



**Autism  
Education  
Trust**

**Schools**

# Practical Support Pack:

## Making Sense of Autism in Schools

A collection of practical tools, templates, top tips, checklists and strategies for busy professionals to use to support autistic children.



Supported by



**Autistic  
Young  
Experts**



# The AET Schools Professional Development Programme

## Schools

### Modules

Making Sense of Autism

Good Autism Practice

Progression Framework

### Elective topic based modules

Anxiety Module

Inclusion Module

### Editable framework documents

Standards Framework

Competency Framework

Progression Framework

### Leadership Resources

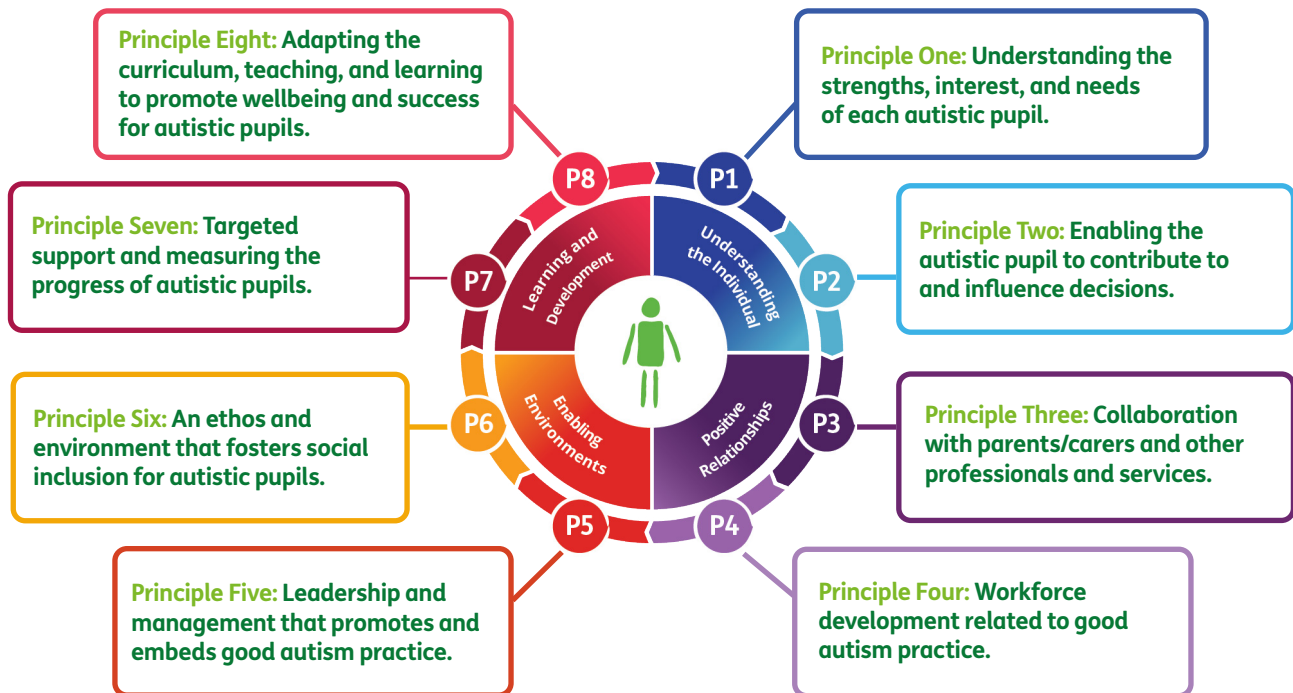
Leadership Modules

GAP Resources



## The AET Eight GAP Principles

This is how the Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice are embedded in the four themes.



