

# Sensory Strategies Library Secondary Schools



This guide is designed to be used alongside the **Sensory Observation & Screening Toolkit – Secondary**

It is not intended to be read from start to finish.

Instead, use it to select and trial strategies linked to the young persons identified priority needs.

## STEP 1

### Return to Your 2-3 Priority Targets

Before selecting strategies, review:

- Which sensory systems were identified as priorities
- Which part of the day feels most challenging
- What impact this has on learning, regulation or independence

*Focus only on the 2-3 highest impact areas.*

**Avoid trying to change everything at once.**

## STEP 2

### Match Strategies to the Priority Area

Each section of this guide is organised by sensory system and context. Within each system you will find:

- Strategies for school
- Strategies for home
- Context-specific suggestions (e.g. transitions, lunchtime, after school)

*Select 1-2 strategies to trial first.*

**Small, consistent environmental adjustments are more effective than multiple changes introduced at once.**

## STEP 3

### Trial, Observe, Adjust

When introducing a strategy:

- Be consistent
- Introduce it predictably
- Allow time for the young person to adjust
- Observe what changes

### Improvement may look like:

- Reduced distress
- Faster recovery
- Increased participation
- Greater independence
- Fewer incidents during the targeted part of the day

## STEP 4

### Review Before Adding More

Supporting one high-impact sensory need can improve regulation across the day.

Once progress is seen, you may choose to introduce another priority area.

Avoid layering multiple new strategies simultaneously.

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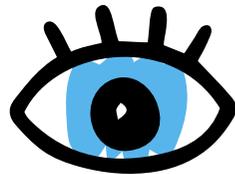


## IMPORTANT REMINDER!

- ! Sensory systems work together
- ! Needs may increase with fatigue, stress or unpredictability
- ! Strategies should reduce environmental demand rather than increase expectations
- ! **Adult consistency** is often the most powerful support
- ! Regulation improves when the environment becomes more predictable, manageable and supportive of the young person's sensory profile.



TACTILE



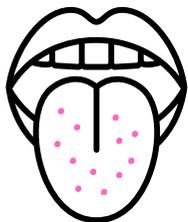
VISUAL



AUDITORY



OLFACTORY



GUSTATORY



VESTIBULAR



PROPRIOCEPTION



INTEROCEPTION



# Over-Responsive / Sensitive to TACTILE input

Use this section if tactile needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

-  *Being accidentally bumped or brushed past feels overwhelming or upsetting*  
→ **Top tip:** Choose seating with more personal space (edge of room, end of row) and use quieter routes between lessons where possible.
-  *Crowded corridors and moving between lessons are stressful for me*  
→ **Top tip:** Leave lessons slightly early or later if agreed, and walk with a trusted friend rather than in the middle of the crowd.
-  *Certain uniform items or fabrics feel unbearable or distracting (labels, seams, tight clothes)*  
→ **Top tip:** Adjust what you can (remove labels, wear softer layers underneath, choose alternative approved items).
-  *Practical subjects can feel difficult because of how materials feel (science labs, DT materials, art supplies)*  
→ **Top tip:** Use tools like gloves, brushes or wipes and ask to prepare gradually rather than being rushed into touching materials.
-  *Light touch from others feels more uncomfortable than firm contact*  
→ **Top tip:** Let others know you prefer space or firm, predictable contact rather than unexpected light touch.
-  *I feel dysregulated after busy lessons where there is lots of physical contact*  
→ **Top tip:** Build in a short reset (hand wash, quiet corner, pressure through hands, deep breathing) before the next lesson.



## HOME

-  *Certain clothes feel so uncomfortable that they affect my mood or concentration*  
→ **Top tip:** Plan “safe clothes” that feel predictable and comfortable, especially for school days.
-  *Self-care tasks like showering, hair brushing or brushing my teeth feel uncomfortable or stressful*  
→ **Top tip:** Make these tasks more predictable and easier on my body.
-  **For showering:**
  - Keep the water temperature consistent and let me adjust it myself if possible.
  - Use steady, firm towel pressure when drying rather than quick light rubbing.
  - Have products ready and in the same order each time so I know what’s coming next.
  - Let the bathroom warm up before I get out of the shower.
-  **For hair brushing:**
  - Use firm, slow pressure rather than light, tickly strokes.
  - Start brushing from the ends and work upwards to avoid pulling. Hold hair towards the root to prevent tugging
  - Listen to preferred music while brushing hair
-  **For brushing teeth:**
  - Try different toothbrush types (soft vs medium bristles, electric vs manual).
  - Use a predictable routine (same order every time).
  - Use a timer or countdown so I know how long it will last.
  - “Wake up” my mouth by gently rubbing my gums before introducing the tooth brush
-  *Unexpected touch from family members makes me tense or upset*  
→ **Top tip:** Agree a simple “ask before touch” rule so contact feels predictable.
-  *I avoid physical closeness even when I care about people*  
→ **Top tip:** Find alternative ways to show connection (sitting nearby, side hug, fist bump) that feel comfortable.
-  *I need time alone after busy days because touch feels “too much”*  
→ **Top tip:** Plan quiet, low-contact downtime after school before talking or social time.



# Under-Responsive to TACTILE input

Use this section if tactile needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

- I don't always notice when I've been bumped, hurt, or knocked*  
→ **Top tip:** Build in quick body check-ins during the day (e.g. after PE or break) to look for marks, soreness or discomfort.
- I don't typically realise when my clothes are uncomfortable, twisted, or inside out*  
→ **Top tip:** Do a quick "clothing check" before lessons or leaving home (collar flat, socks straight, sleeves comfortable).
- I sometimes touch objects or people without meaning to*  
→ **Top tip:** Keep hands busy with a fidget or hold items when walking so I'm less likely to reach out automatically.
- I struggle to notice when my hands or face are dirty*  
→ **Top tip:** Use routine checks after eating, art, science or break time rather than waiting until someone points it out.



## HOME

- I don't always notice cuts, bruises or minor injuries straight away*  
→ **Top tip:** Have a regular evening body check (especially after sport or active days).
- I don't always realise when my clothes are uncomfortable, inside out, too tight or not right for the weather*  
→ **Top tip:** Use a simple "head to toe" check before leaving the house.
- I might not notice when my hands, face or clothes are dirty*  
→ **Top tip:** Build hygiene into routine moments (after meals, before leaving the house, before bed).
- I may prefer strong touch or firm pressure because light touch doesn't register clearly*  
→ **Top tip:** If you need a reset, try pushing your hands into a wall, squeezing something firm, pressing your palms together, or leaning into a desk - stronger pressure can help your body feel clearer and more awake.
- I can struggle with fine motor tasks (buttons, laces, grooming tasks)*  
→ **Top tip:** Slow down the task, break it into steps, and use tools that make control easier (elastic laces, adapted fastenings).
- I find it hard not to touch things, even when I know I shouldn't*  
→ **Top tip:** Agree clear "hands to self" rules and keep hands occupied in busy environments.



# From Patterns to Practical Support

If tactile (touch) needs are affecting learning, independence, or emotional regulation, use this section to identify realistic, agreed supports.

Supports should feel respectful, predictable and not draw unnecessary attention.



