

FREE RESOURCE

Sensory Accommodations Guide

Practical adjustments for classrooms, workplaces, and homes supporting neurodivergent individuals.

Why this matters: Sensory sensitivity is not a preference. For many neurodivergent individuals, an unaccommodated sensory environment drains the cognitive resources needed for learning, communication, and performance—before the work even begins. Small environmental changes produce measurable differences.

Sound & Auditory Environment

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Noise-canceling headphones

Allow use during independent work, tests, or transitions.
Normalize it—no permission slips needed.

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Quiet zones

Designate one area with reduced sound where individuals can work or decompress without explanation.

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Predictable sound cues

Replace unexpected bells or announcements with a consistent, brief warning before changes.

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White noise options

Offer a neutral audio background to mask unpredictable environmental sounds during focus tasks.

Lighting

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Reduce fluorescent lighting

Fluorescent flicker and intensity are common triggers. Natural light or LED alternatives are preferable.

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Strategic seating

Offer seating away from windows or direct light. Allow individuals to choose their position without justification.

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Tinted overlays or filters

Especially useful for visual processing differences. Available as physical overlays or digital settings.

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Task lighting control

Let employees or students adjust the brightness and angle of light at their own workspace.

Touch & Tactile Comfort

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Fidget tools at desks

Quiet fidgets (rings, textured pads, putty) help regulate focus—not distract. Keep them normalized and accessible.

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Flexible seating options

Wobble stools, floor cushions, or standing desks address proprioceptive needs without singling individuals out.

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No mandatory physical contact

Greetings, celebrations, and comfort should never require touch. Offer alternatives without making it a discussion.

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Weighted lap pads

Discreet, calming, and effective for students who need proprioceptive input during seated work.

Movement & Body Regulation

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Movement breaks

Built into the schedule. Every 45–60 minutes for adults, 20–30 for children. Brief, non-punitive, and consistent.

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Standing or walking meetings

For shorter check-ins, moving while talking benefits many neurodivergent individuals and improves focus for most people.

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Defined sensory break space

A space to step away briefly when overwhelmed—not a punishment room, not a privilege. A tool.

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Permission to stand or shift

Remaining still is not the same as paying attention. Allow posture freedom without requiring explanation.

Digital & Virtual Environments

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Camera-off options

Watching oneself on video is a significant cognitive load for many neurodivergent individuals. Normalize camera-off participation.

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Written agenda shared early

Reduces anticipatory anxiety and allows neurodivergent participants to prepare responses—improving their contribution.

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Asynchronous participation

Not everyone processes and responds at the same speed. Allowing written or recorded contributions levels the playing field.

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Reduce visual clutter

Slides and documents with excessive color, animation, or text density increase cognitive load. Simpler layouts benefit everyone.

IMPLEMENTATION NOTE

Accommodations do not need to be labeled as such to be effective. When sensory-friendly practices are embedded into the environment by default—for everyone—the individuals who need them most benefit without being singled out. This is the essence of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Quick self-audit checklist

- My space has at least one quiet or lower-stimulation area available.

- Lighting can be adjusted or dimmed in at least part of the space.

- Fidget tools or movement options are available and normalized.

- Schedules and transitions are communicated in advance.

- Individuals can request changes to their environment without lengthy justification.

- Virtual meetings have a camera-off or async option for those who need it.

- Physical contact is never assumed or required.

- Movement breaks are built into the day, not offered as a reward.