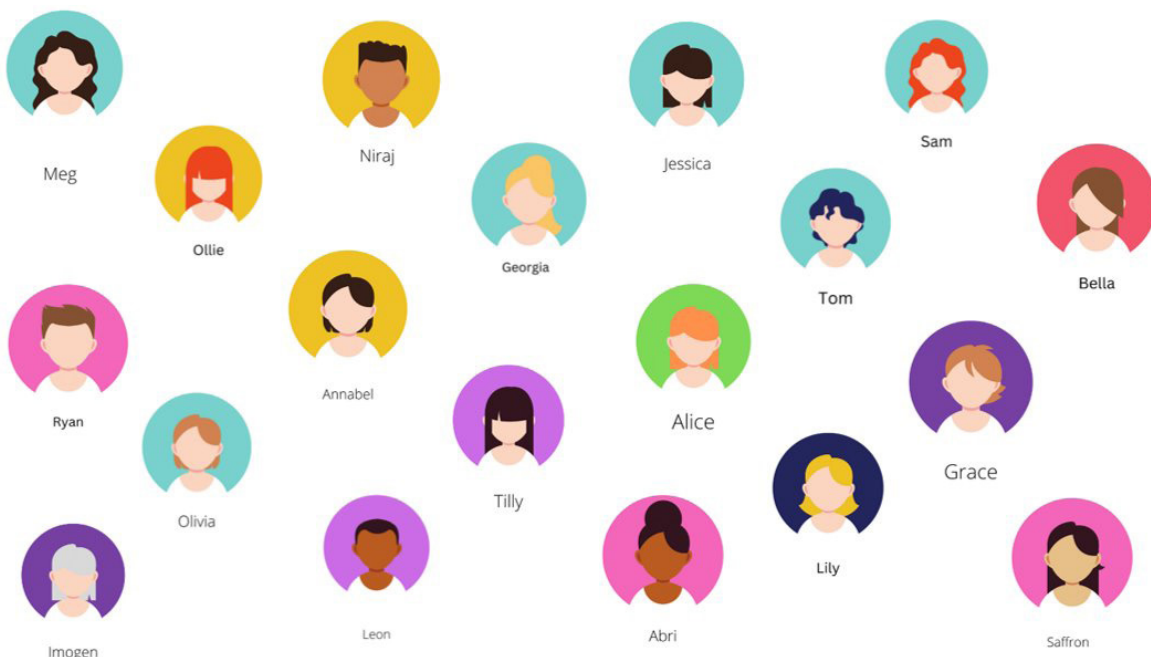
## The AET Eight GAP Principles

The eight GAP principles are also distilled into eight Inclusion Promises developed by the Autistic Young Experts panel. The panel created these promises so that the GAP principles were more accessible for autistic pupils.

We promise to:

- 1 Understand what you are good at, what you like doing, and when you might need help.
- 2 Listen to and act upon your ideas about how we can help you if you need it.
- 3 Listen to and work with the people who know you best and who you trust.
- 4 Make sure we are always progressing towards your goals and aspirations.
- 5 Make sure all staff know the best way to support you, both in and out of lessons.
- 6 Help you to get involved and be included in the activities you wish to participate in.
- 7 Work together to set achievable goals that are important to you, and that help you see how well you are doing.
- 8 Help you to feel safe, secure, empowered, and able to learn.

## AET Autistic Young Experts, Panel Members



### Making Sense of Autism Tools

#### Tool 1 - The three areas of difference template

This template can be used to reflect on an individual pupil and you can record their strengths and differences across the three key areas of:

- Social Understanding and Communication
- Flexibility, Information Process and Understanding
- Sensory Processing and Information

Once you have recorded these, there is space to record additional observations and possible reasonable adjustments that will be made to support the pupil.

#### Tool 2 - One Page Profile

One way of recording information about the child is to create a One-Page Profile (OPP). The profile has a number of headings to help identify key information about the pupil. It is important that this information is shared with all who work and support the pupil in the setting as, by understanding the needs of the pupil, they can best support their participation and development.

