

Neurodiversity Schools 101:

Thinking about the sensory environment

Sensory symptoms can be seen often in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders to a greater or lesser degree. Some children who have Dyspraxia/DCD may also describe specific sensory challenges dependent on the environment.

Individuals with sensory issues can:

- use avoiding behaviour
- be over or under sensitive to different settings
- react emotionally to different situations
- sensory seeking - likes lots of spinning.

Each individual has their own response style. When sensory issues dominate an individual's behaviour, other social/emotional symptoms may appear. These secondary effects become another problem that is separate but related.

Habits and learned fears can persist if not addressed.

Related Social and Emotional Behaviours

Your child may misperceive the world as dangerous alarming or at the very least irritating. Learned patterns and habits are often developed around avoiding disrupting sensory events or seeking out sensation that might restore comfort. Innocent memories can be stored as traumatic experiences. Relationships can be exaggerated. Behaviour with known and trusted people can be quite different than with others. These behaviours make sense if viewed as the child doing the best he/she can to 'survive'.

In schools it is important to consider the environment and how this can impact on your child's ability to maintain focus and feel at ease. Talk to school about this.

Allowing your child to adapt tasks or change environments can make real difference. e.g. moving to a quiet space; using noise cancelling headphones; soft T shirt under a shirt; alteration in lighting.

These don't cost a lot of money to achieve but a willingness to do so!

