



Pathway for Eating disorders and Autism  
developed from Clinical Experience

# Sensory Wellbeing workshop: How to use our senses?

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PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROTOCOL WHEN YOU PUBLISH  
EVALUATION. WE HOPE YOU WILL FIND THIS WORKSHOP HELPFUL!



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## Sensory Wellbeing Workshop Protocol

### Aims of the group:

- To raise awareness of the sensory system.
- To explore how the sensory system can help with self-regulation.
- To identify strategies that can enhance sensory wellbeing.
- To provide participants with the language and tools to communicate their sensory needs.

The group is designed to last between an hour and an hour and a half.

### Number of participants:

The optimal number of the groups varies between 8-12.

The group can be facilitated with 2 or 3 members of the multidisciplinary team. One typically is a trained clinician and other facilitators can be psychology assistants or research psychologists.

### Materials:

Flipchart paper, pens, shoe boxes or bags, pencils, play dough, stones, fidgety toys, textured fabrics, essential oils, hypoallergenic cream, small pots, ear plugs and any other sensory materials desired.

### Sensory wellbeing

Psychoeducation resource:

Our senses refer to the way in which we process and perceive the world around us in our brains. We all process our senses slightly differently. Some people are hypersensitive, meaning they are highly sensitive, and some people are hyposensitive, meaning they have lowered sensitivity. You can experience hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity across different types of sensation: you might be hypersensitive to light, but hyposensitive to touch.

*Invite group members to discuss examples of their sensory sensitivity. Explore how different sensory sensations make them feel. Invite group members to discuss what makes their sensory sensitivities better or worse.*

You can experience both heightened and lowered sensitivity to the same sensation depending on the context. Important factors which can inform our sensory responses include whether you are in control of the sensory stimuli, whether you are anxious or emotionally dysregulated, and whether there are lots of different stimuli at once in the environment.

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*Use previous examples from group members to stimulate discussion of how sensory sensations make them feel.*

Our sensory sensations can make us feel better, or they can make us feel worse. This is closely related to self-regulation. Self-regulation is how we monitor and control our behaviour, emotions, and physiological arousal. Sensory sensations can impact our self-regulation. For example, if you are tired but need to focus at work you might turn up the lights (stimulating your visual system), or get up and walk around (stimulating your vestibular system). From the opposite perspective, if you're highly anxious and need to calm down you might retreat to a quiet space (soothing your auditory system), or rub a soft blanket (soothing your touch system).

*Invite group members to fill out the Sensory-Motor Preference Checklist (TherapyWorks, Inc., 2018; <https://www.alertprogram.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Sensory-Motor-Preference-Checklist-revised-in-2018-PDF.pdf>).*

*Group discussion: what sensations make us feel alert? What sensations make us feel calm?*

This way, we can use sensations to change how we are feeling. However, we don't always have complete control over our sensory environments. If you get stuck in an environment with lots of negative sensory input this can be really overwhelming and unpleasant. If you can't avoid or escape that environment, you can use simple sensory strategies to help you feel calmer and more grounded. For example, taking a moment to smell an essential oil, or putting on headphones and listening to music to block out noise.

*Invite discussion of different sensory strategies: what are small things you can do to change your sensory inputs?*

### **Sensory Aid Box**

*Practical exercise. Present different sensory toys/ tools/ sensations to the group, and encourage group members to create a sensory box with sensations that they find pleasurable. Include a DIY sensory exercise, for example creating a scented hand cream. Encourage group members to discuss the sensations throughout the DIY task. Whilst making sensory boxes (or bags), encourage group members to discuss what sensory tools they are choosing, and why.*

If these kinds of tools do make a difference for you, it might be beneficial to let the people around you know about how you process sensory inputs and what strategies you use to help.

*Hand out sensory communication passport worksheet.*

Some sensory sensations that might help you self-regulate will not fit in a box. It might be helpful to think about and write down sensory strategies, such as going for a walk or going outside.

Hand out sensory booklet.

We all have different sensory thresholds. If we are aware of our sensory systems we are able to self-regulate by increasing or decreasing stimulation and making our environment work for us.

## Group Resources:

### 'Sensory-Aid' boxes

These are ideas you can develop yourself to help you manage your wellbeing. It may be that you are over-stimulated by certain senses or under-stimulate by certain senses. This can change from situation to situation and it might be a useful idea to include items which will increase and decrease your arousal levels.