#### Tool 3 - Examples of Visual Strategies

Autistic people are often visual learners and so visual strategies are often very helpful. Such strategies allow pupils to 'see' a task and promote independence as they can return to the visual cue as many times as needed.

This tool gives a number of examples of visual strategies and what they can be used for.

#### Tool 4 - Making Communication Clear Checklist

Social Understanding and Communication is a key area of difference for autistic pupils. As such, we need to be mindful of our communication and ensure that we make necessary reasonable adjustments.

This tool offers a checklist of good practice in relation to a clear communication style. It also allows you to note any adjustments that you are making or will in future.

### Tool 5 - Top tips for working with parents

This information sheet provides key tips for working alongside parents and carers. Getting this relationship working well is crucial to supporting the pupil to make progress. Problem solving and planning together, good communication and providing a consistency of approach will best meet the pupil's needs.

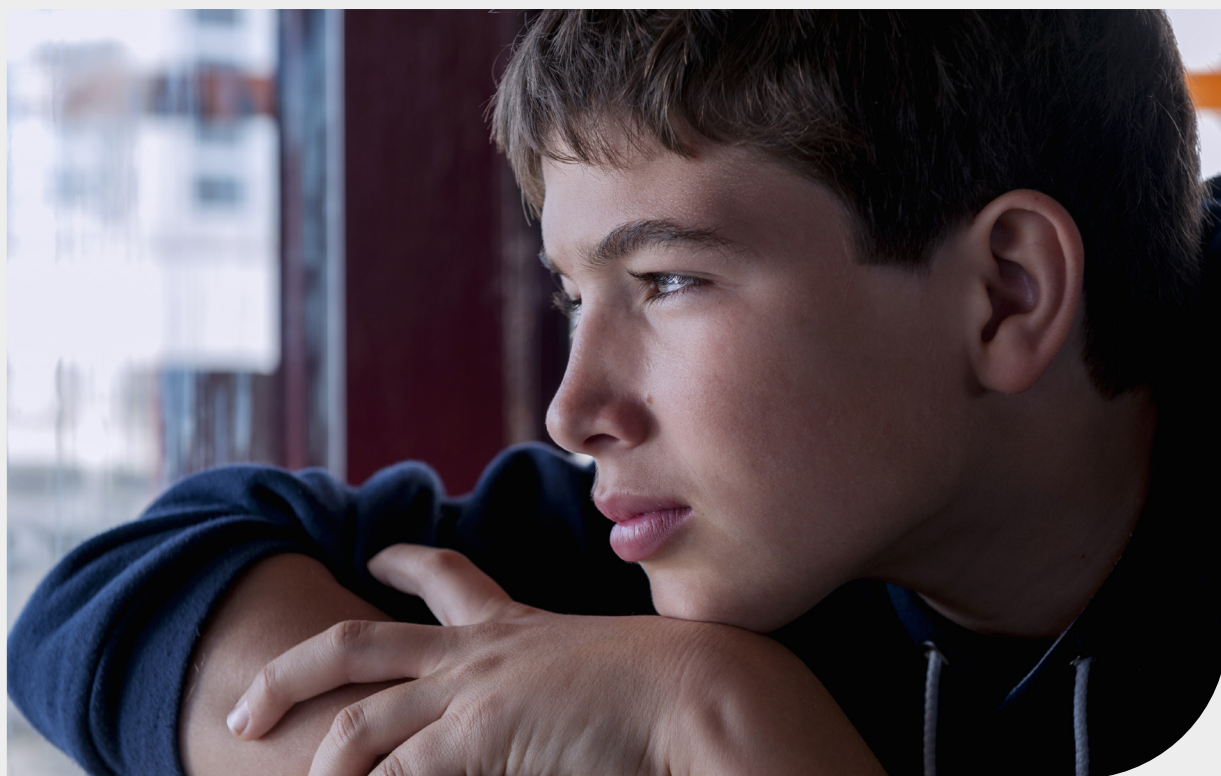
### Tool 6 - Environmental Checklist

It is estimated that up to 95% of autistic pupils experience sensory processing differences. Our sensory processing and integration forms the foundations for our learning and development and how we understand and respond to the world.

