

# Educational Psychology

## Overview Guide

# Sensory diet

A “sensory diet”, first coined by Occupational Therapists Wilbarger and Wilbarger (1991), is an individualised plan of physical activities which aim to support a person’s sensory needs. We refer to 8 senses: smell, taste, touch, taste, sound, vision, proprioception (knowing where your body is in space) and interoception (balance and internal senses, such as, needing the toilet). Just like we try to eat a balanced food diet, it is important that our bodies have a balanced amount of sensory input to help us to feel regulated and in calm state to learn. A sensory diet provides regular opportunities for a child to regulate their senses and provide the sensory input that they are lacking, avoiding or seeking.

### What does a sensory diet look like?

Each child will need activities which are carefully chosen to suit their current sensory profile. Before putting together a sensory diet, it could be helpful to fill in a sensory checklist to indicate the child’s current sensory profile. A sensory diet should be; goal directed, have specific “stops” and “starts”, support a range of senses and allow the child to choose the activity that they complete. These can be complete both at home and in school.

**Physical activities** are a common part of the sensory diet and are often used in sensory circuits (which can form part of the child’s sensory diet). These can support both the **vestibular** and **proprioceptive** sensory systems. These activities can include: pushing/pulling activities, heavy lifting, push ups against the wall, bouncing on a yoga ball/trampolining, climbing on a climbing frame or wearing a heavy backpack.

**Tactile (touch):** The tactile sense detects different types of pressure, texture and temperature. Some ideas are: drawing in sand, hand massage/deep pressure, Thera putty/stress balls, play involving shaving cream, seeds, rice or slime.

**Visual:** Depending on if the child is sensory seeking or avoiding or visual input, consider using: torches to look at books, dot-to-dots or mazes, painting.

**Oral:** Oral sensory needs encompass taste, tactile and proprioceptive senses. Children may like crunchy or chew foods as well as chew toys/chew jewellery, drinking through a straw.

**Auditory:** Some ideas for calming and organizing auditory input are: listening to music/white noise/bird noise, using noise cancelling headphones/ear defenders, playing a musical instrument.

### Resources:

South Warwickshire Sensory checklist and toolkit: [chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.swft.nhs.uk/application/files/8717/2138/8101/Sensory\\_checklist\\_.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.swft.nhs.uk/application/files/8717/2138/8101/Sensory_checklist_.pdf) [chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.swft.nhs.uk/application/files/8417/2138/8100/Sensory\\_toolkit\\_.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.swft.nhs.uk/application/files/8417/2138/8100/Sensory_toolkit_.pdf)  
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