<b>Vision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sunglasses, tinted glasses</li> <li>- Sensory lights</li> <li>- Photos</li> <li>- Books/ magazines</li> <li>- Optical illusions</li> <li>- Letters</li> <li>- Taking yourself somewhere visually appropriate for you (dark room/ garden/greenspaces)</li> <li>- Sensory jars filled with glitter (<b>Make your own: jar, glitter glue, glitter and water</b>)</li> </ul>
<b>Touch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weighted lap pads/ shoulder pads (<b>Make your own: dried rice/ dried beans</b>)</li> <li>- Fiddle toys: fidget spinner, fidget cubes</li> <li>- Textured items: scraps of fabric, (e.g velvet, wool)</li> <li>- Spray bottle with water</li> <li>- Soft pillow or toy</li> <li>- Brush</li> <li>- <b>Stress balls (Make your own: balloons filled with flour)</b></li> <li>- BlueTak/ play doh</li> </ul>
<b>Smell</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scented oils (<b>Make your own: get a plain body lotion and add essential oils</b>)</li> <li>- Flowers</li> <li>- Potpourri (Dried plants e.g. lavender)</li> <li>- Perfume/ room spray</li> </ul>
<b>Hearing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ear defenders, ear plugs. <i>With items such as the ear defenders, it is important to moderate use and to use appropriately. It is possible if you over used ear defenders that when you don't use them, the more overly stimulating noise and noise sensitivity will be.</i></li> <li>- Another option is audio isolating ear protectors. These essential 'focus' hearing for you to the conversation around</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Headphones to play music that suits you and your level of arousal. It may be calming, soothing music or it may be heavy metal! You can also consider apps such as 'Headspace' and 'Calm' which have some free content. You can also listen to some white noise or other 'waves'.</li><li>- <b>Make your own: Voice recordings of family members/ friends/ yourself saying things you know you like to hear when you are feeling this way. Filling a jar with dried rice/ beans and creating a 'maraca'.</b></li></ul>
<b>Taste</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A mint spray</li></ul>

### Sensory Wellbeing DIY Craft Ideas

- Providing a box for group members to create their own Sensory Wellbeing box. Encourage members to decorate and fill with sensory tools and materials.
- Creating stress balls by using a funnel to fill a balloon with flour or rice.
- Creating hand cream. Group members are each given their own tub and some hypoallergenic plain base cream. Members then each add their preferred essential oil, and mix together with an ice lolly stick.
- Creating an essential oil spray. Essential oils are mixed with water in a spray bottle for a calming mix.
- Making glitter jars. Group members mix together their preferred colours of glitter glue and glitter in a jar of water. Jar can also be decorated.

### **References you might find helpful:**

Laura James -Odd Girl Out – 2017

Barb Cook, Michelle Garnett Spectrum Women: -2018 Chapter 11- Our Sensory Worlds p.148-161 Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Temple Grandin talks about sensory system:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzf80k5b\\_EM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzf80k5b_EM)

Amy Laurent TED talk: (5.53 - 9.44) Examples of how sensory experiences may contribute to stress and dysregulation

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fx3cfzICG\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fx3cfzICG_Q)

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## Workshop Evaluation

We try to evaluate and generate evidence from the work we do with our patients.

The idea for the sensory workshop was dictated by needs assessments (Kinnaird 2018, 2019) and research evidence. At the moment the group protocol needs calibration and further development.

This is an example of outcome measures we are using:

## Sensory Screening Pack

This pack includes three short screening questionnaires, and is four pages long. Please return the pack to your clinician after it's completed.

Date pack completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth : \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Current height and weight (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

Current BMI (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Eating disorder diagnosis (please specify if restrictive/binge purge anorexia):

\_\_\_\_\_

Eating disorder duration: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been diagnosed with any other mental health conditions? Please specify (e.g. anxiety, depression)

\_\_\_\_\_

Present eating disorder treatment (circle): outpatient day-patient

Date started present eating disorder treatment (can be approximate):

\_\_\_\_\_

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### Sensory Summary

Mark where you think you are on the below scales. Hypersensitivity means you are highly sensitive to sensations and may try and avoid them where possible; hyposensitivity means you have lower sensitivity and may try to seek out these sensations. There are examples below each scale. If you think you are neither hyper/hyposensitive and have no sensory differences, mark yourself in the middle as a 5.

#### Taste

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

(Hyposensitive)

(No sensory differences)

(Hypersensitive)

If I am hyposensitive, I might add lots of salt to my food to make it taste stronger. If I am hypersensitive, I might prefer to eat bland foods as I find them too strong.