This tool offers a checklist of good practice in relation to the classroom environment including the staff within it and allows for the identification of areas for development.

### Tool 7 - Sensory differences examples and strategies

This resource outlines each of the sensory systems and provides examples of behaviours that could suggest hyper and hypo sensitivity. It also offers delegates some suggestions of strategies that can be tried to support hyper and hypo sensitivity.



### What is it?

It is important to understand that the three Areas of Difference overlap and to recognize that the impact of each area of difference will be different for each individual.

The tool encourages practitioners to consider the strengths and differences of an individual pupil and the impact of these differences on the pupil's levels of anxiety. This will develop the delegates understanding that "one size does not fit all" when planning approaches, adjustments and interventions to support a pupil.

### When should it be used?




Practitioners can use this tool when gathering information about a pupil in their school and considering how they can best support the pupil's learning and development. It can be used to support the practitioners understanding of why a pupil may be behaving and communicating in a particular way and why they may be making particular play choices and to adjust their approaches accordingly.

### How to use it:

Practitioners can use this tool with other staff members, carers and other professionals or as the key worker to begin to record the strengths and differences in each of the three Areas of Difference for the individual pupil and the likely impact of these differences on the pupil in school. They can then consider and record adjustments pupil in school to support the pupil in the setting.



## Schools MSA Tool 1: The Three Areas of Difference Template

 <b>Social understanding and communication</b>	 <b>Flexibility, information processing, and understanding</b>	 <b>Sensory processing and integration</b>
<p><u>Strengths in this area:</u></p>	<p><u>Strengths in this area:</u></p>	<p><u>Strengths in this area:</u></p>
<p><u>Differences in this area:</u></p>	<p><u>Differences in this area:</u></p>	<p><u>Differences in this area:</u></p>
<p><u>Other thoughts/ possible reasonable adjustments:</u></p>	<p><u>Other thoughts/ possible reasonable adjustments:</u></p>	<p><u>Other thoughts/ possible reasonable adjustments:</u></p>



## Schools MSA Tool 2: One Page Profile

Autistic pupils will all have differences in:

- social understanding and communication
- information processing, flexibility and understanding
- sensory processing and integration

A pupil's skills and differences will vary from individual to individual. In order to meet the needs of autistic pupils, it is vital to get to know them as an individual.

All staff who work with the pupil should understand both their strengths and differences and know how to support participation and learning. It is therefore useful to build a profile and ensure it is shared with relevant staff, including supply staff and any new staff.

### What is it?

The profile should summarise the key information that staff need to know in order to work with and support the pupil. It should be based on a detailed and robust assessment taken over time, and signpost any additional information staff need to be aware of. It should highlight what the pupil is good at and also any areas where they made need additional support as well as letting staff and others know what their preferred means of communication is.

### When should it be used?

To encourage staff to listen to the pupil's voice through observation and discussion with those who know the pupil best.

When a new pupil starts at the setting, the key worker should begin to gather information for the profile through assessment, observation and consultation with the pupil and their parents.

Profiles should be updated regularly to reflect progress and changes in support needs.

The profile should be updated ahead of any transitions to new settings so it can be shared with any new staff members who will be working with the pupil.

### How to use it?

You may find this profile template useful. It should be adapted to reflect the pupil, not all headings may be relevant.

