

Supporting Differences in Autism

As sensory processing is an extremely individualized process, any support offered must be tailored to the specific needs of the individual. To better understand an individual's needs, tools like sensory checklists or assessments conducted by professionals such as Occupational Therapists can be beneficial.

Sensory Accommodations and Adaptations

Once a clear picture is established of the specific needs of the individual being supported, we can then offer:

- ◆ Accommodations for the individual: tools that allow them to regulate their own sensory experiences (e.g., noise cancelling headphones)
- ◆ Adaptations for the environment: changes to the person's surroundings that decrease exposure to undesirable stimuli and/or increase exposure to desirable stimuli (e.g., closing a classroom door to limit sounds from the hallway)

Examples of Support Strategies for Sensory Differences Impacting the Auditory Sense

Hyper-Responsive (Sensory Avoiders)		Hypo-Responsive (Sensory Seekers)	
Accommodations	Adaptations	Accommodations	Adaptations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• noise-cancelling headphones• white noise machines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• closing doors• providing quiet spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• noise makers• musical instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• turning on radio• standing closer when speaking

Importantly, we must also teach the individual how to access and use any accommodations provided. This might involve teaching new skills, such as requesting an accommodation when needed (e.g., "Can I turn off the lights?"). Doing so increases a person's ability to regulate their own sensory experience and ultimately serves to increase independence.

Supporting Individuals Experiencing Sensory Overload

Where accommodations and adaptations can be provided in advance, they help to decrease the likelihood of the person experiencing sensory overload. Once sensory overload has already begun however, the best kind of supports are those that allow the person to navigate the associated stress and anxiety, so they can return to a state of calm. Effective calming strategies should also be tailored to the individual, but might include taking deep breaths, utilizing progressive muscle relaxation techniques, or offering access to a calming space that minimizes sensory disruptions.

Collaborating with Professionals

Where you see the potential for sensory differences in the person you support, consider collaborating with an Occupational Therapist experienced in supporting sensory needs in persons with Autism for other kinds of helpful interventions. To find an OT in Ontario, please visit the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists's Website at www.OSOT.on.ca.

For more information, contact Kerry's Place Autism Services:

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