## IF TACTILE NEEDS ARE IMPACTING...

### LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

- Agree seating that reduces close body contact (edge of row, back of room, consistent seat)
- Avoid unnecessary physical prompts (no tapping shoulders to gain attention)
- Plan ahead for high-contact situations (group work, crowded labs)
- Build in short reset moments after busy or high-contact lessons

### SELF-CARE OR INDEPENDENCE

- Adapt uniform within policy where possible (fabric choice, layering, removing labels)
- Use firm, predictable pressure during grooming
- Schedule self-care tasks at calmer times of day
- Allow privacy and extra time for changing (e.g. PE)
- Identify clothing “non-negotiables” that genuinely cause distress

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Identify when touch builds up across the day (crowds, contact, practical lessons)
- Plan decompression time after high-contact periods
- Use grounding strategies involving firm pressure (leaning, weighted blanket, wall pushes)
- Reduce unexpected touch from peers and adults
- Agree a signal if touch feels overwhelming

### NEEDS APPEAR MASKED IN SCHOOL

- Continue agreed adjustments even if distress isn't visible
- Notice end-of-day shutdown, irritability, or withdrawal
- Plan after-school decompression (low demand, low contact)
- Check in privately rather than in front of peers
- Remember: coping does not mean comfortable

## TACTILE NEEDS APPEAR MORE NOTICEABLE...

### TRANSITIONS

- Leave class a few minutes early to avoid corridor crowds
- Agree a consistent route between lessons
- Avoid lining up in tight spaces
- Pre-warn about unavoidable proximity

### SOCIAL / LUNCH TIME

- Identify quieter zones at break/lunch
- Agree where to sit to increase elbow space
- Avoid forced participation in high-contact games
- Plan structured roles in activities
- Allow time indoors if touch exposure is high

### AFTER SCHOOL

- Build in decompression before homework
- Change into preferred clothing quickly
- Use firm pressure (wrap in blanket, lean into sofa, shower with steady pressure)
- Reduce conversation demands initially

### DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE / OUT OF ROUTINE

- Prepare for trips, exam seating, room changes
- Maintain familiar clothing where possible
- Identify one predictable tactile “anchor” (hoodie, ring, textured object)
- Build in extra regulation time around big events



**VISUAL**

# Over-Responsive / Sensitive to VISUAL input

Use this section if visual needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL



*Bright lights, fluorescent lighting or flickering lights feel uncomfortable or overwhelming*

→ **Top tip:** Sit away from direct lighting where possible, use natural light when available, and consider tinted lenses or a cap/hood if allowed.



*Visually busy classrooms, wall displays or cluttered spaces make it hard for me to focus*

→ **Top tip:** Sit facing a plain wall where possible, keep desk space clear, and reduce visual clutter in my immediate area.



*Lots of movement around me (people walking past, doors opening, activity behind me) distracts or overstimulates me*

→ **Top tip:** Choose a seat with a wall behind me or at the side of the room to reduce visual movement in my line of sight.



*Looking at the board, screens or slides for long periods feels tiring or gives me headaches*

→ **Top tip:** Take short visual breaks (look away into the distance for 20–30 seconds), adjust screen brightness, and use printed copies if helpful.



*Busy corridors, assemblies or large group spaces feel visually overwhelming*

→ **Top tip:** Leave lessons slightly early to avoid crowds, stand at the edge of large spaces, or focus on a fixed point to reduce visual scanning.



*Busy practical classrooms (science, DT, art) feel visually intense and hard to manage*

→ **Top tip:** Work in a defined workspace, clear the area before starting, and break tasks into smaller visual steps.



*I prefer to wear my hood up, look down, or reduce eye contact to limit visual input*

→ **Top tip:** Agree appropriate ways to reduce visual load (e.g. cap, hood where policy allows, sitting at the edge of the room) so it's understood as regulation, not disengagement.



## HOME



*Bright lighting at home feels uncomfortable or irritating*

→ **Top tip:** Use lamps instead of overhead lights and dim lighting in the evening where possible.



*Cluttered or busy rooms make it hard for me to relax*

→ **Top tip:** Keep one clear, low-clutter space that I can use when I need to reset.



*Busy shops or public spaces feel visually overwhelming*

→ **Top tip:** Visit at quieter times, use a clear plan of where we're going, and take short breaks outside if needed.



*After school I feel visually drained and need time in a calmer space*

→ **Top tip:** Build in screen-free, low-light downtime before starting homework or conversations.



*Sudden changes to my environment make me feel unsettled*

→ **Top tip:** Get advance warning where possible (room changes, seating changes, new layouts) and have something familiar with me.



# Under-Responsive to VISUAL input

Use this section if visual needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

-  *I miss information written on the board or slides*  
→ **Top tip: Sit closer to the board, ask for printed copies or digital access to slides, and check in at the end of instructions to confirm key points.**
-  *It takes me longer to process visual instructions or demonstrations*  
→ **Top tip: Break instructions into smaller steps, use written checklists, and allow extra processing time before moving on.**
-  *I struggle to find resources or equipment even when they are nearby*  
→ **Top tip: Keep materials in clearly labelled, consistent places and reduce visual clutter in my working area.**
-  *Copying from the board or textbooks is difficult for me*  
→ **Top tip: Provide printed notes where possible, reduce copying load, and use guided notes or partially completed sheets.**
-  *I do not always notice visual reminders, timetables or displays*  
→ **Top tip: Pair visual reminders with verbal prompts and place important information directly in my line of sight.**
-  *I am drawn to bright lights, reflections or moving objects*  
→ **Top tip: Seat me away from windows or moving distractions and provide structured tasks to help anchor my focus.**



## HOME

-  *I struggle to find things even when they are in front of me*  
→ **Top tip: Keep key items in consistent, clearly defined places and reduce surface clutter in important areas (desk, bedside, bathroom).**
-  *I do not always notice mess or unfinished tasks*  
→ **Top tip: Use clear visual checklists or “before you finish” lists to make expectations visible and concrete.**
-  *I miss facial expressions or visual social cues*  
→ **Top tip: Pair facial cues with clear verbal communication rather than relying on “looks” or gestures alone.**
-  *I sit very close to screens or spend long periods looking at them*  
→ **Top tip: Adjust screen distance and lighting, build in movement breaks, and use timers to prevent visual fatigue.**
-  *I find it hard to organise homework, revision or tasks visually*  
→ **Top tip: Use simple planners, colour-coding systems, and step-by-step task breakdowns rather than large, visually busy revision sheets.**



# From Patterns to Practical Support

If tactile (touch) needs are affecting learning, independence, or emotional regulation, use this section to identify realistic, agreed supports.

**Supports should feel respectful, predictable and not draw unnecessary attention.**



## IF VISUAL NEEDS ARE IMPACTING...

### LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

- Agree seating that reduces visual distraction
- Provide printed or digital copies of slides to reduce copying load
- Reduce visual clutter in my immediate workspace
- Break information into smaller visual chunks rather than dense slides
- Use clear contrast (dark text on plain background)

### SELF-CARE OR INDEPENDENCE

- Use simple, uncluttered planners rather than visually busy layouts
- Keep key items in consistent, clearly defined spaces
- Break homework into visually manageable steps
- Avoid overwhelming revision sheets - use structured templates
- Support with organising materials visually (folders, colour-coding)

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Identify when visual load builds up across the day (crowds, screens, busy classrooms)
- Build in low-light or low-clutter reset time
- Reduce exposure to flickering or harsh lighting where possible
- Plan decompression after visually intense days
- Provide advance warning of room changes or layout changes

### NEEDS APPEAR MASKED IN SCHOOL

- Continue agreed adjustments even if I seem to be coping
- Notice headaches, fatigue, irritability, or shutdown after visually busy days
- Check in privately rather than publicly
- Remember: reduced eye contact or hood use may be regulation, not disengagement

## VISUAL NEEDS APPEAR MORE NOTICEABLE...

### TRANSITIONS

- Leave class slightly early to avoid visually busy corridors
- Agree a consistent route between lessons
- Pre-warn about changes in room layout or seating
- Reduce visual overload during line-up or crowded spaces

### SOCIAL / LUNCH TIME

- Identify quieter areas with less visual movement
- Sit facing a wall or away from high traffic areas
- Take short breaks outside if the space feels visually intense
- Avoid standing in the centre of large moving groups

### AFTER SCHOOL

- Build in low-light downtime before homework
- Reduce screen time initially after a visually demanding day
- Use calm, uncluttered spaces to reset
- Delay complex visual tasks until settled

### DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE / OUT OF ROUTINE

- Provide clear visual schedules in advance
- Keep instructions simple and uncluttered
- Maintain familiar visual anchors (bag, folder, layout structure)
- Build in extra processing time for new environments



# Over-Responsive / Sensitive to AUDITORY input

Use this section if auditory needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

-  *Loud or unexpected noises (bells, alarms, shouting, chairs scraping) feel overwhelming or make me anxious*  
→ **Top tip:** Use ear loops where appropriate (30 mins per use), get advance warning of alarms if possible - set a reminder on your smart watch or phone, and sit away from high-noise areas.
-  *Busy environments such as assemblies, dining halls or corridors feel too loud and hard to manage*  
→ **Top tip:** Leave lessons slightly early, stand at the edge of large spaces, and identify quieter areas I can move to if needed. Trial ear loops during noisy busy times.
-  *I find it hard to concentrate when there is background noise or lots of people talking*  
→ **Top tip:** Sit away from talkative groups, use noise-reducing headphones or ear loops for independent work, and break tasks into shorter focused blocks.
-  *Small repetitive sounds (tapping, sniffing, humming, clocks ticking) are hard for me to ignore*  
→ **Top tip:** Use low-level neutral sound (e.g. instrumental music or white noise with permission) to mask unpredictable noises or ear loops during focused/quiet work.
-  *Eating sounds (chewing, crunching, breathing noises) make it difficult for me to stay calm or focused*  
→ **Top tip:** Sit at the end of tables, use headphones where allowed, or eat in a quieter space if possible.
-  *I cover my ears, wear a hood or headphones, or look for ways to block out sound when it feels too much*  
→ **Top tip:** Agree appropriate sound-reduction strategies in advance so they are understood as regulation, not disengagement.



## HOME

-  *Household noise (TV, appliances, siblings, people moving around) feels overwhelming*  
→ **Top tip:** Create a predictable quiet zone at home and agree certain quieter times where possible.
-  *Sudden or loud sounds (doors slamming, toilet flushing) make me panic, freeze or shut down*  
→ **Top tip:** Give advance warning where possible and reduce sudden noise triggers (soft-close doors, predictable routines).
-  *Busy shops, gatherings or public places feel stressful because of the noise*  
→ **Top tip:** Visit at quieter times, take short breaks outside, and plan a clear exit option if needed. Use headphones or ear loops.
-  *I need quiet time after school or busy days to recover*  
→ **Top tip:** Build in low-demand, low-noise decompression time before homework or conversations.
-  *Noise makes it hard for me to relax, settle or sleep*  
→ **Top tip:** Use consistent bedtime sound routines (fan, white noise, calming audio) and reduce unpredictable noise late in the evening.
-  *I avoid certain activities or spaces because the sound feels too intense*  
→ **Top tip:** Identify the specific sound triggers and plan alternatives or gradual exposure with control and choice.



# Under-Responsive to AUDITORY input

Use this section if auditory needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

*I don't always notice when my name is called*

- **Top tip:** Gain my attention first (say my name, pause, make eye contact if appropriate) before giving instructions.

*I miss verbal instructions unless they are repeated*

- **Top tip:** Provide written key points alongside verbal instructions and check understanding rather than assuming I've heard.

*It takes me longer to process what someone has said*

- **Top tip:** Give me a few seconds to respond before repeating or rephrasing — I may still be processing.

*I find it hard to follow group discussions, especially when more than one person is talking*

- **Top tip:** Use clear turn-taking structures and summarise key points at the end of discussions.

*I may appear disengaged in lessons that are mostly verbal*

- **Top tip:** Pair spoken information with visuals, written prompts, or clear bullet points.

*I sometimes make noises to myself or enjoy echoing spaces where sounds are amplified*

- **Top tip:** Build in appropriate times for vocal or sound-based regulation, while agreeing clear boundaries for lessons.



## HOME

*I don't always respond when people speak to me*

- **Top tip:** Reduce background noise before speaking and check I'm looking towards you before giving important information.

*I need things repeated and this can frustrate others*

- **Top tip:** Keep instructions short and specific, and ask me to repeat back the key part to check understanding.

*I watch TV or listen to music very loudly*

- **Top tip:** Agree safe volume levels and consider using headphones rather than increasing external volume.

*I struggle to follow spoken routines or instructions*

- **Top tip:** Use visual reminders (lists, notes, phone reminders) to support verbal instructions.

*People think I am ignoring them when I have not heard*

- **Top tip:** Clarify first ("Did you hear me?") before assuming avoidance.

*I enjoy making sounds or being in spaces where noise echoes*

- **Top tip:** Identify safe, appropriate times and places for sound exploration without disrupting others.



# From Patterns to Practical Support

If auditory (sound) needs are affecting learning, independence, or emotional regulation, use this section to identify realistic, agreed supports.

Supports should feel respectful, predictable, and not draw unnecessary attention.



## IF AUDITORY NEEDS ARE IMPACTING...

### LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

- Agree seating away from high-noise areas
- Use written key points alongside verbal instructions
- Allow use of noise-reducing headphones for independent work
- Break longer verbal instructions into shorter, clearer steps
- Check understanding privately rather than in front of peers

### SELF-CARE OR INDEPENDENCE

- Use simple, clear verbal instructions (one or two steps at a time)
- Pair spoken routines with visual reminders or checklists
- Reduce background noise when giving important information
- Agree safe volume levels for music or devices
- Build predictable sound routines at home (e.g. consistent bedtime audio)

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Identify when sound builds up across the day (bells, corridors, dining hall)
- Build in quiet decompression time after noisy periods
- Use headphones, ear loops, or agreed sound-filtering tools
- Provide advance warning for loud events (alarms, assemblies)
- Reduce sudden shouting or unpredictable noise where possible

### NEEDS APPEAR MASKED IN SCHOOL

- Continue agreed adjustments even if distress isn't visible
- Notice signs of fatigue, irritability, shutdown, or withdrawal after noisy days
- Check in privately rather than publicly
- Remember: wearing headphones, hood use, or seeking quiet is regulation, not disengagement

## AUDITORY NEEDS APPEAR MORE NOTICEABLE...

### TRANSITIONS

- Leave class slightly early to avoid corridor noise
- Agree a consistent, quieter route between lessons
- Pre-warn about bells, alarms, or changes in routine
- Reduce crowding during line-up or end-of-lesson movement

### SOCIAL / LUNCH TIME

- Identify quieter areas at break/lunch
- Sit at the edge of busy spaces
- Take short breaks outside if noise builds up
- Avoid standing in the centre of large groups

### AFTER SCHOOL

- Build in low-noise decompression before homework
- Reduce conversation demands initially
- Use calm, predictable sound (music, white noise, quiet space)
- Delay complex tasks until settled

### DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE / OUT OF ROUTINE

- Provide clear advance warning of trips or events
- Explain what the environment will sound like beforehand
- Keep one predictable quiet option available
- Build in extra recovery time around loud events



# Over-Responsive / Sensitive to SMELL input



Use this section if olfactory needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

-  *Certain smells (toilets, dining hall, science labs, food smells) make me feel overwhelmed, sick or anxious*  
→ **Top tip: Sit near doors or windows where possible, use short movement breaks, and use a tissue with a preferred scent i can have in my sleeve to smell when feeling overwhelmed.**
-  *Food smells make it hard for me to concentrate or stay in a room*  
→ **Top tip: Avoid sitting near bins or food areas and consider using a subtle personal scent (e.g. a tissue with a familiar smell) to mask stronger odours.**
-  *Cleaning products, air fresheners or perfume feel strong, distracting or upsetting*  
→ **Top tip: Reduce exposure where possible (open windows, avoid recently sprayed areas) and raise concerns discreetly with staff.**
-  *I feel uncomfortable in certain classrooms because of how they smell*  
→ **Top tip: Agree seating that increases airflow and build in short reset breaks if the smell feels intense.**
-  *Strong smells make me want to leave the lesson or shut down*  
→ **Top tip: Identify the trigger early and use a pre-agreed signal to step out briefly rather than waiting until it becomes overwhelming.**
-  *I may comment that someone smells because the odour feels overwhelming to me*  
→ **Top tip: Learn private coping strategies (moving seat, covering nose subtly, using a neutral scent) rather than commenting, to protect relationships.**



