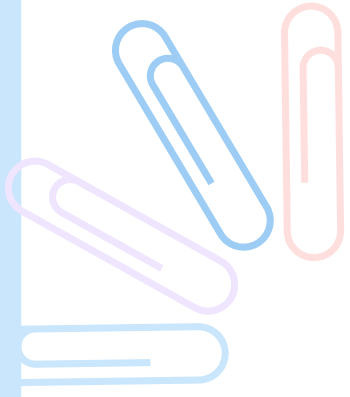


EXPLORING SENSORY NEEDS

A self-help workbook





About

This is a workbook about identifying and accommodating for your own sensory needs. Everyone has unique differences but the world is not always accommodating.

You may have learned to adapt to your surroundings and suppress your natural behaviour, often at the cost of your energy and well-being.

This workbook will help you explore your sensory world, focus on your own needs and consider what changes or adjustments can be made to support you.

Our Senses

Our senses constantly send input to our brain about what is happening both inside and outside the body, to help us stay alive! Our brains are **always** taking in sensory information, and will sort through this input to determine what it needs to pay attention to, and what is not relevant.



We may have grown up being told our experiences aren't valid- "It's not that bright, don't be silly!", "Just eat it, it doesn't taste that bad!". This can lead us to have negative beliefs about ourselves like "I'm picky/difficult/sensitive".

Neurodivergent people often experience differences in how we experience sensory input. This is **not wrong**, it is just different to neurotypical experience.



You may be used to thinking of your senses as 5: **Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch & Smell**. In this workbook we will also be looking at our 3 other senses:

- **Introception**, our internal bodily cues
- **Proprioceptive**, where we are in space
- **Vestibular**, our sense of balance

Up to 95% of autistic people experience sensory differences.

Everyone will have sensory differences

Small, regular changes to our environment can help us remain calm, grounded and comfortable.



Sensory Sensitivity

Sometimes, those of who are neurodivergent have differences with our nerve endings and how our brain perceives sensory information. They may be hyper-sensitive, we receive too much sensory input, or hypo-sensitive, and we might not receive enough.

When we cannot trust our senses to help us navigate the world around us, we can feel unsafe and anxious. We may always feel insecure in our bodies.

Hyposensitive

Under sensitive,
low
responsiveness,
under stimulating



Hypersensitive

Over sensitive,
high
responsiveness,
over stimulating

Regulating our senses and keeping in an optimal level of stimulation can be complex. For example: We might love loud music—but only when it is expected noise, like at a concert. The same level of noise in a place that is **unexpected** (like a shopping centre) may overwhelm us.



