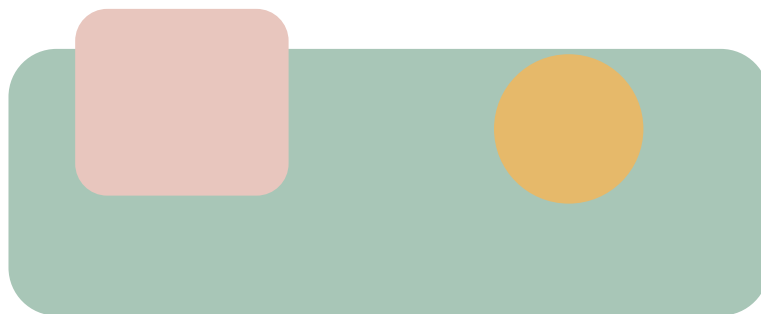




SPACE TO BREATHE

Creating a Sensory-Friendly Home

A practical, compassionate guide for every household



Notice • Adapt • Regulate • Belong

Includes a Fun Sensory Corner activity page

Understanding sensory needs



What sensory-friendly means

A sensory-friendly home reduces unnecessary strain and offers choice. It does not need to be silent, plain or perfect. It is a home where people can move toward comfort, step away from overload and recover without shame.

Sensory needs can change with tiredness, pain, hunger, stress, hormones, illness and masking.

The eight sensory systems

Sight • sound • smell • taste • touch
Balance and movement (vestibular)
Body position and pressure (proprioception)
Internal signals such as thirst, temperature, pain, heartbeat and toileting (interoception).

A person may seek one sensation while avoiding another.

Signs the environment is too much

Covering ears or eyes • leaving rooms • irritability • freezing • pacing • rocking • repeated movements • headaches • nausea • sudden fatigue • difficulty speaking • needing darkness • avoiding washing, dressing or meals.

These are not bad behaviour. They may be communication, protection or an attempt to regulate. Ask: "What might this person's nervous system be telling us?"

Start a gentle sensory profile

NOTICE: Where and when does discomfort appear? What happened just before it?

PREFER: Which light, sound, fabrics, temperatures, movements and smells feel best?

RECOVER: What helps after overload - quiet, pressure, movement, solitude, company or sleep?

COMMUNICATE: Agree simple phrases, cards or signals such as "too much", "pause" and "I need space".

REVIEW: Change one thing at a time and observe. Include everyone who uses the home; never force exposure or remove a safe regulation strategy simply because it looks unusual.

Room-by-room changes



Entrance & transitions

Create a predictable landing place for keys, bags, shoes and headphones. Offer a seat, soft light and a few quiet minutes after arriving home.

Living room

Use lamps instead of harsh overhead light; provide curtains, a low-volume zone, different seating, blankets and permission to leave shared activities.

Kitchen & eating

Reduce competing smells and appliance noise. Offer familiar plates and foods separately. Keep safe foods available; eating support must never rely on pressure or shame.

Bedroom

Choose breathable bedding, remove scratchy labels, block unwanted light, soften sudden sounds and keep the route to the bathroom clear and predictable.

Bathroom

Try unscented products, dimmable light, warm towels, non-slip mats and advance warning before noisy fans, flushing, hairdryers or electric toothbrushes.

Work or study area

Face away from visual traffic. Keep only current items visible. Add headphones, a timer, movement breaks, clear storage and a second lower-stimulation place to work.

Designing for regulation



Light, colour & visual load

Use warm lamps, dimmers, blinds or tinted film. Reduce flicker where possible. Store busy items behind plain doors, baskets or curtains. Keep one visually calm wall or corner. Neutral spaces can sit alongside joyful colour - the goal is personal comfort, not a particular style.

Sound & smell

Soft furnishings, door seals and felt pads can reduce echo and bangs. Offer ear defenders or headphones without making someone justify them. Choose fragrance-free cleaning and laundry products when scents cause distress. Ventilate cooking smells and warn before vacuuming, blending or drilling.

Touch, clothing & temperature

Keep preferred textures within reach: smooth, fluffy, cool, weighted or firm. Remove labels and avoid surprise touch. Provide layers, fans, hot-water bottles or cool packs. Ask before changing bedding, towels, furniture or personal products.

Movement & body input

Offer safe ways to push, pull, stretch, rock, pace, bounce or carry. A wall push, resistance band, weighted lap pad or basket of laundry may provide grounding pressure. Weighted products must be comfortable, removable by the person and used with appropriate safety advice.

Create a regulation station

Include only things the person genuinely likes: water, a snack, communication cards, soft fabric, fidget, headphones, sunglasses, breathing prompt, timer, notebook, heat/cool item and a comforting object. Keep it accessible - not as a reward, punishment or place of isolation. Adults need regulation spaces too.

The Fun Sensory Corner



Build your cosy corner

Choose a small tent, chair, canopy or corner. Add 1 soft thing, 1 interesting texture, 1 calming visual, 1 drink option and 1 way to reduce sound. Give it a name and a simple "available / please wait" sign. Everyone may leave whenever they wish.

Sensory treasure hunt

Can you find something...

- smooth and something bumpy?
- quiet and something that jingles?
- warm-coloured and cool-coloured?
- that smells comforting?
- that helps your body feel steady?

Skipping an item is always allowed.

Make a comfort menu

Pick from: blanket burrito • music • silence • wall pushes • bubbles • drawing • crunchy snack • warm drink • pacing • rocking • pet time • dark room • shower • hand massage • a chat • being alone. Add your own. Circle "helps", "maybe" or "not for me".

Low-mess sensory play

Try a torch shadow game, fabric-matching bag, paper tearing, sticker patterns, water painting, sorting buttons, indoor picnic, pillow path, slow balloon keep-up or listening for five household sounds. Check choking, allergy and mobility risks first.

My corner plan

My corner is called: _____

Things I would like there: _____

Light that feels best: _____ Sound that feels best: _____

My "I need space" signal: _____

One fun activity I want to try: _____

There is no correct way to enjoy sensory play. Stop, change or repeat whenever your body asks.

A household plan that lasts



Before overload

Keep routines visible but flexible. Give advance notice of visitors, repairs, appliances and changes. Schedule decompression after school, work, shopping or appointments. Carry a small sensory kit between rooms. Make access needs ordinary household information, not a secret or a source of embarrassment.

During overload

Reduce words, demands, light, sound and the number of people present. Offer space and simple choices. Do not insist on eye contact, explanations, touch or breathing exercises. Prioritise immediate safety. A meltdown is not the time to teach a lesson; connection and recovery come first.

Afterwards

Allow recovery time, hydration, food and rest. Avoid an immediate post-mortem. Later, ask gently what helped and what should change. Record patterns without blame. Repair any misunderstandings and reassure the person that their needs are valid.

When to seek support

An occupational therapist may help when sensory differences seriously affect daily living. Speak with an appropriate health professional about sudden changes, pain, hearing or vision concerns, fainting, eating or hydration risks, sleep disruption, or significant distress. In urgent danger, use emergency services.

Your first three changes

1. One thing we will reduce: _____
2. One comfort we will make easier to reach: _____
3. One way we will communicate "pause": _____

Review together after one week. Keep what helps, adjust what does not, and remember: a sensory-friendly home is built through listening, not perfection.