



# SENDCo Guidance

## Delivering Targeted Support Using the Tameside Sensory Needs Toolkit

This section supports SENDCos to move from identification to structured, consistent targeted support. Targeted support should feel collaborative, time-limited, and purposeful.

The stages of targeted support are listed below, with guidance for each stage.

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## Stage 1: Strengthen Universal Support First

Before moving to targeted planning, ensure:

- ✓ Universal classroom strategies have been implemented.
- ✓ Environmental adjustments have been considered.
- ✓ Staff understand sensory differences.
- ✓ Predictability and routine have been reviewed.



**Targeted support builds on universal practice - it does not replace it.**

### Sensory OT Insight:

*“If targeted support feels necessary immediately, pause and check universal practice first. Often small environmental shifts and predictable routines reduce the need for individual plans.”*

**1 UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS**

**Most sensory needs can be supported through universal practice.**

Universal sensory support focuses on the environment, routines and structure that children experience every day. When these are consistent, predictable and sensory-considerate, they support regulation, attention and participation for all children.

Children experience the same environments very differently. A whole-school approach recognises this and avoids relying on individual strategies alone. Instead, it focuses on making environments feel reliable, understandable and easier for every nervous system to manage.

When predictability and consistency are built into everyday practice, sensory surprises are reduced, regulation is supported, and fewer children require targeted or specialist support later on.

**For this reason, universal tools should always be used before moving to targeted sensory screening or individualised support.**

**TOOLS TO DOWNLOAD**

**PREDICTABILITY WINS: A UNIVERSAL SENSORY SUPPORT HANDOUT**

This handout provides practical, everyday examples of how schools can increase predictability and consistency across the day for all children. It focuses on small, realistic adjustments that reduce sensory surprises and help environments feel more reliable and easier for the nervous system to manage.

**SENSORY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS: TOP TIPS**

Practical guidance for creating calmer, more predictable environments.

**PRIMARY SCHOOL TOP TIPS**      **SECONDARY SCHOOL TOP TIPS**

**SENSORY ENVIRONMENT AUDIT TOOL**

A structured tool to reflect on: physical environments, routines and transitions and sensory load across the day.

**PRIMARY AUDIT TOOL**      **SECONDARY AUDIT TOOL**

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## Stage 2: Complete the Observation & Screening Checklist

Use the Sensory Screening Checklist to identify patterns.

1. Send the checklist home first for parents/carers to complete.
2. Complete the school view on the SAME document.
3. Compare responses to identify shared patterns and differences.

This dual perspective is **essential**.

Children often present differently across environments.

Look for:

- ✓ Sensory themes
- ✓ Time-of-day patterns
- ✓ Differences between home and school
- ✓ Early signs of overload



### Sensory OT Insight:

*“Take your time with the screening checklist. It is not designed to be rushed or completed during periods of major transition (for example, the first few weeks of a new school year or following a significant change). During transitions, sensory behaviours can temporarily increase (or decrease!) as routines and predictability settle.*

*The purpose of this checklist is not to “tick as many boxes as possible” or to evidence how severe things feel. It is to identify functional patterns and priorities so that support can be targeted and meaningful. Even if a child appears to meet many indicators, focus on what is having the greatest impact on safety, regulation and access to learning.*

*Parent and school views may differ. This is to be expected and valuable! A behaviour not observed in school may still be significant at home. Both perspectives matter”*

## Stage 3: Listen – Complete the Voice of the Child

Use the Voice of the Child worksheet to explore:

- ✓ What feels hard
- ✓ What helps
- ✓ Tricky times of the day
- ✓ Early signs of dysregulation

**Why this matters:** Children are experts in their own bodies.

Support is more effective when the child understands what is changing and why.