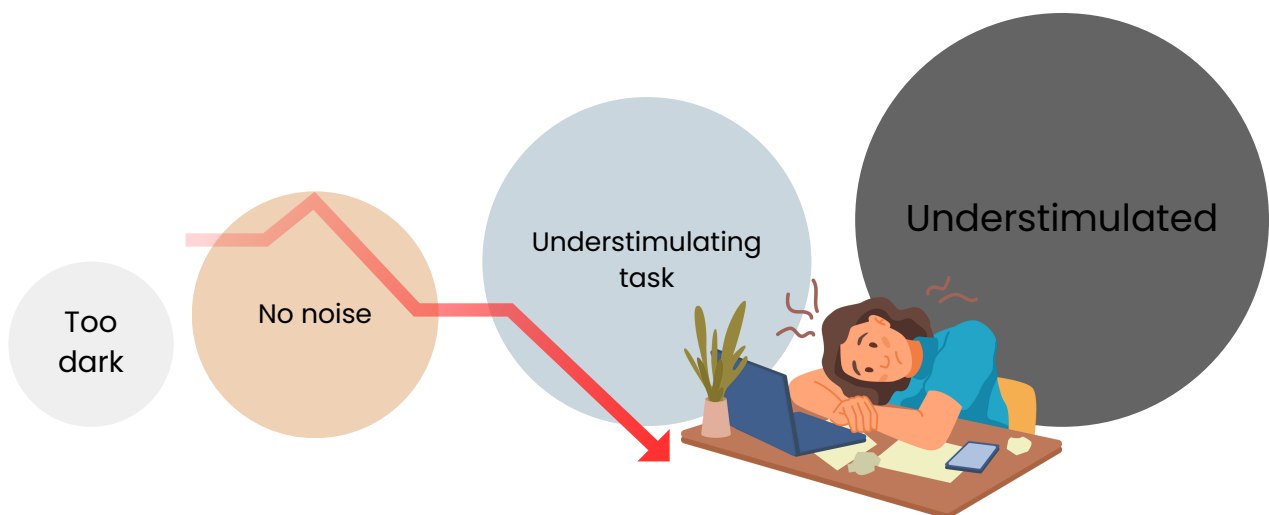
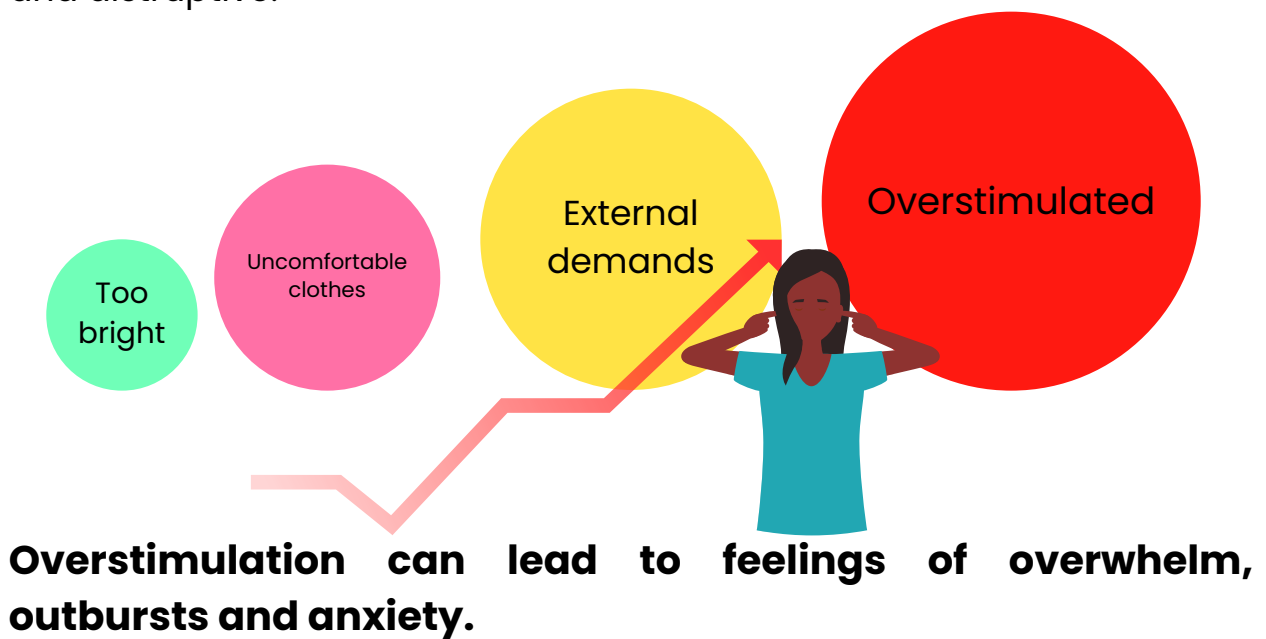
VS



We might also seek out certain sensations to help manage sensory overload in other areas, like using white noise to block out other unexpected sounds.

Sensory Sensitivity

Sensory sensitivity is a spectrum and so many of us have sensory differences. This doesn't just mean we find sensory sensations overwhelming, but we can be under-sensitive to input as well. Both being under and overstimulated can be uncomfortable, dysregulating and disruptive.



It can be common for our sensitivities to change, depending on the environment, demands, and energy levels. We might be fine with a task one day, and find it overstimulating the next. This can be confusing but it is a valid part of our experience. Be kind to yourself and be patient as you start to develop coping skills.

Where to Start

Before we explore strategies to manage attention using this model, it helps to have something specific in mind to apply them to. This way, you can try out different approaches and see what works best for you, as well as reviewing your progress as you work through this workbook.

If you haven't already, we recommend completing the "Getting Started: Core Values" workbook.

Reflection: Are there any situations (at home, work, or in your relationships) that you find particularly uncomfortable?



Reflection: How do you feel when you are in these environments?



Reflection: What will being more comfortable in this environment enable you to do? How is it meaningful?



Setting a Goal

Setting goals helps us to stay motivated in replacing unhelpful behaviours with behaviours more in line with our values.

Specific: Be as specific as possible. What is the smallest step I could take right now?

Meaningful: Align the goal with my core values. What values are underlying my goal?

Achievable: Consider Capability, Opportunity and Motivation. Ask myself, is this goal realistic right now?

Reviewed: How will I know when I've made progress towards my goal?

Time-bound: Set a timeframe. When will I complete this by?

My Goal

Setting goals helps us to stay motivated in replacing unhelpful behaviours with behaviours more in line with our values.

Specific:

Meaningful:

Achievable:

Reviewed:

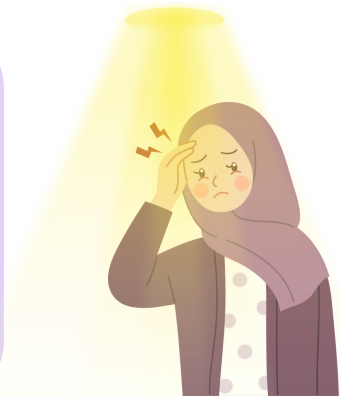
Time-bound:

Sight

Differences in sensory responses to light is really common, but often goes unnoticed because we get so **used** to it, and don't realise the impact it has on us over time.

Hypersensitivity

- Sensitivities to colour
- Discomfort or struggling to concentrate under bright lights
- Noticing small changes in the environment, like something out of place or dirt



Hyposensitivity

- Seeking out bright lights, colours, or flashing lights
- Poor depth perception (difficulty working how near or far away things are)
- Clumsiness
- Objects appearing dark/ missing details

Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity



Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to light. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

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Sound

Our sense of sound can help give us important information about our environment, and therefore our safety.



Hypersensitivity

- Startled by loud noises
- Struggling to concentrate or focus in busy environments
- Sounds blurring together
- Struggling to hear conversations

Hyposensitivity

- We might speak very loudly
- Listening to things on max volume
- We might stim verbally, like singing or humming
- Seeking out very loud environments



Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity

Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to sound. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

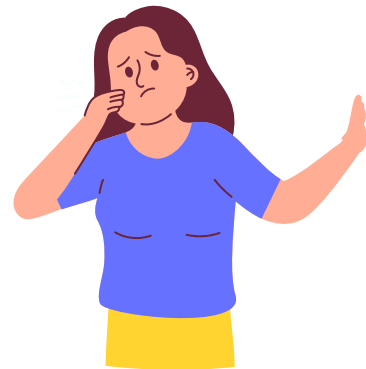
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Smell

Our sense of smell is a sense a lot of us experience some processing differences with, but we're not always aware of it!

Hypersensitivity

- Noticing smells others do not
- Having a strong reaction to smells
- Headaches around perfumes, cleaning products
- Smelling laundry detergent on clothes



Hyposensitivity

- We might seek out strong smells
- We might not notice our own scent
- We might overuse perfumes, detergents and body sprays

Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity

Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to smell. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

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Taste

Our sense of taste, smell and touch can be closely interlinked.



Hypersensitivity

- We might eat the same foods
- Prefer very bland foods, that are the same each time
- We might gag at certain foods
- We might have a limited diet

Hyposensitivity

- We might eat the same foods
- Prefer very bland foods, that are the same each time
- We might gag at certain foods
- We might have a limited diet



Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity

Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to taste. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

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Touch

Our sense of touch can also be thought of as our sensitivity to pressure.

Hypersensitivity

- Disliking being touched
- Sensitive to pain
- Distaste for brushing hair, teeth and other care tasks



Hyposensitivity

- Seeking out pressure
- Seeking out physical touch
- High pain tolerance
- Self harming behaviours

Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity

Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to touch. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

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Introception

Introception is our internal bodily sensations, like our emotions and bodily signals.

Hypersensitivity

- Being very sensitive or overwhelmed to bodily cues
- Being over responsive to cues:
 - Using the toilet often
 - Overeating
 - Over sleeping



Hyposensitivity

- Not noticing bodily cues
- Not eating regularly
- Not recognising when hungry
- Not knowing when you need to use the bathroom



Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity

Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to your bodily cues. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

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Vestibular

Our vestibular system is a sensory system in the inner ear and brain that provides information about our sense of balance.

