentrate on peripheral vision as central vision is blurred • Conversely, some say that a main object is magnified and things on the periphery are blurred • Poor depth perceptions – problems with catching or throwing • Flapping near eyes
Auditory	• Volume of noise can be magnified and surrounding sounds distorted and muddled • Inability to cut out particular sounds – difficulties concentrating • May have a lower hearing threshold which makes an individual particularly sensitive to auditory stimuli – hearing conversations in the distance. • Fingers in ears	• May not acknowledge particular sounds • Enjoys crowded noisy places • Bangs doors and objects • Makes own noise e.g. humming
Gustatory	• Some flavours and foods are too strong and overpowering • Certain textures also cause discomfort, some children will only eat smooth foods such as mashed potatoes or ice cream • Only eats bland foods	• Preference for strong flavours – like very spicy foods • Eats everything e.g. grass, soil, materials. This is known as Pica
Olfactory	• Aversion to particular smells • Smells can be intensified and overpowering • Toileting problems • Dislike of individuals with distinctive perfumes or shampoos	• Smells objects • May have no sense of smell and fail to notice extreme odours • May lick objects
Proprioceptive	• Dislikes close proximity of others • Has difficulty with fine motor skills and manipulating small objects • Moves whole body to look at objects	• Proximity – stands too close to others not knowing about personal space etiquette • Little awareness of hunger/pain cold/needing the toilet • Difficulties with navigating rooms and avoiding objects (bumps into things) • Bumps into people • Poor muscle tone • A preference for deep pressure for example tight shoelaces or pushing their chin into people
Vestibular	• Dislikes playground equipment (swing/slide etc) • Difficulties in activities which include movement (sport) • Difficulties in stopping quickly or during an activity	• Need for rocking, spinning swinging • Seeks opportunities for movement/ constantly moving/ fidgeting

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