



Improving Futures

Heard. Understood. Supported. It's your journey.

Understanding the 8 Senses

Most people know about the five senses but our bodies actually use eight. For many children (especially those who are autistic, sensory seeking, anxious, or neurodivergent), these senses can work differently, affecting behaviour, emotions, and daily life. Understanding these sensory differences is key to supporting your child's development, regulation, and learning.



Sight (Visual Sense)

How we process light, movement, colours, shapes and what we see. Signs of difference: avoiding bright lights, sensitivity to colours, loving spinning objects, finding it hard to focus visually.



Hearing (Auditory Sense)

How we make sense of sound. Signs of difference: covering ears, distress with noise, seeking loud sounds, difficulty following spoken instructions.



Smell (Olfactory Sense)

How we detect and interpret scents. Signs of difference: strong reactions to smells, avoiding certain environments, sniffing objects.



Taste (Gustatory Sense)

How we experience flavours. Signs of difference: restricted diet, food aversions, sensory-based eating struggles (including ARFID).



Touch (Tactile Sense)

How we feel textures, temperature and pressure. Signs of difference: avoiding clothing, refusing baths, discomfort with brushing teeth or hair, craving deep pressure.



Balance (Vestibular Sense)

Our sense of movement, balance and where our head is in space. Signs of difference: toe walking, spinning, fear of movement, clumsiness, constant need to jump or move.



Body Awareness (Proprioception)

How our muscles and joints tell us where our body is and how hard to push, pull or hold things. Signs of difference: heavy movement seeking, crashing, chewing, poor coordination, difficulty judging force.



Internal Awareness (Interoception)

How we understand internal body signals like hunger, thirst, pain, temperature and emotions. Signs of difference: difficulty knowing when hungry or thirsty, toileting issues, low pain awareness, emotional overwhelm.

Why This Matters & How You Can Help

Understanding Makes a Difference

When the senses are overwhelmed or under-responsive, everyday tasks can feel stressful, confusing, or physically uncomfortable.

Understanding sensory needs can help you:

- Reduce meltdowns and anxiety
- Improve communication
- Support eating, sleeping, and daily routines
- Help children feel safe and regulated
- Create a more supportive home and nursery environment

Simple Ways to Support

- Predictable routines and calm transitions
- Sensory breaks during the day
- Choice of clothing textures
- Reduced noise or use of ear defenders
- Safe movement opportunities
- Deep pressure activities (blankets, hugs if accepted)
- Visual supports for communication
- Respect their pace and preferences



Improving Futures Ltd

Compassionate support for sensory needs, neurodiversity, behaviour, EHCPs & family wellbeing.

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