#### Smell

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

(Hyposensitive)

(No sensory differences)

(Hypersensitive)

If I am hyposensitive, I might not notice strong smells and enjoy smelling essential oils. If I am hypersensitive, I might dislike smelly places like a canteen and find smells overpowering.

#### Vision

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

(Hyposensitive)

(No sensory differences)

(Hypersensitive)

If I am hyposensitive, I might really like watching bright light displays. If I am hypersensitive, I might prefer to have lights dimmed or turned off.

#### Sound

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

(Hyposensitive)

(No sensory differences)

(Hypersensitive)

If I am hyposensitive, I might turn my music up loud and dislike silence. If I am hypersensitive, I might dislike loud spaces and put my hands over my ears.

#### Touch

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

(Hyposensitive)

(No sensory differences)

(Hypersensitive)

If I am hyposensitive, I might enjoy rubbing my hands on soft fabric or a soft toy. If I am hypersensitive, I might dislike and avoid touching certain fabrics.

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### Texture

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

(Hyposensitive)

(No sensory differences)

(Hypersensitive)

If I am hyposensitive, I might really enjoy the feeling of certain food textures in my mouth (such as liking crunchy food). If I am hypersensitive, I might strongly dislike and avoid eating certain food textures (such as mashed potato).

### Autism Quotient-10

*Please tick one option only per question:*

		Definitely Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
1	I often notice small sounds when others do not				
2	I usually concentrate more on the whole picture, rather than the small details				
3	I find it easy to do more than one thing at once				
4	If there is an interruption, I can switch back to what I was doing very quickly				
5	I find it easy to 'read between the lines' when someone is talking to me				
6	I know how to tell if someone listening to me is getting bored				
7	When I'm reading a story I find it difficult to work out the characters' intentions				
8	I like to collect information about categories of things (e.g. types of car, types of bird, types of train, types of plant etc)				
9	I find it easy to work out what someone is thinking or feeling just by looking at their face				
10	I find it difficult to work out people's intentions				



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## Hospital Anxiety and Depression Questionnaire

Tick the box beside the reply that is closest to how you have been feeling in the past week.  
Don't take too long over your replies: your immediate is best.

D	A		D	A	
		<b>I feel tense or 'wound up':</b>			<b>I feel as if I am slowed down:</b>
	3	Most of the time	3		Nearly all the time
	2	A lot of the time	2		Very often
	1	From time to time, occasionally	1		Sometimes
	0	Not at all	0		Not at all
		<b>I still enjoy the things I used to enjoy:</b>			<b>I get a sort of frightened feeling like 'butterflies' in the stomach:</b>
0		Definitely as much		0	Not at all
1		Not quite so much		1	Occasionally
2		Only a little		2	Quite Often
3		Hardly at all		3	Very Often
		<b>I get a sort of frightened feeling as if something awful is about to happen:</b>			<b>I have lost interest in my appearance:</b>
	3	Very definitely and quite badly	3		Definitely
	2	Yes, but not too badly	2		I don't take as much care as I should
	1	A little, but it doesn't worry me	1		I may not take quite as much care
	0	Not at all	0		I take just as much care as ever
		<b>I can laugh and see the funny side of things:</b>			<b>I feel restless as I have to be on the move:</b>
0		As much as I always could		3	Very much indeed
1		Not quite so much now		2	Quite a lot
2		Definitely not so much now		1	Not very much
3		Not at all		0	Not at all
		<b>Worrying thoughts go through my mind:</b>			<b>I look forward with enjoyment to things:</b>
	3	A great deal of the time	0		As much as I ever did
	2	A lot of the time	1		Rather less than I used to
	1	From time to time, but not too often	2		Definitely less than I used to
	0	Only occasionally	3		Hardly at all
		<b>I feel cheerful:</b>			<b>I get sudden feelings of panic:</b>
3		Not at all		3	Very often indeed
2		Not often		2	Quite often
1		Sometimes		1	Not very often
0		Most of the time		0	Not at all
		<b>I can sit at ease and feel relaxed:</b>			<b>I can enjoy a good book or radio or TV program:</b>
	0	Definitely	0		Often
	1	Usually	1		Sometimes
	2	Not Often	2		Not often
	3	Not at all	3		Very seldom

Please check you have answered all the questions



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## Workshop Materials

### Worksheet: Sensory Passport



I can enhance my sensory wellbeing in relation to vision by:



I can enhance my sensory wellbeing in relation to hearing by:



I can enhance my sensory wellbeing in relation to smell by:



I can enhance my sensory wellbeing in relation to taste by:



I can enhance my sensory wellbeing in relation to touch by:



I can enhance my sensory wellbeing in relation to texture by: