



# Toolkit: Managing Sensory Needs

*A parent's guide to recognising, supporting, and embracing sensory differences*

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## 1. Introduction

Every autistic child experiences the world differently and sensory needs are a huge part of that experience.

This toolkit from **Barney's Box** offers a clear, step-by-step path to understanding your child's sensory profile and building a calm, supportive environment.

You are not alone in this. Sensory challenges can be overwhelming, but with knowledge, support, and practical tools, you can help your child feel safer, more comfortable, and more in control.

## 2. What are Sensory Needs?

Sensory needs relate to how a person processes information from the world through their:

- Sight
- Sound
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch
- Movement (vestibular)
- Body awareness (proprioception)

Some children experience sensory input **more intensely** (hypersensitive), others **less intensely** (hyposensitive), or a combination of both.



### 3. Understanding Sensory Processing

Autistic children may:

- Cover ears or avoid noisy places
- Seek constant movement or pressure
- Refuse certain clothing or food textures
- Be drawn to lights, spinning, or tapping objects
- Get overwhelmed in busy shops or classrooms



**Barney's Box Reminder:** These aren't bad behaviours – they're attempts to self-regulate.

## 4. Common Sensitivities

### Hypersensitive (Over-reactive)

- Distracted or distressed by background noises
- Avoids touch or messy play
- Dislikes bright lights or strong smells
- Startles easily

### Hyposensitive (Under-reactive)

- Constantly moving or spinning
- Chews objects or clothing
- Crashes into things or seeks pressure
- Doesn't notice injuries or temperature changes

Some children swing between both depending on their environment or stress levels.

## 5. Creating a Sensory Support Plan

Barney's Box encourages families to create a **Sensory Support Plan** to feel prepared.

### Step 1: Observe and record

- What environments or sensations cause stress?
- What helps your child feel calm?

Use a Sensory Diary (template available)

### Step 2: Identify patterns

- Look at time of day, type of input, or settings

“Loud parks are tricky, but headphones help.”

### Step 3: Trial calming activities

- Create a “calm” or “sensory” corner at home.
- Try weighted toys, body socks, etc.

### Step 4: Work with your child’s preferences

- Respect refusals (e.g. touching slime)
- Offer alternatives (e.g. dry pasta play)



## 6. Sensory Diets (Daily Activities to Regulate)

A “sensory diet” includes regular input tailored to your child’s needs.

Examples:

- **Proprioceptive (body pressure):** jumping, heavy blankets, pushing walls
- **Vestibular (movement):** swings, balance boards, spinning chairs
- **Oral:** chewy tubes, crunchy snacks, blowing bubbles
- **Tactile:** sand play, water beads, textured fabrics
- **Auditory:** calming playlists, noise-cancelling headphones
- **Visual:** glitter jars, lava lamps, soft lighting

## 6. Adapting Home, School & Public Spaces

### At Home

- Create a sensory-safe zone
- Reduce clutter, adjust lighting
- Use blackout curtains or white noise

### At School

- Work with SENCO or teacher on a sensory profile
- Ask for sensory breaks or movement time
- Provide a “safe signal” your child can use

### In Public

- Bring a sensory emergency kit (fidgets, headphones, snacks)
- Use sunflower lanyards or cards to explain needs
- Keep outings short and build in recovery time

## 6. Sensory Toolkit

Suggested items for your child’s personal sensory box:

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Soft toy or weighted lap pad
- Fidget toys or tangle toys
- Favourite snack or drink
- Scented lotion or essential oil roller
- Soft socks or compression clothing
- Visual calming item (bubble tube)

You can personalise this kit together, ownership helps build trust.

## 6. Final Note from Barney’s Box

Sensory needs are not problems to be fixed – they are *needs to be understood*.

When you see the world through your child's sensory lens, everything starts to make more sense. You're already doing so much. You're learning, adjusting, and advocating every single day.

At **Barney's Box**, we see you. We're proud to stand beside you and your child every step of the way.

**The Barney's Box Team**

[www.barneysbox.co.uk](http://www.barneysbox.co.uk)