## HOME

-  *Cooking smells feel overwhelming, even if I like the food*  
→ **Top tip: Open windows, use extractor fans, or spend time in another room while food is cooking.**
-  *Bathroom smells make it hard for me to use the space comfortably*  
→ **Top tip: Improve ventilation and use consistent, mild products rather than strong fragrances.**
-  *Certain perfume, deodorant or cleaning products feel too strong for me*  
→ **Top tip: Agree low-scent household products where possible and avoid layering multiple strong smells.**
-  *Strong smells affect my mood or make me irritable*  
→ **Top tip: Notice patterns and reduce exposure before irritation builds up. Identify a preferred scent i can use to help me feel calmer.**
-  *I avoid certain rooms or activities because of how they smell*  
→ **Top tip: Identify the specific smell trigger and plan adjustments rather than avoiding everything linked to it.**
-  *I find it hard to be near people who wear strong perfume, deodorant or have noticeable smells*  
→ **Top tip: Increase physical distance where possible and use quiet coping strategies rather than drawing attention to it. Use a tissue with a preferred scent i can have in my sleeve to smell when feeling overwhelmed.**



# Under-Responsive to SMELL input

Use this section if olfactory needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

-  *I don't notice smells that other people react to*  
→ **Top tip: Be open to neutral feedback from trusted adults if something might need attention.**
-  *I don't realise when my clothes or belongings smell*  
→ **Top tip: Build a consistent washing routine (e.g. uniform washed on set days, PE kit after every use).**
-  *I'm not always aware of hygiene issues (e.g. body odour)*  
→ **Top tip: Create a predictable daily hygiene checklist (shower, deodorant, clean clothes).**
-  *I don't notice warning smells (e.g. burning, chemicals)*  
→ **Top tip: Follow safety routines consistently rather than relying on smell to alert you.**
-  *I rely on others to tell me when something smells unusual*  
→ **Top tip: Agree clear, private ways adults can raise concerns without embarrassment.**



## HOME

-  *I don't notice when clothes need washing or changing*  
→ **Top tip: Use a weekly laundry schedule rather than waiting until something "smells".**
-  *I'm not always aware of my own body odour*  
→ **Top tip: Use daily hygiene routines at consistent times (morning/evening), especially after sport.**
-  *I struggle to tell when food smells off or unsafe*  
→ **Top tip: Check expiry dates and visual signs rather than relying on smell alone.**
-  *I don't notice when rooms smell unpleasant*  
→ **Top tip: Build regular habits like opening windows or emptying bins on specific days.**
-  *I need reminders about hygiene or laundry routines*  
→ **Top tip: Use phone reminders, visual checklists, or a consistent weekly reset routine.**



# From Patterns to Practical Support

If smell (olfactory) needs are affecting learning, independence, or emotional regulation, use this section to identify realistic, agreed supports. Supports should feel respectful, discreet, and not draw unnecessary attention. If smell sensitivities increase in particular environments (e.g. dining hall, toilets, science labs, public spaces, after school), use these supports to reduce cumulative stress.



## IF SMELL NEEDS ARE IMPACTING...

### LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

- Agree seating near doors or windows where airflow is better
- Avoid sitting near bins, food areas, or cleaning supply storage
- Allow short movement breaks if smells become overwhelming
- Identify specific classrooms that feel harder and adjust where possible
- Use discreet coping tools (e.g. tissue with familiar scent)

### SELF-CARE OR INDEPENDENCE

- Build consistent hygiene routines (shower, deodorant, clean clothes)
- Use mild, low-scent personal products
- Follow laundry schedules rather than relying on noticing smell
- Use visual checks (expiry dates, appearance) for food safety
- Improve ventilation at home (windows, extractor fans)

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Identify when smells build up across the day
- Build in decompression time after high-smell environments
- Reduce exposure to strong perfumes, sprays, or air fresheners where possible
- Plan ahead for known trigger environments (science labs, public toilets)
- Agree a quiet signal if stepping out is needed

### NEEDS APPEAR MASKED IN SCHOOL

- Continue agreed adjustments even if distress isn't obvious
- Notice irritability, shutdown, or avoidance after high-smell environments
- Check in privately if smell is affecting regulation
- Remember: leaving a room may be regulation, not avoidance

## SMELL NEEDS APPEAR MORE NOTICEABLE...

### TRANSITIONS

- Pre-warn about environments that may have strong smells
- Allow movement at less crowded times
- Plan routes that avoid known trigger areas

### SOCIAL / LUNCH TIME

- Sit at the edge of dining spaces
- Allow outdoor eating when appropriate
- Identify quieter, less food-dense areas
- Reduce time spent near bins or concentrated food smells

### AFTER SCHOOL

- Build in time away from cooking smells
- Ventilate spaces before settling
- Change clothing if smells feel "stuck"
- Delay after school demands until regulated
- Use preferred/calming scent as a regulation tool

### DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE / OUT OF ROUTINE

- Explain what environments may smell like beforehand (trips, new venues)
- Keep one familiar scent available as an anchor
- Build in extra recovery time around public events
- Plan exits in advance if needed



# Over-Responsive / Sensitive to TASTE input



Use this section if gustatory needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL



*I avoid school food because the tastes feel too strong or unpredictable*

→ **Top tip: Bring familiar packed food where possible or agree access to simple, predictable options.**



*Strong flavours make me feel uncomfortable, sick or overwhelmed*

→ **Top tip: Choose milder options and avoid being pressured to try intense or spicy foods.**



*I struggle with foods that are mixed together or touching on the plate*

→ **Top tip: Keep foods separate where possible and choose simple combinations.**



*Lunchtime feels stressful or anxiety-provoking because of food expectations*

→ **Top tip: Sit with familiar peers, eat in a calmer space if available, and reduce pressure to finish everything.**



*I avoid food-related lessons or activities because I feel pressured to taste*

→ **Top tip: Agree participation options (preparing, observing, discussing) without mandatory tasting.**



*Unexpected changes to food (brand, recipe, temperature) make it hard for me to eat*

→ **Top tip: Keep preferred brands consistent where possible and give advance warning of changes.**



## HOME



*I eat a small range of foods because many tastes feel unpleasant*

→ **Top tip: Keep safe foods reliably available and introduce new foods gradually without pressure.**



*Being asked to “just try” foods makes me anxious or upset*

→ **Top tip: Remove pressure – allow choice and control over when and whether to try something new.**



*Certain flavours make me gag or feel overwhelmed*

→ **Top tip: Avoid known trigger flavours and build tolerance slowly only if the young person wants to.**



*Mealtimes feel stressful or emotionally draining*

→ **Top tip: Reduce conversation demands about food and focus on calm routine rather than negotiation.**



*If a safe food tastes slightly different, I may stop eating it*

→ **Top tip: Keep backups available and avoid framing it as “fussy” – slight differences can feel very significant.**



# Under-Responsive to TASTE input

Use this section if gustatory needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



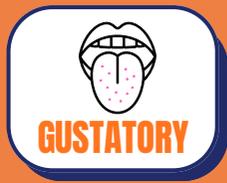
## SCHOOL

-  *I prefer very strong flavours or spicy foods to feel satisfied*  
→ **Top tip: Choose stronger flavours safely, but balance them with awareness of how your body feels.**
-  *I add lots of sauce, seasoning or flavouring to food*  
→ **Top tip: Add seasoning gradually and taste between additions rather than all at once.**
-  *I don't always notice when food tastes bland or unusual*  
→ **Top tip: Pause occasionally while eating and check in with the taste and texture before continuing.**
-  *I may eat quickly without noticing taste*  
→ **Top tip: Slow down slightly and take short pauses so your body has time to register flavour and fullness.**
-  *I put non-food items in my mouth without thinking*  
→ **Top tip: Keep appropriate chew alternatives available (gum, safe chew items) and increase awareness of when this happens.**