**Complete with at least two members of staff who know the pupil well. Circulate to staff as appropriate.**

## Schools MSA Tool 2: One Page Profile

<p><b>What you can do to help me:</b></p>	<p><b>My name is:</b></p> <p>I am _____ years old</p> <p>I communicate by:</p>	<p><b>What is important to me:</b></p>
<p><b>What people like and admire about me:</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Me</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Click to add photo here</p>	<p><b>My strengths &amp; talents:</b></p>
<p><b>My dream is to:</b></p>	<p><b>My fears / worries / things I don't like:</b></p>	<p><b>My favourite things:</b></p>

## Schools MSA Tool 3: Examples of Visual Strategies

### ? What is it?

Visual strategies are a way of supplementing information which is supplied verbally with visual information. They can be used to accomplish a range of goals. You may use something visual to help a pupil to understand a situation, or to provide a visual prompt so a pupil can accomplish a task more independently.

Visual strategies may take a range of formats including signs, symbols, objects of reference, photographs and writing, or a combination of the above. The needs and skills of the individual should determine the size, format, quantity and complexity of the information being communicated.

### 🕒 When should it be used?

You can use Visual Strategies to help facilitate learning and independence in a range of ways:

Enabling the pupil to “see” the task. The visual provided will not disappear from them as spoken instructions do.

Giving additional time for processing information.

Allowing pupils to process the information in their own time.

Promoting independence by providing a visual tool to refer to in order to identify and carry out a task or stages of a task.

In addition, they can be looked at, sequenced, rehearsed and learned.

### ✓ How to use it:

Decide what support the individual pupil needs to facilitate learning and independence. Use some of the examples given below in different scenarios and find out which ones work best for the pupil.



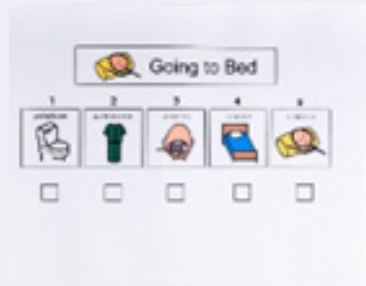
# Schools MSA Tool 3: Examples of Visual Strategies

## Examples of what visual strategies can be used for:

### 1. Create daily/weekly schedules with visual blocks of time



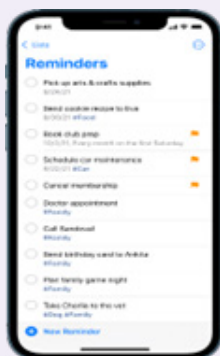
### 2. Show sequential steps in a task



### 3. Demonstrate units of time



### 4. Make a "to do" list



## Schools MSA Tool 3: Examples of Visual Strategies

### 5. Aid communication for those who are less or non-verbal



### 6. Offer choices



**“I’m a visual thinker, not a language-based thinker. My brain is like Google Images.” – Temple Grandin**

## Schools MSA Tool 4: Making Your Communication Clear Checklist

One area of difference that is explored in the Making Sense of Autism module is social understanding and communication. This impacts on how a pupil communicates and how they process and interpret what another person is trying to communicate to them, using speech, body language, tone of voice etc.

### ? What is it?

This tool is a checklist of Good Autism Practice when communicating with an autistic pupil. It is also a tool to identify any reasonable adjustments that need to be made by the adult to improve their support for the pupil.

### 🕒 When should it be used?

This tool should be used by staff members working with an autistic pupil to remind them of key principles of Good Autism Practice when communicating with an autistic pupil. It can also be used as a tool to reflect and modify their practice.

### ✅ How do use it:

Use this tool as a simple checklist and reflection tool. It can be used to support discussion with all staff members to make sure that there is consistency for the autistic pupil.



## Checklist

Do you and your colleagues consistently:	Tick:	Reasonable Adjustments made:
Use pupil's name to gain attention. (Don't expect that the pupil will always look at you)		
Use simple, clear language		
Say what you mean. Avoid jokes and sarcasm.		
Say things in the order that they are going to happen.		
Allow pupil time to processing information. (This can be surprisingly long)		
If you need to repeat an instruction, say the same words in the same order.		
Use visual cues (symbols, photos, objects) to support your verbal information.		
Don't rely on non-verbal cues, some pupils will not be able to pick up on these.		