The child's voice builds:

- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Trust
- ✓ Engagement
- ✓ Shared understanding



### Sensory OT Insight:

*“The Voice of the Child worksheet is a guide, not a script. Use the prompts to support conversation, but adapt them to suit the child. You might choose to explore sensory systems in a child-friendly way, use a simple analogy (such as a volume dial or bucket), or complete the work creatively over time.*

*You do not need to be a sensory specialist to ask these questions. Exploring how a child experiences their body and environment will not “get it wrong” or cause harm. In practice, many children can clearly describe what feels difficult when they are given the right prompts and enough space to talk.*

*Be curious about priorities. The adult focus may be on attention or behaviour, but the child's priority may sit elsewhere- perhaps in anxiety about transitions, lunchtime, or another part of the day. In collaborative planning, consider balancing priorities so that school, parent and child perspectives are all represented.”*

## Stage 4: Identify Three Priorities

Work with parents and key staff to agree:

### Three top priorities

(For example: morning transition, lunchtime overwhelm, end-of-day fatigue.)

Keep it focused.

Targeted support works best when it is specific.

Ask:

- What has the biggest impact on access to learning?
- Where does distress escalate?
- What feels most urgent?



### Sensory OT Insight:

*“When everything feels urgent, it is tempting to try to address everything at once. However, introducing too many changes can feel overwhelming for staff and for the child. Consistency is more powerful than quantity. When identifying three priorities, aim for balance — for example, one school-led focus, one parent-led focus and one child-led focus. This supports collaboration and shared ownership.*

*In practice, schools often receive multiple recommendations from different professionals. Rather than attempting to implement all strategies simultaneously, select the three areas that will have the greatest impact on safety, regulation and access to learning. Implement these consistently, review their impact, and build gradually over time.*

*Focusing on three priorities now does not mean other needs are ignored. Support can evolve following review.”*

## Stage 5: Select Strategies to Trial

Using the Strategies Library Resource (Available on the Tameside Sensory Needs Toolkit under targeted tools):

- Choose supports linked directly to the three priorities.
- Consider timing and predictability.
- Ensure strategies are tailored - not generic.

### Strategies are only effective when:

- ✓ **They are consistent.**
- ✓ **They are delivered at the right time.**
- ✓ **The child understands their purpose.**

## Involving the Child – Example Scripts

Children should know **what is changing and why**.

Examples: *“I’ve noticed that mornings can feel a bit rushed for your body. You told us that quiet time helps. So we’re going to try five minutes of calm time when you arrive.”*

*“You said lunchtime feels loud. We’re going to try sitting in a quieter space and having a movement break before going outside.”*



### Sensory OT Insight:

*“Strategies are only effective when they are consistent, preventative and understood by the child.”*

*Before agreeing a strategy, ask:*

- **Can this be delivered reliably?**
- **Is it realistic within the classroom context?**
- **Will adults prompt and model it if needed?**
- **Does the child understand its purpose?**

*A strategy that sits unused in a drawer or is offered inconsistently can increase unpredictability rather than reduce it.*

*If a child presents as more passive in their regulation, they may rely on adult prompts to access support. In these cases, adult consistency is especially important. Consider whether staff can deliver the strategy at the same time each day or in response to clear early signs.*

*Only agree to strategies that can be implemented well. It is better to implement one strategy consistently than several inconsistently. If a strategy feels unrealistic, adapt it collaboratively with parents, staff and the child so that it becomes achievable and predictable.”*

## Stage 6: Create the 1-Page Sensory Passport

Summarise:

- Tricky patterns
- Early signs
- Key timings
- Agreed strategies
- Adult actions

Share the passport with:

- All key adults
- Parents/carers
- The child



**Consistency matters more than perfection.**

### Sensory OT Insight:

*“By the time you create the 1-Page Sensory Passport, you should have a clear picture of the child’s three priorities, key patterns from the screening checklist, the child’s voice, and agreed strategies. The passport brings this information together in one accessible document so that all key staff can quickly understand what the child needs within the environment.*

*Be specific. When identifying tricky times of day, clearly highlight when regulation is most vulnerable (e.g., morning arrival, after lunch, late afternoon). Link each priority directly to the agreed support.*

*When recording strategies, do more than list them. Include:*

- *How often they are used*
- *How long for*
- *Whether adult prompting is required*
- *How the child will know when to access the support (e.g., visual timetable, verbal cue, routine)*

*Early signs of overload may be subtle, particularly for children who present more passively. Parents & carers’ insights are especially valuable here. Signs may include small behavioural shifts (e.g., nail biting, withdrawal, increased fidgeting, staring out of the window) rather than obvious distress.*

*In the “What adults should do” section, be clear and consistent. Agree specific phrases or approaches so responses feel predictable across environments. Keep language minimal when a child is dysregulated - visual cues and calm tone are often more effective than lengthy explanations.*

*Where appropriate, ask the child what helps in difficult moments - **and what does not**. Knowing what to avoid can be as important as knowing what to do.*

*The passport should remain a live document within the plan–do–review cycle and evolve as patterns become clearer.*

## Stage 7: Review & Next Steps

Targeted support is only effective when it is reviewed thoughtfully.