## HOME

-  *I prefer very strong, sour, spicy or intense flavours*  
→ **Top tip: Include strong flavours safely but avoid increasing intensity automatically – notice what's "enough."**
-  *I seek out chewy or crunchy foods for extra sensory input*  
→ **Top tip: Include safe crunchy or chewy foods as part of meals rather than relying on constant snacking.**
-  *I eat quickly and don't always notice when I'm full*  
→ **Top tip: Use visual portioning or short pauses during meals to help your body catch up with fullness signals.**
-  *I may over-season food without realising*  
→ **Top tip: Season in small amounts and taste before adding more.**
-  *I don't always notice when food is too hot in temperature*  
→ **Top tip: Pause briefly before eating hot food and check temperature to avoid burns.**



# From Patterns to Practical Support

If taste (gustatory) needs are affecting learning, independence, or emotional regulation, use this section to identify realistic, agreed supports. If taste sensitivities increase in particular environments (e.g. dining hall, eating out, food tech, after school), use these supports to reduce stress and build predictability. Supports should feel respectful, discreet, and avoid unnecessary pressure.



## IF TASTE NEEDS ARE IMPACTING...

### LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

- Agree access to safe, predictable foods at lunchtime
- Allow participation in food-related lessons without mandatory tasting
- Avoid public pressure to “try just one bite”
- Provide advance notice of food-based activities
- Allow eating in a calmer or quieter space if needed

### SELF-CARE OR INDEPENDENCE

- Build predictable meal routines (timing, brands, preparation style)
- Keep backup safe foods available
- Introduce new foods gradually and only with agreement
- Support awareness of fullness and pace of eating
- Use visual cues (portioning, plating separately) rather than mixing foods

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Identify when taste pressure increases anxiety (social meals, dining hall, family events)
- Reduce negotiation or conflict around food
- Build in decompression after stressful meals
- Use preferred textures or flavours as grounding tools when overwhelmed
- Avoid sudden brand or recipe changes where possible

### NEEDS APPEAR MASKED IN SCHOOL

- Continue agreed supports even if the young person appears to cope
- Notice avoidance, skipped meals, or fatigue later in the day
- Check in privately rather than drawing attention at lunchtime
- Remember: coping does not mean comfortable

## TASTE NEEDS APPEAR MORE NOTICEABLE...

### TRANSITIONS

- Pre-warn about changes to routine meals
- Avoid introducing new foods during already stressful days
- Plan ahead for school trips or events involving food

### SOCIAL / LUNCH TIME

- Allow sitting with familiar peers
- Reduce pressure from staff or peers to try new foods
- Provide consistent access to packed lunch or safe options
- Avoid unnecessary commentary about food choices

### AFTER SCHOOL

- Allow time to decompress before discussing meals
- Keep dinner predictable after long days
- Reduce pressure if appetite is low after school
- Have a familiar, predictable snack after school

### DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE / OUT OF ROUTINE

- Provide clear information about what food will be available
- Allow familiar snacks during trips or events
- Avoid using food as reward or consequence
- Build in recovery time if meals have been stressful



# Over-Responsive / Sensitive to VESTIBULAR input



Use this section if vestibular needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

-  *PE lessons or fast-paced movement activities make me feel anxious or overwhelmed*  
→ **Top tip: Start with grounded activities, observe first, and build up gradually rather than being pushed straight into fast movement.**
-  *Busy corridors and rushing between lessons make me feel unsettled or off balance*  
→ **Top tip: Leave class slightly early, use quieter routes, and avoid being rushed.**
-  *I feel uncomfortable when my feet leave the ground or when I am not fully stable*  
→ **Top tip: Choose activities where both feet are grounded and avoid pressure to climb, jump, or balance if it feels unsafe.**
-  *I avoid stairs, slopes or crowded stairwells because they feel unsafe*  
→ **Top tip: Use quieter stairwells, hold handrails, and allow extra time to move safely.**
-  *I feel anxious using lifts, escalators or walking on uneven surfaces*  
→ **Top tip: Use stairs instead of escalators if preferred, take uneven surfaces slowly, and plan routes in advance.**
-  *After busy movement-heavy lessons, I feel dysregulated, tired or irritable*  
→ **Top tip: Build in calm, grounded reset time after PE or practical lessons.**
-  *I feel anxious or unsafe sitting on high stools or chairs where my feet are not firmly on the floor*  
→ **Top tip: Use seating where your feet can rest flat on the floor or use a footrest if available.**



## HOME

-  *Activities like fairground rides or spinning feel too intense*  
→ **Top tip: Avoid forced participation and choose movement that feels controlled and predictable.**
-  *Car journeys, buses or trains make me feel nauseous or unwell*  
→ **Top tip: Sit facing forward, look at a fixed point, and take breaks on longer journeys. Suck on a polo or mint while looking forward.**
-  *Washing my hair or tipping my head back feels uncomfortable or stressful*  
→ **Top tip: Keep your head upright where possible, control the pace, and use predictable routines.**
-  *I feel anxious on heights, balconies or open staircases*  
→ **Top tip: Stay near solid walls or railings and avoid looking down if that increases discomfort.**
-  *After busy days with lots of movement, I feel overwhelmed*  
→ **Top tip: Plan quiet, low-movement downtime before homework or social demands.**
-  *Bending forward to tie my shoelaces or pick something up makes me feel uncomfortable or off balance*  
→ **Top tip: Sit down to tie laces or pick things up, and move slowly rather than rushing.**



# Under-Responsive to VESTIBULAR input

Use this section if vestibular needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL

-  *I find it hard to stay seated and often need to move*  
→ **Top tip: Build planned movement breaks into lessons rather than waiting until I'm restless. Allow me to stand to work or stand (without disrupting others) towards the back of the class to listen.**
-  *I fidget, rock, bounce or shift position when sitting*  
→ **Top tip: Use subtle movement options (wobble cushion, foot movement, standing desk when appropriate, allow discreet fidget).**
-  *I lean on walls, furniture or people when standing*  
→ **Top tip: Stand near a solid surface or use structured movement before long standing periods.**
-  *I seek out spinning, running or fast movement*  
→ **Top tip: Include safe, structured movement opportunities (PE, movement breaks) rather than restricting movement entirely.**
-  *I struggle with balance, coordination or gross motor tasks*  
→ **Top tip: Break physical tasks into smaller steps and allow extra time to practise.**
-  *I find it hard to negotiate busy school spaces safely*  
→ **Top tip: Slow transitions down, reduce rushing, and plan consistent routes between lessons.**



## HOME

-  *I am often in motion and find it hard to sit still*  
→ **Top tip: Include regular movement in the day (walks, stretching, short activity bursts).**
-  *I seek out bouncing, spinning or rough movement*  
→ **Top tip: Choose safe spaces for movement (trampoline, open area) rather than unsafe environments.**
-  *I slump, lean or struggle to maintain upright posture*  
→ **Top tip: Use supportive seating and build in posture resets throughout the day.**
-  *I have poor balance or coordination in everyday tasks*  
→ **Top tip: Slow tasks down and allow extra time rather than rushing.**
-  *I bump into things or misjudge distances*  
→ **Top tip: Increase awareness of space (clear pathways, reduce clutter) and practise controlled movement.**



# From Patterns to Practical Support

Use this section if vestibular (movement and balance) needs are affecting learning, independence, emotional regulation, or becoming more noticeable at certain times of the day.

If movement sensitivities increase during transitions, PE, practical lessons, travel, or busy days, use these targeted supports to reduce cumulative stress.

Supports should feel respectful, predictable, and not draw unnecessary attention.