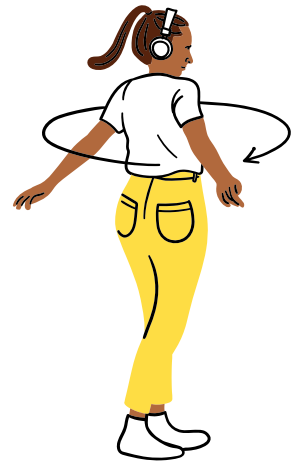


Hypersensitivity

- Motion sickness
- Difficulties with coordination and balance
- Being clumsy
- Frequently 'putting things down' and instantly losing them

Hyposensitivity

- Seeking out deep pressure, from other people or from heavy objects. We might like a tight hug!
- Rocking, stimulating self by swaying when standing upright, or moving our legs when sitting down



Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity

Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to your sense of balance. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

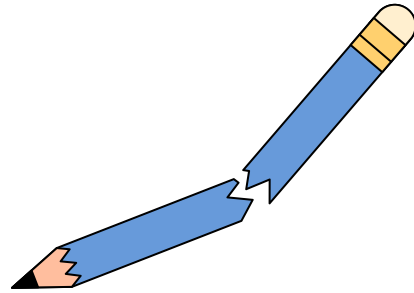
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Proprioception

Proprioception is the sense that helps us know where our body parts are as well as the force we are using when we move.

Hypersensitivity

- Difficulty with fine motor skills
- Applying more force than you meant to
- Difficulty with balance



Hyposensitivity

- Standing too close to people or things
- Clumsiness
- Craving deep pressure

Reflection: Identifying your sensitivity

Colour in to indicate how over or under responsive you tend to be to proprioception. Is it a sense you tend to be under or over sensitive too? Remember, this can change frequently, but it can be helpful to record your 'normal'.

Hyposensitive

Hypersensitive

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Reflection Point

Which sense are you the most responsive to?



Which senses are you the least responsive to?



Remember it is normal for our sensitivities to be more pronounced on certain days, change and flip. It can help to keep a diary if you're struggling to identify any patterns in your sensitivities.

Struggling to identify sensitivities?

Remember it is normal for our sensitivities to be more pronounced on certain days, change and flip. It can help to keep a diary if you're struggling to identify any patterns in your sensitivities.

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:
Tuesday	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:
Wednesday	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:
Thursday	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:
Friday	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:	What: Where: Comfort Level:

Sensory Accommodations

The next few pages will cover some ways to both soothe and stimulate your senses. Remember, the goal is to make sure you are accommodating for yourself as best as possible. Small changes throughout the day can have a big difference, and can add up.

Tips

- Identify the situation you want to adjust
- Pick a sense you find either under or overstimulating
- Incorporate one of the suggestions
- Review. How was your mood before and after? How was your anxiety level?

Repeat until you find which adjustments work for you in each setting!

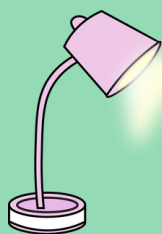
Accommodating for differences in visual processing

If overwhelmed: USE SOFT LIGHTING



Many devices, like monitors and smart phones have a setting to filter out harsh blue light, or you can buy special screen shields to do this

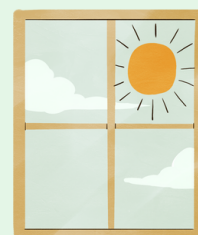
Turn off overhead lights and opt for soft, dimmer (and controllable!) lighting, like lamps



Sunglasses, eye shields, and brimmed hats are all valid options to make you more comfortable

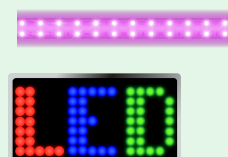
To stimulate: ADD LIGHT or COLOUR

Work in the line of direct light, for example facing a window



Use coloured pens and highlighters to keep your attention when working

Incorporate dynamic, colorful lighting into your workspace



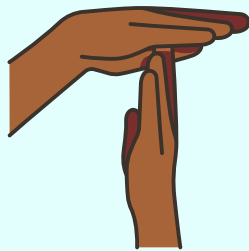
An adjustment I might find helpful could be:

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Accommodating for differences in audio processing

If overwhelmed: Reduce sound

Schedule regular breaks if you know you're going to be exposed to loud environments- even if you don't think you'll need them



Use ear plugs when sleeping or concentrating, to calm your nervous systems response to noises

Noise cancelling headphones can help "turn down" the environment but still allow you to hear conversation if needed



To stimulate: Add sound or music

White noise, for example from a fan, or playing from headphones, can provide non distracting audio stimulation



Create a list of sounds that make you feel energized, and one that makes you feel soothed. Use them to help regulate yourself accordingly.