Reviewing allows schools to:

- Reflect on what has been trialled
- Consider impact over time
- Make evidence-led decisions
- Avoid repeated cycles of starting again

Use the **Progress & Review Log** within the Tameside Sensory Toolkit to structure this process.

### When reviewing targeted support, consider:

- Were the agreed strategies implemented consistently?
- Were they delivered at the intended time of day?
- Were adults clear and confident in their role?
- Has there been feedback from the child or parents/carers?
- Has sufficient time (6–8 weeks) been allowed?

Review should focus on patterns over time — not individual incidents.

### What progress may look like:

Progress is not always fewer behaviours.

It may include:

- ✓ Reduced escalation or quicker recovery after stress
- ✓ Smoother transitions
- ✓ Increased willingness to enter lessons
- ✓ Improved attendance or punctuality
- ✓ Greater emotional safety or trust with adults
- ✓ Improved access to learning at any point in the day

**Sensory sensitivity will likely remain.**

**Progress is increased capacity, regulation and participation.**

### If progress is limited:

Before escalating, consider:

- **Consistency** – were strategies delivered reliably?
- **Timing** – were supports in place before pressure points?
- **Match** – do strategies still align with the identified priorities?
- **Volume** – were too many strategies introduced at once?
- **Environment** – are universal barriers still present?

Adjusting support is not failure. It is part of the graduated response.



### Sensory OT Insight:

*“When reviewing impact, look beyond behaviour alone. Sensory differences are often part of a neurodivergent profile. Sensory supports are not designed to “cure” sensitivity or remove neurodivergent traits - and nor should they.*

*A child may continue to experience sensory sensitivity. Meaningful progress may instead look like quicker recovery after stress, more consistent access to learning, increased use of support strategies, or greater emotional safety with adults.*

*A neuro-affirming approach recognises that the goal is not to “fix” sensory needs, but to reduce distress and increase participation. Escalation should therefore be based on impact and access to learning - not the continued presence of sensory sensitivity itself.”*

## Implementation Guidance

### How long should strategies be trialled?

Strategies should be trialled for a minimum of 6–8 weeks, unless there is clear evidence they are increasing distress.

This allows time for:

- Adult consistency
- Routine to embed
- The child’s nervous system to adapt
- Patterns to become clearer

If a strategy appears to be working, avoid removing it too quickly. Stability often reflects that the support is effective.

If considering reducing support:

- Speak with the child first
- Inform parents/carers
- Use a gradual, stepped approach
- Ensure the child understands what is changing and why

Sudden removal can feel unpredictable and may lead to regression.



#### Sensory OT Insight:

*“If support has helped a child feel safer and more regulated, removing it abruptly can reintroduce unpredictability. Where possible, use a graded step back rather than sudden withdrawal. The goal is to build independence gradually - not to test whether the child can cope without support.”*

## Embedding strategies into daily routines

Strategies are more effective when they are:

- ✓ Visible
- ✓ Predictable
- ✓ Built into routine

### Consider:

- ✓ Including strategies within the visual timetable
- ✓ Using desk prompts or discreet visual cues
- ✓ Ensuring tools are within the child's eyeline
- ✓ Normalising sensory language across the whole class

For example:

**“Everyone, it’s focus tool time.”**

**“Let’s all check our bodies — do we need a movement break?”**

Ear defenders stored at the back of the room are unlikely to be used.

Accessibility matters.



### Sensory OT Insight:

*“A strategy is only helpful if it can be accessed easily and consistently. If it relies entirely on the child remembering to use it (particularly if they present more passively) adult prompting and routine will be essential.”*

## Supporting Children Who Mask

Children who mask may appear regulated in school while releasing distress at home. Parents are often the first to notice increasing anxiety, emotional intensity, or school refusal.