## IF MOVEMENT NEEDS ARE IMPACTING...

### LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

- Agree seating where feet can rest firmly on the floor
- Avoid high stools if they feel unstable
- Reduce rushing between lessons
- Allow observing movement tasks before joining in
- Break physical tasks into smaller, predictable steps
- Provide alternative roles in PE when movement feels overwhelming

### SELF-CARE OR INDEPENDENCE

- Allow extra time for stairs or uneven surfaces
- Encourage sitting down for tasks that involve bending (e.g. tying laces)
- Keep head upright during grooming where possible
- Plan travel breaks on longer journeys
- Avoid sudden changes in movement routines

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Identify when movement builds up across the day (PE, transitions, practical lessons)
- Reduce exposure to fast, unpredictable movement
- Provide advance warning before high-movement activities
- Agree a quiet signal if movement begins to feel unsafe
- Recognise that for some young people movement is a powerful way to regulate emotions

### NEEDS APPEAR MASKED IN SCHOOL

- Continue agreed adjustments even if anxiety isn't obvious
- Notice irritability, shutdown, or fatigue after PE or busy days
- Check in privately rather than publicly
- Remember: avoiding certain movement may be regulation, not defiance

## MOVEMENT NEEDS APPEAR MORE NOTICEABLE...

### TRANSITIONS

- Leave class slightly early to avoid rushing
- Use quieter routes where possible
- Avoid crowded stairwells
- Allow extra time for safe movement

### SOCIAL / LUNCH TIME

- Avoid high-contact games if uncomfortable
- Identify areas where movement feels more controlled
- Reduce pressure to join fast-paced activities
- Build in short, predictable movement breaks if under-responsive

### AFTER SCHOOL

- Plan low-movement decompression time after busy days
- Avoid stacking multiple movement-heavy activities
- Delay demanding tasks until regulated
- Some young people need more intensive movement to regulate and feel 'just right'

### DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE / OUT OF ROUTINE

- Prepare for new environments (trips, new buildings, sports days)
- Explain what movement demands will look like beforehand
- Keep routines as predictable as possible



# Proprioception: The Organising System



## The power of Proprioception

Proprioception is your body awareness system.

It tells your brain where your muscles and joints are and how much force you're using.

It's the system that kicks in when you:

- Push something heavy
- Carry a bag
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Do wall push-ups
- Lift weights
- Lean or press into something

For many young people, this type of input feels calming and organising.

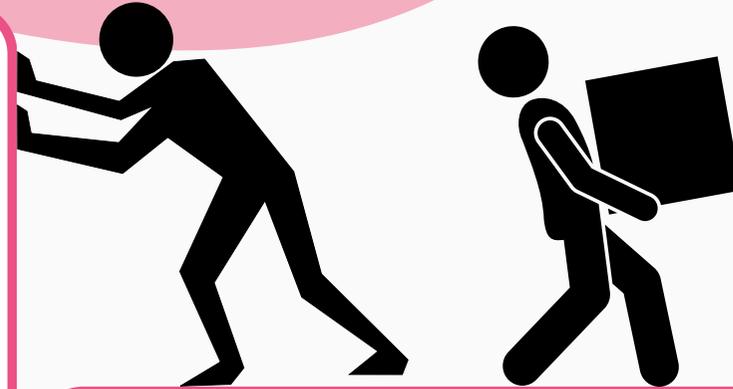
If this system isn't getting enough input, you might:

- Feel restless or fidgety
- Use too much or too little force
- Struggle to stay seated
- Seek movement or rough play
- Feel "wired" but unfocused

**When in doubt – heavy work helps.**

Adding structured pushing, pulling, lifting or resistance during the day can:

- Improve focus
- Help emotions feel steadier
- Reduce impulsive or "too much" force
- Support smoother transitions
- Make your body feel calmer and more in control



## Proprioception Principles

- Use it before things get overwhelming – not just after
- Think "muscles and pressure" rather than fast spinning
- Choose resistance (push, pull, carry, squeeze)
- Use it regularly across the day
- Increase it temporarily during stress, change, or busy periods
- Build it into routines so it feels normal, not obvious

**Proprioception helps your body feel predictable.  
And when your body feels predictable, everything else –  
emotions, attention, social situations – becomes easier to  
manage.**



# SEEKS OR NEEDS INCREASED PROPRIOCEPTIVE INPUT



Use this section if proprioception needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## SCHOOL



*I find it hard to stay seated and often lean, rock, tip my chair or shift position during lessons*

→ **Try a chair band, footrest, or sitting where you can brace your feet firmly. Build in short “pressure breaks” (wall push, carry books, refill water) between lessons.**



*I slump on the desk, rest my head on my hands, or wrap myself into my chair to feel supported*

→ **Sit where you can lean safely (back row, wall side). Use a firm cushion or hoodie for pressure. Push your feet firmly into the floor every 10–15 minutes to reset posture.**



*I bump into desks, doorways or people without meaning to*

→ **Slow your pace slightly in busy spaces. Carry something with two hands (books, tray) or a heavy backpack to increase body awareness. Use wall edges as a visual guide in corridors.**



*I misjudge personal space and may stand too close or brush past others*

→ **Use arm’s-length as a spacing guide. Stand slightly side-on in conversations. Position yourself near walls or edges in crowded spaces.**



*I use too much or too little force when writing, colouring, cutting or using tools*

→ **Do 10 seconds of hand squeezes or desk pushes before fine motor tasks. Try mechanical pencils or pens that give feedback when pressure is too strong.**



*My handwriting can look messy because I struggle to control pressure or speed*

→ **Slow down slightly and press into the table for stability. Use lined or boxed paper to guide spacing. Try brief hand resistance (squeeze ball) before writing.**



*I fidget with my hands a lot (picking skin, pulling sleeves, cracking knuckles)*

→ **Swap skin-picking for safer input: textured keyring, resistance putty, hoodie cuff squeeze, or a small grip trainer. Give your hands something structured to do**



*I chew hoodie strings, pens, nails or objects when concentrating or stressed*

→ **Use a safe chew tool or sugar-free gum (if allowed). Drink through a sports cap bottle for oral resistance. Notice when chewing increases - it’s often a stress signal.**



*I press hard on the table, squeeze items, or “heavy lean” when working*

→ **Build pressure in on purpose: wall pushes, chair dips, plank hold for 20 seconds before class. Structured pressure works better than random leaning.**



*I can seem too rough in PE, practical lessons or group work and may hurt others accidentally*

→ **Practise “controlled force” drills (slow push-ups, resistance bands). Ask for clear rules around physical contact. Think “steady strength” rather than speed.**



*When I feel dysregulated, I may slam objects, bang my bag, or punch walls/doors without thinking*

→ **This is your nervous system looking for heavy input. Replace impact with safe force: wall pushes, slam a medicine ball (if available), squeeze a tough fidget, carry something heavy.**



*I find changing for PE difficult because my body feels awkward, clumsy or hard to organise*

→ **Change slightly earlier to avoid rushing. Sit down for socks/shoes. Use the same order every time. Practise fastening skills at home slowly without time pressure.**



# SEEKS OR NEEDS INCREASED PROPRIOCEPTIVE INPUT



Use this section if proprioception needs were identified as a priority in the screening checklist.