Playing music or a favorite podcast whilst you work can provide some extra stimulation to help you focus



An adjustment I might find helpful could be:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for a user to write an adjustment they might find helpful.

Accommodating for differences in smell perception

If overwhelmed: Reduce input

Use unscented products whenever possible, for example when bathing or washing clothes



Sit near open windows where possible, or invest in air purifiers to keep lingering smells to a minimum

Communicate your needs to those around you, so they can be mindful when eating or using fragrance themselves



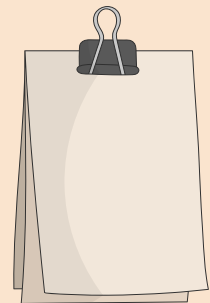
To stimulate: Incorporate Smell

Be mindful you may be less sensitive to the smells of toxins (smoke, gases) in the air- make sure you have working alarms



Use flowers, candles or oil diffusers for passive stimulation (be careful with little people, furry friends and oil diffusers)

Create (and use) a list of smells that make you feel calm, or energised. Add these to your routine as needed



An adjustment I might find helpful could be:

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for writing an adjustment.

Accommodating for differences in taste perception

If overwhelmed: Reduce input

Make a list of your safe foods –the ones you find comforting and easy to eat. Keep these foods easily accessible to ensure you always have something satisfying and manageable when needed.



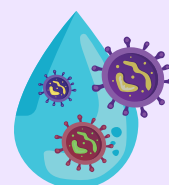
Smoothies, vitamin supplements and meal replacements are a viable option- but always speak to your doctor first

If you dislike mint, try neutral or fruity toothpaste, mild mouthwashes, or ask your dentist for alternatives.



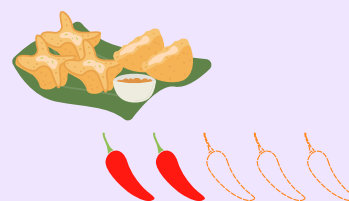
To stimulate: Incorporate Taste

Be mindful you may be less able to detect food or water that has gone “off” or bad- use your other senses and be cautious



Chewing gum is a small way to add oral sensory feedback throughout the day

Consider adding spicy, strong or crunchy foods into your diet throughout the day, for added stimulation



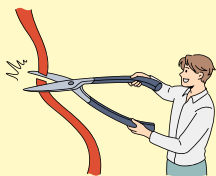
An adjustment I might find helpful could be:

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Accommodating for differences in tactile perception

If overwhelmed: Reduce input

Wear non constrictive clothing where possible, avoiding clothes that put pressure on areas you find uncomfortable



Cut the tags out of clothes and be mindful of loose threads, or clothes that are made of multiple textures (like those with stitched logos)

Communicate with others that you can find touch overstimulating, so they are mindful of your boundaries



To stimulate: Incorporate pressure

For those who like to feel various textures, tactile patches sewn onto clothing or accessories provide easy access to tactile input



Fidget toys and objects with different textures Fidget spinners, or textured rings can be carried around throughout the day.

Use weight for passive input. Weighted blankets, lap pads or even just a heavy pile of books on your lap. This can have a calming effect.



An adjustment I might find helpful could be:

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for writing an adjustment.

Accommodating for differences in vestibular processing

If overwhelmed: Reduce input

Gentle squeezing, weighted blanket or compression clothing can also provide calming, stabilizing input



Pushing or pulling heavy objects provide deep pressure feedback, which can be soothing and grounding.

Slow, controlled movements can help. Slow walking, stretching, or gentle rocking can help the body regain a sense of balance and stability



To stimulate: Incorporate pressure

Introduce "movement breaks" - moving in a way that feels natural to you, regardless of what it may "look" like. Try rocking, swaying, or other repetitive movements



Challenge your balance- using a balance board, or yoga or tai chi, which involve controlled movements and body awareness, also provide gentle but effective vestibular stimulation

If you can do it- Handstands, headstands, or even crawling on hands can provide strong vestibular input through changes in orientation!



