

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO LEARNING (ABLE)

Ideas for Sensory Processing difficulties

Visual Processing strategies
Dislikes bright lighting/ squints, covers eyes or complains about brightness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move child away from direct sunlight or glare• Consider lighting in class e.g. can it be turned off or dimmed• Change background and / or brightness of interactive whiteboards/ Use lower contrast screens• Consider using coloured acetate overlays for reading• Allow child to wear sunglasses inside• Allow child to wear a cap with a peak inside• Provide a dark area or tent in the classroom• Try pastel coloured paper for worksheets and writing• Provide work areas in the classroom that are free of visual distractions• Reduce clutter on desks and surfaces• Reduce or cover any unnecessary visual information on worksheets / textbooks• Make sure smart boards and computer screens are blank when not in use• Position child in classroom so they are not in view of people walking past• Provide a hard copy of information that is displayed on interactive white board.
Avoids eye contact in order to process auditory information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow this• Check child is listening in other ways
Gets upset when something is moved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid unnecessarily changing environment• Prepare for change / involve young person where possible
Frequently loses place when reading/copying
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a text blocker to keep the lines to a page• Try a sloping board or book rest• Reduce the amount of information a child has to look at• Consider whether copying is necessary. Can a printed copy of text be provided or close procedure used instead?
Difficulty organising objects in a less organised/busy environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use pictures or labels on the front of drawers/cupboards showing what is inside• Use drawer dividers to organise drawer contents

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice this skill by playing “Where’s Wally?” type games, ‘spot the difference’, and doing jigsaw puzzles • Use lists / colour coding systems • Use a home school diary • Keep resources in the same, predictable place
Takes more visual information to react
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the contrast on screens and worksheets
Likes bright environment, reflective or spinning light
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide appropriate toys and activities at planned points throughout the day
Spins/flicks objects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow safe space and time to do this in movement breaks • Accept this if it does not impact negatively on learning • Consider more discreet alternatives should be taught
Spins own body to seek visual stimuli
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow breaks to do this in a safe way, include proprioceptive feedback in this too
Misses visual cues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exaggerate and slow down gestures such as pointing • Be aware that the child may need prompted in other ways or visual cue pointed out to them • Provide higher contrast on any visual cues in worksheets
Bumps into things/ misjudges spatial relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide as much space as possible between objects • Ensure high contrast between classroom furniture and carpeting • Keep spaces clear • Practice this through activities such as simple building tasks • Obstacle courses as part of gym including position words • Environmental adaptations e.g. marking edge of steps.
Can be startled when approached suddenly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say the person’s name as you approach them • Try not to approach from behind • Approach with slow movement and quiet voice

Auditory Processing strategies
Dislikes loud noises/avoids noisy places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep noise to a minimum • Prepare the child for any expected loud noises to be encountered • Gradually introduce noisy places • Allow them to wear ear plugs or earphones to reduce some of the noise but <u>not all</u>
Struggles to cope with noise made by others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give breaks to go to a quiet area to do work • Reduce noise levels in classroom – carpets and soft furnishings reduce echo
Holds hands over ears to protect ears from sound

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the child to massage around their ears and jaw line • Allow the child to wear a tight hat or cap • Use ear plugs or ear phones to block out some of the noise but <u>not all</u> of the noise
Speaks loudly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a volume scale
Talks to self
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that this could be an important self-help tool • Encourage them to do this quietly and / or find a private place.
Hums, sings, make noises
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be to mask background noise. Try music or white noise through ear phones • Provide opportunity to do this at socially acceptable times
Enjoys really loud noise/ bangs on surfaces to create noise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time to do this in the playground or during planned times • Allow the child to do some drumming in a quiet room or outside at break time
Fails to pick up verbal cues/seems not to listen/ oblivious to sounds that others react to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule out a hearing difficulty • Support verbal cues with visual cues and gesture • Provide the child with written cue cards • Use their name first to get their attention before giving an instruction • Change your tone of voice to emphasise important information • Be aware during fire alarm
Cannot determine location of sounds or voices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide visual cues to support identifying the location
Difficulty understanding or recalling what has been said
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chunk instructions • Give lots of time to process between instructions • Avoid asking the child to listen and read or process visual information at the same time. • Add visuals to instructions • Check out understanding after input, before starting task
Difficulty discriminating between similar sounds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-emphasize sounds • Elongate sounds • Provide a multisensory clue to support their sound discrimination

Vestibular processing (balance and movement) strategies
Avoids spinning and/or jumping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually introduce these movements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gentle rocking and swaying - Jumping from standing before jumping off a height - Stepping off height before jumping
Becomes dizzy easily or not at all
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually introduce slow spinning movement such as walking in a large circle

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware spinning movement tends to increase arousal which can be helpful or unhelpful • Avoid the child spinning quickly, introduce alternatives such as rocking and swaying
Becomes upset in a busy place full of movement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to be on the edge of the room or area • Allow child to observe before participating
Less focused when feet are off the ground
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure child is seated with feet on the ground, even allow them to take shoes off as this increases the sensation they are receiving • Consider if the chair is the correct height for the child
Dislikes activities where head is upside down e.g. somersaults, rough and tumble play
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually increase these activities, making sure there is a lot of deep pressure involved such as squashing • Do this with an adult who can gauge responses rather than another child
Appears clumsy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include lots of practice of controlled movement throughout the day which includes proprioception and deep pressure e.g. carry heavy bag or box of books.
Has poor balance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of practice of basic balance activities such as standing on one leg • Looking at self in a large mirror whilst practicing can help
Has difficulty changing direction, bending or turning quickly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out obstacle courses during PE that support practice of this
Cautious or hesitant to take risks and avoids movement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include movement without added pressure of team game such as class yoga
Prefers lying down to sitting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give support in sitting such as wall when sitting on the floor • Allow the child time to lie on tummy in reading corner for instance • Allow them to sit on a seat during carpet time, ideally one with arm rests
Leans on objects or uses their hands arms to support body rather than sit up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sloping board at writing desk to support posture • Allow movement breaks
Is anxious around or avoids stairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child together go ahead or to wait till last and take their turn on stairs • Buddy them up with another more physically confident and caring child • Encourage them to use the hand rail • Practice when no other children are there • Ensure good lighting and visual cues as to stair edges
Is always 'on the go'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the child to take messages around the school • Try a corridor sensory walk • Give regular movement breaks from learning • Include movement in learning

Has difficulty sitting still/ Is constantly fidgeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try a 'move and sit' cushion • Try weighted lap pad or shoulder wrap • Try a kick band fitted to the child's chair if they fidget with their feet a lot • Give plenty of space to move in during group times without distracting others • Provide fidget toys similar to what they already like to fiddle with
Runs rather than walks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a visual cue for what is expected in class • Allow running as part of movement breaks • The daily mile
Rocks unconsciously <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow plenty of space for the child to do this in floor sitting • Provide activity in movement breaks that includes rocking • Try a move and sit cushion on the child's chair
Frequently twirls, spins self throughout the day, rarely becomes dizzy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourage fast spinning as this can be too alerting • Slow walking in large circles • Use rocking, swaying and jumping movements instead.
Likes playground equipment, swinging is a popular activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child regular opportunity to use this • Provide regular movement breaks throughout the day
Seeks excitement and has no sense of danger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide safe opportunity to carry out movement off the ground such as jumping and climbing • Be vigilant to dangers
Enjoys being upside down and falling over <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow safe opportunity to do this using crash mats • Child can lie on a gym bench with their head inverted off the end for a few moments

Touch Processing strategies
Avoids touch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow situations where they can be in control of what they are touching • Introduce gradually • Hard smooth textures are generally easier to cope with than uneven or wet textures
Constantly seeks hugs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a class soft toy to hug
'Mouths' objects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure water bottle is nearby • Discuss with parents an appropriate chew toy
Only likes certain textures fabrics and clothes, avoids others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be flexible about school uniform requirements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to wear tight sport shorts and rash vest under their uniform if this helps
Doesn't like labels or restricting clothes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child flexibility in clothes they wear for school uniform
May insist on wearing the same clothes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to wear their PE things all day if changing during the day is a problem
Dislikes messy play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very gradual introduction is important, do not force • Hard, smooth textures are generally easier to cope with than uneven or wet textures • Backs of hands and arms are less sensitive than palms • Try some deep pressure touch such as playdough or pressing palms together first
Feels pain more strongly than others/ Overreacts to minor injuries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sympathetic, they really do feel that way • Encourage deep pressure/rubbing on the affected area • May need a calm space or person to co-regulate if distressed
Very sensitive to heat and or cold <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware they may be slow in the dining hall as they are waiting for their food to cool – allow them time
Has difficulty standing in line with other children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give children their own floor spot to stand on • Allow the child to stand at the front or the back of the line
May not like their skin exposed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow long sleeves and leggings/tracksuit trousers for gym
Does not like their hand being held <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow them to hold a cloth between you, a short length of string, or similar
Takes firm touch to respond <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use firm touch when approaching them
Over-grips objects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage activity against resistance first like play dough or writing/mark making in wet sand
Sometimes too close to others / touches or leans on people to the point of irritating others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a social story if appropriate to developmental stage • Make time for touch input at other times such as play dough • Give a class teddy to hug • Include things like wall push ups in a sensory walk • Allow child to lean on wall or other firm surface during group times
Has difficulty responding to temperature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware and extra cautious with hot temperatures
Has an unusually high tolerance to pain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of other signs of pain other than their verbal response such as going pale, flushing or sweating
Hits self or engages in other self injurious behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to practice drumming