## HOME

-  *I seek strong hugs, pressure or being “squashed” to feel calm*  
→ **Ask for firm, steady pressure rather than light touch. Use a blanket wrap, tight towel roll, or push your back firmly into a wall for safe, controlled input.**
-  *I like weighted experiences (heavy blankets, weighted lap pads, heavy hoodies)*  
→ **Build these into predictable times (homework, gaming, winding down). Use weight for short periods rather than all evening so it stays effective.**
-  *I prefer tight or heavier clothing (hood up, snug layers) because it helps me feel held together*  
→ **Choose structured, comfortable layers you can control. Compression-style clothing or a fitted hoodie can give input without drawing attention.**
-  *I chew clothing, hoodie strings, fingers or objects when I’m concentrating, stressed or bored*  
→ **Swap to safer options like gum, chewy snacks, or a chew tool. Drinking through a sports cap bottle can also give strong oral input.**
-  *I pick at skin, bite nails, crack knuckles or fiddle with my body to get input*  
→ **Give your hands something purposeful: resistance putty, grip trainer, textured keyring, or squeezing a frozen/chilled fidget tightly for 20 seconds.**
-  *I jump, crash, stomp, slam doors or use more force than I realise*  
→ **Plan “safe crash” time: wall push-ups, stair climbing, carrying laundry, moving boxes, or pushing against a sturdy surface instead of slamming.**
-  *I lean heavily on furniture, walls or people when standing or walking around*  
→ **Stand with your back against a wall or sit when possible. Press your feet firmly into the floor to ground yourself.**
-  *I struggle to calm down unless I move my body or get deep pressure*  
→ **Use a short heavy-work routine: 10 wall pushes, 20-second plank, carry something heavy upstairs, then pause and breathe.**
-  *I can accidentally hurt others during play because I misjudge my strength*  
→ **Slow your movements slightly and check in: “Is this too hard?” Practise controlled force (slow push-ups, resistance bands) to build awareness.**
-  *When I’m dysregulated I might throw objects, hit things, or punch walls/cushions*  
→ **This is your body asking for strong input. Replace with safer impact: slam a medicine ball, hit a cushion placed on the floor, squeeze a pillow tightly, or push hard against a wall.**
-  *I find fine motor tasks hard (buttons, laces, hair, opening packets)*  
→ **Do quick hand squeezes before starting. Sit down to increase stability. Break tasks into steps and slow them down.**
-  *I seem clumsy, drop things, knock drinks over, or misjudge where my body is*  
→ **Slow transitions between tasks. Use two hands when carrying items. Pause before moving through tight spaces and check your body position.**



# From Patterns to Practical Support

Use this section if proprioceptive (muscle and pressure) needs are affecting focus, independence, emotions, or becoming more noticeable at certain times of the day.

Proprioceptive input helps your body feel organised and steady.

When it's not balanced, you might feel restless, floppy, heavy, rough, clumsy, or wired-but-tired.



## IF PROPRIOCEPTION NEEDS ARE IMPACTING...

### LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

- Sit where your feet are firmly grounded (use a footrest or chair band if helpful)
- Choose seating near a wall or edge for extra stability
- Do brief resistance before focused work (wall push, desk press, carry books)
- Keep your workspace clearly defined to reduce body drift
- Use a writing slope or sturdy folder to improve shoulder stability
- Work in short, timed focus blocks with planned movement resets
- Use “press and release” warm-ups (hand squeeze, push fists together) before writing

### SELF-CARE OR INDEPENDENCE

- Notice when your body needs pressure – don't wait until it's overwhelming
- Use structured pressure breaks (1–5 minutes) between tasks
- Break grooming or changing tasks into a consistent order
- Slow movements down when coordination feels off
- Use two hands for tasks that require control
- Practise fine motor skills separately when calm
- Sit down for tasks like tying laces if balance feels unstable
- Use heavier cutlery or tools if force control is inconsistent

### EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Use heavy work before stress builds, not only after
- Identify your early “body signals” (restless legs, gripping, slamming)
- Pair deep pressure with breathing (press hands together, count 5, release)
- Use resistance (carry, push, plank, wall sit) rather than fast movement
- Avoid very high-intensity movement if you're already overwhelmed
- Keep movement steady and rhythmic rather than chaotic
- If emotions spike, use controlled force (wall pushes) instead of impact

### NEEDS APPEAR MASKED IN SCHOOL

- Keep agreed strategies consistent, even if you seem “fine”
- Notice end-of-day fatigue – regulation takes effort
- Build pressure breaks into the day before things unravel
- Rotate responsibilities that involve carrying or moving equipment
- Offer short “reset” opportunities between lessons
- Teach self-advocacy: “I need a quick pressure break”
- Use weighted lap pad or firm grounding input during seated learning if helpful



# From Patterns to Practical Support

Use this section if proprioceptive (muscle and pressure) needs are affecting focus, independence, emotions, or becoming more noticeable at certain times of the day. Proprioceptive input helps your body feel organised and steady. When it's not balanced, you might feel restless, floppy, heavy, rough, clumsy, or wired-but-tired.



## PROPRIOCEPTION NEEDS APPEAR MORE NOTICEABLE...

### DURING HEIGHTENED ENERGY STATES

*(Excitement, dysregulation, overwhelm, conflict)*

**When arousal rises, force control can drop. You might crash into things, push too hard, slam objects, or seek intense input.**

Try:

- Use short, structured heavy work (wall pushes, chair stacking, carrying books)
- Choose resistance over speed (push, pull, hold – not spin)
- Reduce verbal input while your body is moving
- Avoid fast, chaotic movement if already overwhelmed
- Use slow, controlled strength (plank, wall sit, resistance band)
- Keep physical boundaries clear (defined space, stable desk area)

### DURING LONG PERIODS OF SITTING

*(Assemblies, extended writing, revision sessions)*

**Sustained posture needs muscle stability. Without enough input, you might fidget, lean, chew, or zone out.**

Try:

- Keep feet firmly grounded (footrest, resistance band)
- Press palms into the desk or push feet into the floor for 10 seconds
- Build in short movement resets every 20–30 minutes
- Alternate between sitting and standing where possible
- Use weighted or resistance tools only if they genuinely help
- Slow posture down rather than collapsing into it

### AFTER SCHOOL

*(Fatigue, emotional drop, physical restlessness)*

**Many young people “hold it together” all day and then crash at home.**

Try:

- Do structured heavy work before screens or homework
- Keep expectations low-demand at first
- Use deep pressure (blanket wrap, firm shower pressure, leaning into sofa)
- Avoid jumping straight into loud or high-speed activities
- Expect increased force-seeking when tired
- Build a predictable decompression routine
- Use thicker drinks (smoothie, milkshake, yoghurt) through a straw for oral pressure

### DURING PERIODS OF CHANGE / OUT OF ROUTINE

*(New classroom, timetable shift, exams, trips, holidays)*

**Proprioception supports internal predictability. When routine changes, your body may feel less organised.**

Try:

- Increase structured movement breaks temporarily
- Start and end the day with heavy work
- Add extra time for dressing, packing, organising
- Revisit seating and posture supports if your body feels “off”
- Lower precision demands when under stress
- Build more frequent reset moments into the day
- Remind yourself what tools and strategies are available



# INTEROCEPTION: INTERNAL BODY SIGNALS



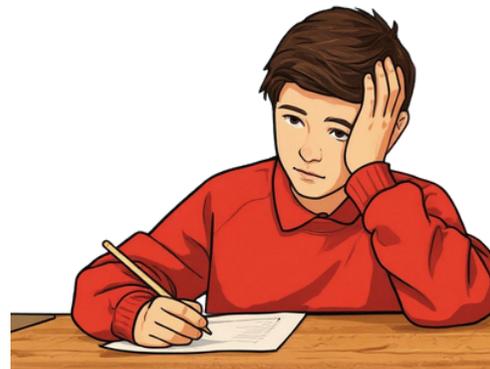
Interoception is your ability to notice what's happening inside your body.