## Schools MSA Tool 5: Top Tips for Working with Parents

### What is it?

Working and building a relationship with the parents of young children is vital to supporting the child effectively in the Early Years setting. For the parents of an autistic child this period of time is often very difficult as they begin their journey of understanding their child's differences and the impact of those differences on their family life.

This tool is a summary of key points to consider when supporting parents of a young autistic child.

### When should it be used?

This tool should be used as preparation for any discussion with the parent/carer of an autistic child as a reminder of Good Practice to develop a relationship that will best support the child.

### How do use it:

This tool should be used before meeting a parent/carer of an autistic child. It is also a document that sets out Good Practice when working with all parents/carers.





## Schools MSA Tool 5: Top Tips for Working with Parents

1. Be sensitive to the needs of the parent. Make sure you take some time to consider where the parent is on their journey.
2. Do not assume that you understand what they are going through.
3. Listen more than you speak. Believe what you are being told. You will be able to gather a great deal of information about the child you are supporting.
4. Ensure the parent feels respected and not judged.
5. Know the Code of Practice and the Equality Act. Some parents have better knowledge of these than staff.
6. Work to enable everyone who has contact with the child to fully understand their needs. If the parent feels this is not the case, they will soon lose confidence in you.
7. Don't promise things that you are unable to deliver, manage expectations well.
8. Actively involve the parents in all planning towards meeting the child's needs. This will take time but will pay dividends, not only with your relationship with the family, but in enabling you to meet the needs of the child person.
9. Focus on the child's strengths as well as their areas for development. Make sure you are extending their strengths and areas of interest as well as supporting their areas of development. This will show the child and parents that you are interested in progress in all areas.
10. Parents may have had negative experiences in previous settings or when they were at school themselves. Build a relationship of trust to benefit the child person.
11. Work with the parent to establish an effective communication system that works well for all parties. Communicate their child's positive experiences and progress as much as you can, as well as areas where they need support.
12. Think about the language you use and how you use it.

## Schools MSA Tool 6: Environmental Checklist

### ? What is it?

This tool is a checklist of questions/prompts that staff can consider in relation to the environment in which they work as well as the presentation of the staff themselves. It relates to the sensory processing and integration of the pupils they support.

### 🕒 When should it be used?

This tool can be used regularly by staff (termly/half termly) to audit the school environment and staff practice in consideration of the sensory processing and integration needs of the pupils they support. If an autistic pupil has expressed that they are experiencing sensory differences or if this has been identified by staff supporting them, the checklist could be completed to help identify possible reasonable adjustments that might help.

### ✓ How do use it:

Staff/ curriculum teams can complete the checklist by moving around the school environment or the part of it in which they are based. They can tick the statements/questions as appropriate and identify areas for development once completed. Senior Leadership Teams could also consider completing this tool during Learning Walks of the school environment too.



## Schools MSA Tool 6: Environmental Checklist

**Classroom:**

**Date:**

General Classroom Appearance	Tick
Are the furniture tops clear?	
Are cupboard doors closed?	
Are the blinds closed when the sun shines in?	
Are all cupboards and boxes labelled?	
Are all resources stored in cupboards or lidded boxes?	

Organisation of room	Tick
Is there a clear area for group work?	
Is there a clear snack area (or a strategy which indicates change of use)?	
Are children's work areas clearly organised with resources clearly labelled so children can access the materials they need?	
Are materials/stationary in a good state of repair?	

Computer	Tick
Are wires hidden?	
Are stop/no touching signs in places for when the computer is not in use?	
Is the computer area clean and tidy?	

Sound	Tick
Are windows closed if people are outside?	
Do chairs have stoppers to minimise noise?	