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep pressure activities such as being squashed into a space such as tent with lots of cushions • Stamping and jumping activities
Unusual need to touch certain things <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow fidget toys and fidget times of the day
Not aware clothes are twisted or shoe are on wrong feet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use discreet visual markers for left and right • Encourage checking in a mirror after dressing
Doesn't seem to notice when hands/face are messy or covered in food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of a pocket mirror to check • Encourage the child to use firm pressure with a paper towel to increase awareness of face

Taste and Smell Processing strategies
Dislikes strong tastes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with parents on introduction of new smells and tastes • Accepting items near them may be the first step
Likes only bland tastes/ Has difficulty with certain textures and temperatures of food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with parents on broadening range of foods within similar tastes initially
Smells people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give child some of a favourite smell on a tissue to avoid them smelling others inappropriately
Overreacts to new smells/ reacts to or complains about smells that others don't notice/ avoids strong smelling environments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new smells at a distance and very cautiously for a short time only • Encourage child to have their own smell on a tissue or cuff to mask other smells
Gags easily <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassurance for the child • Very gradual approach to introducing new textures of food
Can get upset at break and lunchtimes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that smells and tastes from snacks or lunch hall may be causing this • Allow the child to eat in a smaller group away from the lunch hall smells
Prefers not to mix food or food textures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have divided plates available
Breathes through mouth instead of nose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage this by verbalising "in through the nose, out through the mouth". This can be done as part of class relaxation
Eats or 'mouths' non-food items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage use of water bottle • Allow crunchy snacks such as carrot sticks or breadsticks • Provide an appropriate chew toy in discussion with parents • Provide ice to crunch on • Consider allow dental gum for an older child in discussion with parents

Craves strong tastes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to experience lots of strong tastes
Puts too much food in their mouth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the child to take a cold drink first to increase the awareness of their mouth
Unable to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant smells
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name the smells for the child • Talk about smells that are considered pleasant or unpleasant
Actively seeks out strong smells which could include faeces and urine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with parents to find an alternative strong smell the child likes and have that available for them
Licks, tastes or smell things to gain sensation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child to have ice available or other cold sensation

Proprioception (body position) strategies
Lack of understanding of where their body is in relation to other things
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the child more space around them in class for their belongings
Can be seen as clumsy or uncoordinated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice resistive activities that involve pushing and pulling
Writes very lightly or heavily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the diameter of the pencil or other implement • Carry out regular activities with play dough or similar • Use a vibrating massager on the hands and arms
Bumps into or trips over things/people/ Lack of awareness of body in space
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out lots of movement activities throughout the day such as hopping, marching, and skipping • Children's yoga activities • Try tight sports clothing
Stands too close to others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a weighted lap pad when doing stationary activities • Increase the amount of heavy pushing, pulling and firm touch activity throughout the day
Puts self in too small spaces or pushes against corners of room
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a contained area such as a tent in the classroom
Looks at feet when going down the stairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child to do this, practice without looking on short flights of steps when there are no other children there
Appears to enjoy crashing into things e.g. the floor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the child to replace crashing with hopping, marching, and skipping • Allow them to dangle from wall-bars or monkey bars if available.
Places body in strange positions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to spend some time with their head tipped upside down, this can support sensory regulation

Cracking joints to gain sensory input <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide play dough as a resistance activity for the hands • Do wall push ups or chair sit ups as part of movement break
Engages in self-injurious behaviour to get the sensation they crave <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow child to dangle from wall bars or climbing frame (with safety mat) • Allow space to run quickly for a few minutes • Try play dough or firm putty in the hands • Try vibrating teether or massager • Allow times during the day where their head is upside down
Moves stiffly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage jumping and hopping and log rolling movements
Walks or stays at the edge of activities/playground <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with supporting the child to join in with smaller groups where the activity and movement is more predictable
Spills/ breaks things unintentionally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try heavier cups and pencil holders
Doesn't know how much force to use and frequently hurts others unintentionally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushing and pulling activities • Wall push ups
Likes bear hugs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow lots of opportunity for hugs, even if it is with a large soft toy • Provide a place in the classroom for a tight squeeze such as large cardboard box, play tent or tunnel
Runs, hops, bounces instead of walking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to hop and bounce regularly throughout the day • Encourage jumping from a safe height on to both feet • Wear a rucksack for increased deep pressure
Prefers tight clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child to wear a tight sports clothing under their school clothes
May slouch, have poor posture and rest head in hands <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the child's feet can be flat on the floor • Try a sloping board to improve posture • Encourage different positions for work such as standing or lying on tummy