## This Section Focuses On:

- Building awareness of your body signals
- Reducing overwhelm when signals feel too strong
- Creating simple, predictable body check-in routines
- Learning practical, safe responses

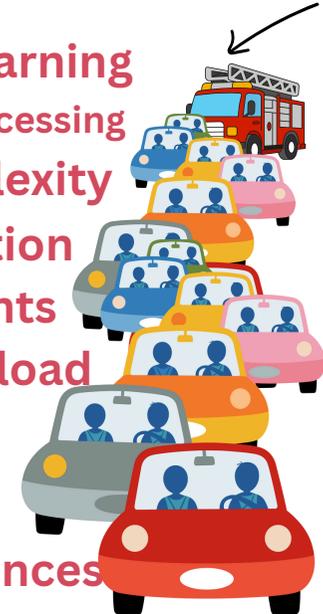
## When Using This Section:

- Choose one body area to focus on first (e.g. hunger, toilet, headaches, energy levels)
- Notice whether your signals feel “quiet” (hard to notice) or “loud” (overwhelming)
- Start with routines and reminders before expecting independence
- Practise noticing signals at calm times – not only during stress



## Interoception

Learning  
Language Processing  
Social Complexity  
Attention  
Bright lights  
Visual overload  
Smells  
Noise  
Tactile experiences



Interoception does not operate alone.

Your body signals compete with everything else happening around you like learning demands, social thinking, language processing, noise, light, movement and emotional load.

When your brain is managing lots of sensory and thinking demands at once, quieter body signals (like thirst or needing the toilet) can get missed. The busier or more overwhelming the day, the harder it can be to notice what your body needs. That doesn't mean you're ignoring it. It means your brain is prioritising survival over subtle signals.



# INTEROCEPTION PRINCIPLES



## 1. Awareness Before Independence

- You can't respond to body signals you don't notice yet.
- It's normal if you need reminders at first
- Body awareness develops gradually
- Independence grows with practice, not pressure

## 2. Regulation First

- When you're overwhelmed, your body signals get harder to read.
- Calm your nervous system before trying to analyse feelings
  - Movement, pressure, or quiet time often helps first
  - Reflection works better when your body feels steady

## 3. Quiet Signals Need Predictability

- Some body signals are subtle – like hunger, thirst, or tiredness.
- Use regular check-in times instead of waiting to “feel it”
- Try simple prompts: “Am I hungry? Thirsty? Tense? Tired?”
- Routine helps quiet signals get louder over time

## 4. Loud Signals Need Containment

- Sometimes body sensations feel intense or scary.
- Strong emotions often come with strong body signals
- Validate the feeling first
- Learn simple scales (low / medium / high) to measure intensity
- Reduce escalation before problem-solving

## 5. Language Builds Awareness

- The more words you have, the easier it is to understand your body.
- Use simple body-based language (“tight chest,” “heavy head,” “buzzing legs”)
- Connect sensations to everyday words
- Repetition helps your brain build clearer maps

## 6. Attach Body Checks to Daily Routines

- Body awareness improves with consistency.
- Link check-ins to predictable moments (before school, before eating, before bed)
- Keep it short and simple
- Small habits build strong awareness

## 7. Remove Shame

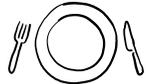
- Forgetting to drink, missing toilet cues, or not noticing tiredness isn't laziness.
- It's information about how your body processes signals
- Respond with curiosity, not criticism
- Problem-solve calmly

## 8. Context Always Matters

- Your body awareness changes depending on what's happening around you.
- Stress, noise, fatigue, and social pressure can reduce signal awareness
- Support the environment as well as the body
- The busier the day, the harder interoception can be



# INTEROCEPTION: INTERNAL BODY SIGNALS



## HUNGER & THIRST

-  I notice hunger or thirst really quickly and it feels urgent or distracting  
→ **Keep a water bottle and safe snack accessible. Eat little and often rather than waiting until you're starving. Rate hunger 1-5 before it hits 5.**
-  If I'm not allowed to eat or drink straight away, I get irritable, anxious or shaky  
→ **Pre-plan fuel before long lessons. Use slow breathing if you need to wait. Let staff know early rather than when you're already dysregulated.**
-  I can go most of the school day without realising I'm hungry or thirsty, then suddenly feel dizzy, angry or overwhelmed  
→ **Use scheduled check-ins (break, lunch, end of school). Don't rely on "feeling hungry." Use alarms if needed.**
-  When I'm gaming or focused, I forget to eat or drink  
→ **Set timed reminders every 60-90 minutes. Pair eating/drinking with natural breaks (new level, end of episode).**



## TOILETING

-  When I feel the need to go, it feels sudden and urgent  
→ **Use scheduled toilet times instead of waiting for urgency. Go at break even if it doesn't feel strong.**
-  I worry a lot about needing the toilet  
→ **Plan where toilets are. Agree a quiet signal with staff. Reduce anxiety by increasing predictability.**
-  I don't notice until it feels urgent  
→ **Use body check prompts mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Don't wait for discomfort.**
-  I ignore the feeling because I'm worried to ask  
→ **Agree a discreet system in advance. Leaving early is easier than managing panic later.**



If I feel even slightly tired, everything feels harder  
→ **Notice early signs (heavy eyes, slower thinking). Reduce demand before overwhelm builds. Add movement or fresh air before pushing through.**



## TIREDNESS / ENERGY



After a busy school day, I feel completely drained  
→ **Build in decompression time before after school demands. Low-demand first 30-60 minutes. Use alerting activities after your rest period.**



I don't realise I'm tired until I shut down or argue  
→ **Use predictable energy check-ins (after school, 8pm). Rate energy 1-5 daily to learn your pattern.**



I stay up late because I don't feel tired – then crash  
→ **Use a set wind-down routine rather than waiting to "feel sleepy." Reduce screens 60 mins before bed. Create a "sleepy" routine.**



# INTEROCEPTION: INTERNAL BODY SIGNALS



## TEMPERATURE REGULATION

- If a space is too hot or cold, I can't concentrate*  
→ Sit near ventilation where possible. Layer clothing so you can adjust quickly.
- Small temperature changes affect my mood*  
→ Build transition time when moving indoors/outdoors. Adjust clothing before discomfort escalates.
- I don't notice I'm too hot or cold*  
→ Use routine checks when entering new spaces. Ask yourself: "Do I need a layer on or off?"
- I forget to adjust clothing*  
→ Make it part of transition routines (arrive → check temperature → adjust hoodie/coat).



## PAIN / ILLNESS

- Minor aches feel intense and worrying*  
→ Rate discomfort 1–5. Notice whether it changes with rest, water, or breathing before assuming something serious.
- I focus on small sensations and worry*  
→ Shift attention to external grounding (5 things you see, 4 you feel). Not every sensation means danger.
- I don't notice injuries until pointed out*  
→ Do a quick body scan after PE or sports. Check hands, knees, feet intentionally.
- I carry on when unwell*  
→ Learn your early warning signs (headache, irritability, heavy body). Respond earlier rather than pushing through.



- Strong emotions hit fast and feel huge*  
→ Strong emotions usually have a physical build-up before the "explosion." Start noticing your early physical signs: jaw clenching, fists tightening, heat in your face, restless legs, heart speeding up.  
→ Use a simple scale (1–5) for intensity. If you can catch it at a 2 or 3, you have more control. At a 5, your thinking brain is offline.  
→ Use body-based regulation first (wall pushes, paced breathing, cold water on wrists, stepping outside briefly). Talking comes after your body settles.



## EMOTIONS & INTERNAL SENSATIONS



- When my heart races, I panic*  
→ A racing heart is your nervous system's alarm system — not proof something is medically wrong. It's the same response your body uses for running or excitement.  
→ Label it accurately: "This is adrenaline." Naming it reduces fear.  
→ Slow your exhale longer than your inhale (e.g. 4 in, 6 out) to signal safety to your nervous system.



- Reactions feel like they come out of nowhere*  
→ Emotions rarely appear instantly. They usually build underneath as small body signals.  
→ After an incident, rewind the tape. Ask: What was happening 15 minutes before? Was I hungry? Tired? Overstimulated? Socially stressed?



- I struggle to explain what I'm feeling*  
→ Start with body descriptions, not emotion labels. "My chest feels tight," "My stomach feels heavy," "My head feels hot."  
→ Use comparison language: "It feels like pressure," "It feels buzzy," "It feels like I want to escape."  
→ You don't need the perfect word. A rough description is enough for adults to support you.