



Sensory Needs Checklist & Guidance Notes

July 2012

Developed in partnership between
The Moray Council (Educational Psychology Service) and
NHS Grampian (Occupational Therapy and Speech and
Language Therapy Departments)

BACKGROUND

Sensory needs are important. To function and participate effectively in our world we need to use our senses.

The senses are:

Hearing **Touch**

Sight **Balance**

Taste **Body awareness**

Smell

The Central Nervous System organises the sensory information it takes in, and then produces the right response for that situation. A strong basis of sensory integration is necessary for learning and allows us to become efficient, independent human beings.

There are many reasons for behaviours which can be observed in educational establishments and sometimes the exact reasons are unclear or unknown. Educational establishments are well developed in their processes for identifying and responding to the additional support needs of their pupils in many areas such as social, emotional, academic and behavioural skills. However, it is often the sensory needs of young people which are not so routinely considered - despite the fact these needs frequently give rise to additional support needs. These needs may be demonstrated outwardly in a range of ways including social, emotional or behavioural support needs. The multitude of sensory inputs and demands in the learning environment can have a profound impact upon the ability of children to learn. These barriers to learning may result from (over- or under-) sensory stimulation. Awareness of these issues means that we can better meet need through a sensory-aware learning environment.

Table 1 illustrates how considering behaviour from a sensory needs perspective can offer not only new explanations of that behaviour but it also generates ideas and strategies so that need can be better met.

Table 1: Sensory Transition Passport

Problem/ issue/ observed behaviour	Possible sensory reason	Ideas/ strategies	Outcome/ evaluation
PUPIL doesn't like to get his hands wet e.g. when washing dishes/ hands for personal hygiene	Anxiety about texture of soap on skin/ tactile needs	Wear gloves when doing the dishes Introduce wipes for cleaning hands	

Skill being targeted: personal hygiene, independent living			
Likes to have his clothes warmed prior to dressing, otherwise refuses dressing and becomes agitated and distressed Skill being targeted: independent dressing	May like the sensation of heat on skin, may change the experience of the texture	Encourage PUPIL to set clothes out on radiator. Encourage use of visual symbol strip of tumble dryer use. We could try using a body lotion to act as a barrier on his skin	Pupil refused to set clothes out but can now use the tumble dryer independently. Lotion not tried as visual strip worked. Action: Info to go into behaviour support plan
PUPIL struggles making eye contact with others Skill being targeted: social communication & joint attention	Peripheral vision is more comfortable than central vision. may experience sensory overload from 'looking and listening' at the same time	Agree situations/ contexts where we expect eye contact and when we don't need it. Identify where his line of sight is and talk to him from there. Use a touch on his arm to help cue him into the need for visual attention. Wait for him to look at member of staff when he hands PECS symbol over when he wants something. Rewards for 'looking'	

USING THE CHECKLIST

In 2011, a multi-agency working group was established in Moray, to help develop practice relating to sensory support needs. This group had representation from Occupational Therapy, Educational Psychology, and Speech and Language Therapy.

As already acknowledged, our educational establishments hold a wealth of information about children so the initial task for this group was to develop a jargon-free checklist for educationalists. This checklist should be seen as a starting point for the identification of sensory support needs which, if required, may generate further in-depth assessment and intervention or support.

The checklist has been developed to help record possible areas of sensory difficulties for pupils who may show behaviours which could be related to sensory needs. Use of the checklist would form part of normal information gathering and pupil profiling. It is not intended to be used as an investigative tool but rather a means to record, in a

coherent manner, the information already known. If you are not aware of the more 'home based' behaviours (e.g. problems with getting hair cut) please just record them as 'not able to comment', rather than feeling the need to question families about these behaviours.

The checklist should be used as a working document for those who know the pupil to add their thoughts to. It is recognised that there will often be a range of explanations for observable behaviours - all of which are equally valid.

APPLICATIONS OF THE CHECKLIST

Transition, as we know, can be a challenging time for our young people. The working group recognised a particular need to better identify the sensory needs of young adults as they prepare to leave our schools. Having known pupils for a period of time, school staff are ideally placed to highlight potential sensory needs which may impact on post school destinations. Moreover, they can use their knowledge to identify the skills which are important for young people to develop through their transition to adult life. These skills can then be incorporated into planning processes around the individual, such as risk assessments and support plans.

NEXT STEPS

It is likely that most people will have some of the observable behaviours and referral on to external support services should only be considered where a cluster of behaviours are thought to exist.

Once you have a completed checklist and where possible sensory needs are evident, you may wish to discuss it with a member of one of the following services:

Occupational Therapy 01343 567365

Educational Psychology 01343 550999

Speech and Language Therapy 01343 553100

FEEDBACK

There is a commitment to maximising the potential of this checklist so feedback about the checklist and accompanying notes is welcome. Please direct comments to:

Emma Macleod

Senior Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychology Service
Beechbrae Education Centre,
Duffus Road
ELGIN
IV30 4NP

or emma.macleod@moray.gov.uk



SENSORY SUPPORT NEEDS CHECKLIST



OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOUR	NOT ABLE TO COMMENT	NOT REALLY	SOMETIMES	A LOT OF THE TIME
Over-eats, eats anything (e.g. soil)				
Places objects in mouth (e.g. to chew them)				
Doesn't notice smells that others do				
Licks objects				
Finds smells overpowering/ intense				
Avoids proximity with people with strong perfumes/ shampoos				
Rocks/ swings/ spins				
Gets travel sick				
Dislikes getting hands dirty				
Dislikes some materials e.g. in clothing				
Dislikes the feel of collars/ cuffs/ labels of clothing				
Dislikes having hair cut/ washed				
Dislikes going to the dentist/ brushing teeth				
Dislikes having nails cut				
Dislikes (or only likes) certain food textures				
Doesn't appear to feel pain/ or feels pain very easily				
Holds people tightly				
Avoids being touched by others				

Dislikes having anything on hands/ feet (e.g. kicks shoes off)				
Difficulties in fine motor skills (e.g. buttons)				
Has trouble navigating rooms/ avoiding obstructions				
Stands too close to others/ lacks awareness of personal body space				
Poor depth perception (e.g. on stairs/kerbs)				
Rubs eyes/ squints/ appears not to like certain lights or colours (e.g. high or low light levels)				
Likes to focus on small details of objects, rather than look at whole item				
Doesn't always acknowledge certain sounds				
Finds some sounds very loud or hears things far away				
Seeks out noisy places and experiences (e.g. banging objects)				
Squeezes into small spaces (e.g. under tables)				
Difficulties in fine motor skills (e.g. buttons)				
Clumsy/bumps into people				
Sleep difficulties				
Tip toe walking				
Finds it difficult to work/ play in groups				