Early intervention is essential.

If a child begins expressing distress about attending school, intervene quickly. Prolonged avoidance can increase anxiety and make reintegration significantly more difficult.

Children who mask may:

- **Avoid drawing attention to themselves**
- **Decline support even when needed**
- **Present as compliant but fatigued**
- **Struggle to articulate what feels wrong**

**They do not require a diagnosis for support to begin.**

Continue to:

- ✓ Use the Voice of the Child tools
- ✓ Prioritise predictability
- ✓ Reduce sensory load where possible
- ✓ Normalise sensory strategies across the class
- ✓ Whole-class education around sensory tools reduces stigma and increases psychological safety.



### Sensory OT Insight:

*“When a child appears reluctant to use agreed strategies, this is not always refusal. For some children, it does not yet feel safe to be visibly different. Normalising sensory supports across the classroom can increase access without singling the child out.”*

## What Progress Looks Like

Progress is not only fewer incidents.

Look for:

- ✓ Faster recovery after stress
- ✓ Smoother transitions
- ✓ Increased engagement
- ✓ Clearer communication of needs
- ✓ Greater confidence
- ✓ Improved adult consistency

**Safety and predictability are the goal.**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What if parents and school views are very different?

Differences are common and valuable.  
Children often present differently across environments.

Use this as information:

- Is the child masking in school?
- Is fatigue showing at home?
- Are routines different?

Look for patterns rather than trying to decide which view is “correct.” Both perspectives matter.

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### 2. What if we identify more than three priorities?

Stay focused.

Targeted support works best when it is specific.  
Start with the three areas that have the biggest impact on safety and access to learning.

Additional areas can be reviewed later.

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### 3. What if staff feel the strategies are “too much”?

Consistency is more important than quantity.

It is better to:

- Implement one strategy well
- At the right time
- With full staff understanding

Rather than introducing multiple changes that are not sustained.

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### 4. What if the child refuses the strategy?

Refusal is information.

Check:

- Does the child understand why the strategy is in place?
- Was it chosen with their input?
- Does it feel safe and predictable?

Revisit the Voice of the Child and adjust. Support should feel collaborative, not imposed.

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## 5. What if there is no immediate improvement?

Strategies require time and consistency.

Ask:

- Has the strategy been implemented as agreed?
- Has timing been considered?
- Are early signs being recognised?
- Is adult response consistent?

Allow 6–8 weeks before deciding a strategy is ineffective, unless distress is increasing.

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## 6. What if things improve quickly?

### **Do not remove support too soon!**

Stability often reflects that the strategy is working. If it's not “broken” then don't fix it! If the shared goal is to withdraw strategies or reduce support (to increase independence or in preparation for transition to secondary school for example) then gradual adjustments are safer than sudden removal, and this should always been agreed in advance with parents/carers and the child directly so they are aware of the changes.

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## 7. How do we know if we need to escalate?

Consider escalation if:

- Strategies have been implemented consistently for 6–8 weeks.
- Strategies have been fully reviewed and adjusted if identified during the review process
- Patterns remain significant.
- Distress continues to impact learning or safety.
- Adults require more specialist guidance.

Attach the Sensory Passport and Screening Checklist when seeking further advice.

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## 8. What if the child appears calm in school but distressed at home?

This may indicate masking.

Speak with parents about:

- After-school fatigue
- Emotional intensity at home
- Sleep disruption

Distress that appears primarily at home does not mean that needs cannot be supported within school. For some children, significant effort is required to remain regulated during the school day. This effort can result in emotional overload once they return home.

Schools may need to consider reducing sensory load, increasing predictability, or embedding preventative strategies - even when distress is not visibly apparent in class. In practice, when school environments become more predictable and sensory supports are implemented consistently, families often report a reduction in meltdowns and emotional intensity at home.

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## 9. How do we avoid this becoming a behaviour plan?

Keep the focus on:

- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Regulation
- ✓ Predictability
- ✓ Adult consistency

The aim is to support the nervous system, not manage compliance.

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## 10. How often should the passport be updated?

Review after 6–8 weeks. Update if:

- Priorities change
- New patterns emerge
- The child's needs shift

**Keep it live, but avoid constant rewriting.**