## Schools MSA Tool 6: Environmental Checklist

**Classroom:**

**Date:**

Staff	Tick
Do staff consider clothing choices (remembering bright and highly patterned clothing may not conducive to learning)	
Are accessories kept to a minimum?	
Do staff avoid wearing strong perfume or hair products?	
Do staff support understanding using symbols?	
Do staff use minimal language where appropriate?	
Are staff conversations kept to essential information only in the presence of children?	

**Classroom:**

**Date:**

**Areas for development:**

## Schools MSA Tool 7: Examples of Sensory Differences

### ? What is it?

This fact sheet provides examples of hyper and hypo sensitivities that an autistic child may be experiencing and suggestions of strategies that can be used to support the child.

### 🕒 When should it be used?

This tool should be used to gather information about the child's sensory processing needs from observation, the parents/carers and any other professionals involved. Information from this tool could be included in the One Page Profile and used as a basis for discussing strategies that can be put into place to support the child.

### ✅ How to use it:

This factsheet can be used to identify key areas of sensory differences for the child and to consider strategies and support that can be put in place to minimise distress for the child and maximise learning opportunities.



## Schools MSA Tool 7: Examples Sensory Differences

System	Example of hyper (over-sensitive) behaviour	Examples of hypo (under-sensitive) behaviour
 <p><b>Touch</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Touch can be painful and uncomfortable and some pupils may withdraw from aspects of touch. This can have a profound effect on relationships</li> <li>• Only tolerates certain materials for clothing</li> <li>• Dislike of having anything on hands or feet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holds others tightly</li> <li>• Has high pain threshold (pain/ temperature)</li> <li>• Self harming</li> <li>• Enjoys heavy objects on top of them</li> <li>• Prefers tight clothing</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Vision</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distorted vision occurs, objects and bright lights can jump around</li> <li>• Fragmentation of images, as a consequence of too many sources of visual stimuli</li> <li>• Focussing on particular details (sand grains) can be more pleasurable than looking at something as a whole</li> <li>• Distracted by certain lighting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May see things darker, lose features and lines</li> <li>• May concentrate on peripheral vision as central vision is blurred</li> <li>• Conversely, some say that a main object is magnified and things on the periphery are blurred</li> <li>• Poor depth perceptions – problems with catching or throwing</li> <li>• Flapping near eyes</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Hearing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volume of noise can be magnified and surrounding sounds distorted and muddled</li> <li>• Inability to cut out particular sounds – difficulties concentrating</li> <li>• May have a lower hearing threshold which makes an individual particularly sensitive to auditory stimuli – hearing conversations in the distance</li> <li>• Fingers in ears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not acknowledge particular sounds</li> <li>• Enjoys crowded noisy places</li> <li>• Bangs doors and objects</li> <li>• Makes own noise e.g. humming</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Taste</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some flavours and foods are too strong and overpowering</li> <li>• Certain textures also cause discomfort, some pupils will only eat smooth foods such as mashed potatoes or ice cream</li> <li>• Only eats bland foods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preference for strong flavours – like very spicy foods</li> <li>• Eats everything e.g. grass, soil, materials. This is known as Pica</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Smell</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aversion to particular smells</li> <li>• Smells can be intensified and overpowering</li> <li>• Toileting problems</li> <li>• Dislike of individuals with distinctive perfumes or shampoos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smells objects</li> <li>• May have no sense of smell and fail to notice extreme odours</li> <li>• May lick objects</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Sense of body in space</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislikes close proximity of others</li> <li>• Has difficulty with fine motor skills and manipulating small objects</li> <li>• Moves whole body to look at objects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity – stands too close to others not knowing about personal space etiquette</li> <li>• Little awareness of hunger/pain/cold/needing the toilet</li> <li>• Difficulties with navigating rooms and avoiding objects (bumps into things)</li> <li>• Bumps into people</li> <li>• Poor muscle tone</li> <li>• A preference for deep pressure for example tight shoelaces or pushing their chin into people</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Balance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislikes playground equipment (swing/slide etc)</li> <li>• Difficulties in activities which include movement (sport)</li> <li>• Difficulties in stopping quickly or during an activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for rocking, spinning, swinging</li> <li>• Seeks opportunities for movement/constantly moving/fidgeting</li> </ul>