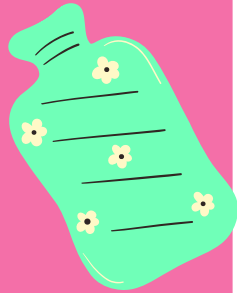
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Accommodating for differences in interoceptive processing

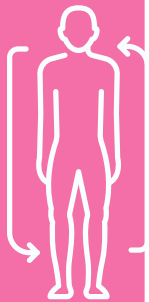
If overwhelmed: Reduce input

Use temperature, (like a hot water bottle) applying to the stomach, neck, or chest and try to focus your attention on the sensation



Do a body scan and check in with yourself- what is your body telling you right now? What emotions/sensations are present, and what do you need?

If you are overwhelmed by your internal experience (sensations or emotions) try a grounding technique to pay attention to your other senses



To stimulate: Incorporate pressure



Set frequent "body check in" times, where you focus on checking in with your body and what you need in that moment

Keep visual reminders handy to remind you to drink, for example keeping your water bottle on your desk



You may be undersensitive to your bodies cues- try following a set time to eat if skipping meals or overeating is a problem

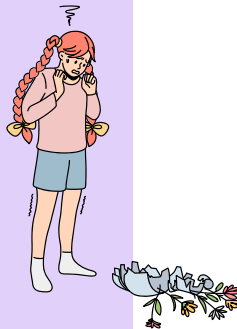
An adjustment I might find helpful could be:

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Accommodating for differences in proprioceptive processing

To reduce:

Controlled Environments:
Provide a safe and calm space to reduce overwhelming sensations. Minimize chaotic or unstructured physical activities.



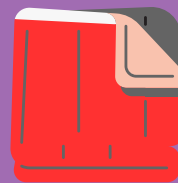
Introduce yoga, tai chi, or stretching exercises that involve slow and intentional movements. Use activities that enhance balance and coordination

Adjust Demands:
Reduce tasks requiring fine motor precision (e.g., threading needles).



To Stimulate

Engage in sports that emphasize body awareness and coordination. Practice motor skills through activities like dancing, martial arts, or guided exercises.



Increased Physical Input:
Use weighted blankets, vests, or compression garments for consistent proprioceptive feedback.

Controlled Environments:
Provide a safe and calm space if you're prone to being clumsy!



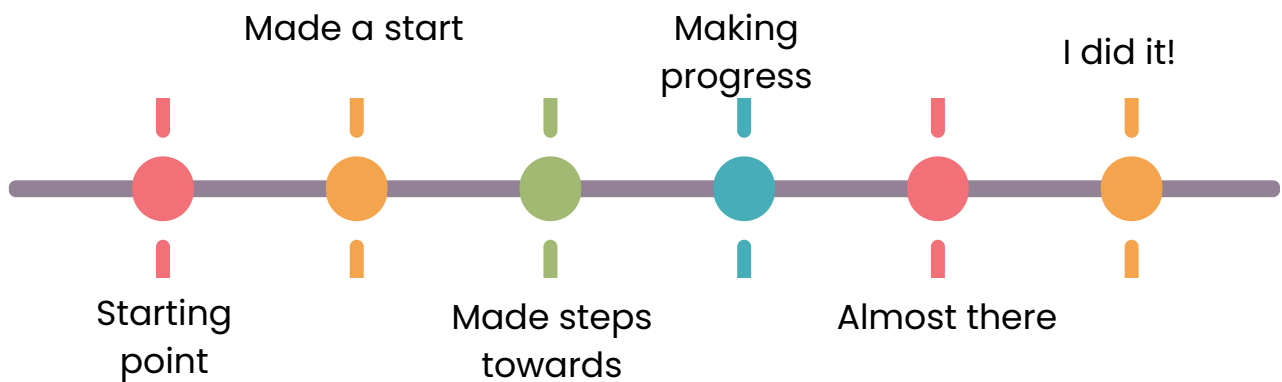
An adjustment I might find helpful could be:

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Review

It's important to check in on your goals regularly and see how things are going. Use these next few sheets to keep track of any behaviour changes you try from our other workbooks.

Goal progress this week



Have you made any progress towards meeting your goal this week?

Are there any challenges or barriers you've identified when trying to complete your goals?

Have your needs or priorities shifted since you set your goal?

References

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Find this helpful?

We hope you find this workbook helpful. For more free evidence-based workbooks, head to ndhelp.co.uk

Remember: your needs are, and always have been, valid.