## Schools MSA Tool 7: Examples Sensory Differences










### Interoception

- Is overwhelmed by feelings that are part of the body's day-to-day functioning
- Becomes distracted by typical bodily functions e.g. the beating of their heart
- Struggles to regulate their emotions
- Struggles to identify when they are hungry/thirsty (goes long periods without eating/drinking)
- Have toileting accidents
- Struggle to identify their emotions or work out how they are feeling
- Be unable to recognise when they are ill - e.g. sense they have a fever...



## Schools MSA Tool 7: Strategies for Sensory Differences

System	Hypersensitivity	Hyposensitivity
 <p><b>Touch</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Warn the pupil if you are about to touch them</li> <li>Remember hugs may be painful rather than comforting!</li> <li>Gradually introduce different textures</li> <li>Allow individuals to complete activities themselves (e.g. hair brushing and hand washing) to allow them to regulate their sensitivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider tight clothing e.g. leotards underneath clothing</li> <li>Weighted blankets</li> <li>Sleeping bags</li> <li>Work with sand bag on lap</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Vision</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce fluorescent lighting</li> <li>Sunglasses</li> <li>Create a workstation</li> <li>Use blackout blinds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use resources which stimulate visual system e.g. light sticks</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Hearing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shut windows and doors to reduce external sound</li> <li>Prepare the pupil noisy places</li> <li>Ear plugs/ear defenders</li> <li>Walkman/iPod</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Music therapy</li> <li>iPod/walkman</li> <li>Use visual cues to back up verbal information</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Taste</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow opportunities to taste lots of different things to aid sense development</li> <li>Encourage children to 'clean out' mouth with water between mouthfuls</li> <li>Puree foods</li> <li>Use ice pops to desensitise mouth</li> <li>Introduce very small bites of portions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow opportunities to taste lots of different things to aid sense development</li> <li>Provide oral stimulation throughout the day, crunchy foods</li> <li>Use vibration toys to stimulate the senses</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Smell</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use unscented detergents or shampoos</li> <li>Refrain from wearing perfume</li> <li>Make environment as fragrance free as possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use strong smelling objects as rewards</li> <li>Use strong smelling objects to distract from inappropriate strong smells (faeces) for example scented playdough</li> <li>Create a book of scents - match pictures to scented cotton wool for example lemon, coffee etc</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Sense of body in space</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threading activities</li> <li>Lace boards</li> <li>Allow the pupil to stand at end of line when lining up</li> <li>Allow the pupil to sit on a stool instead of carpet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position furniture around the edge of the room to make navigation easier</li> <li>Put coloured tape on floor to indicate boundaries</li> <li>Use arms length rule (you must be at least an arms length away from someone when speaking to them)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Balance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Break down activities into small steps</li> <li>Use visual clues for finish lines or stops in movement activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage activities which develop the vestibular system – swing, roundabout, rocking horse, see-saw, dancing</li> </ul>



## Schools MSA Tool 7: Strategies for Sensory Differences



### Interoception

- Grounding activities that draw attention to specific body parts
- Use music/ ear phones/ Calmers to block out internal noises
- Teach emotions and incorporate emotional check ins
- Timetable regular opportunities to eat/ drink
- Timetable toilet breaks
- Provide a Toilet Pass to avoid having to ask at last minute
- Teach emotions and incorporate emotional check ins





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Take your knowledge to the next level. Explore our training modules, framework documents and resources:

- Extend your knowledge of autism with the AET Good Autism Practice training module: [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/training-content/schools-good-autism-practice](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/training-content/schools-good-autism-practice)
- Use our free competency and standards frameworks to evaluate and improve your practice: [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/framework-documents](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/framework-documents)

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