Creating a Sensory-Friendly Home

A practical, continuous guide to making your home more comfortable, flexible and supportive. You do not need a perfect home or expensive equipment: start with what makes everyday life easier.

Welcome home

A sensory-friendly home is not a perfectly quiet, minimalist or expensive home. It is a home that makes everyday life easier for the people who live there. You may need lower light, predictable sound, soft textures, space to move, or a place where nobody expects conversation. Different people can need opposite things. The aim is choice, not a single correct sensory setting. **Consider:** Start by noticing one moment at home when your body relaxes and one moment when it braces. Those moments are useful clues.

Your sensory profile

Your nervous system may notice, amplify, seek or miss different sensations. These responses can change with tiredness, stress, illness and the time of day. Some people are sensitive to noise yet seek strong pressure; others enjoy bright light but find clothing seams unbearable. Sensory preferences are not a test of resilience. They are information for designing a more workable environment. **Consider:** Notice what you seek, what you avoid and what you need after a demanding day.

Lighting without overload

Light affects comfort, concentration and the ability to settle. A bright ceiling light can feel very different from a shaded lamp, even when the room is equally usable. Try layered lighting: task light where it is needed and softer light elsewhere. Consider glare from windows, reflective surfaces, screens and flickering bulbs. Blackout curtains may help some people; others need daylight to feel oriented. **Consider:** Experiment with one adjustable light before replacing every bulb.

Sound and recovery

The most difficult sound is not always the loudest. Repetitive humming, unpredictable bangs, overlapping voices and sudden alerts can be especially draining. Consider soft furnishings, door seals, quieter appliances, headphones or a predictable quiet period. Headphones should be a choice, not a requirement to tolerate a difficult environment. Agree how someone can ask for reduced sound without needing to explain at length. **Consider:** Identify the sound you would most like to control and one realistic way to reduce it.

Textures and touch

Furniture, bedding, flooring and clothing can influence how safe or settled a room feels. Texture is highly personal. Offer different seating and blanket options rather than assuming soft always means comfortable. Labels, seams, rough upholstery, sticky surfaces and unexpected touch can be distressing. Keep favourite textures accessible and allow people to choose whether they want touch or space. **Consider:** Choose a surface you use daily. Is its texture supportive, tolerable or exhausting?

Smells and air

Cooking odours, cleaning sprays, scented candles and perfumes can linger long after the source is gone. Unscented products, ventilation, closed storage and a predictable cooking routine can help. Check that ventilation does not create a new noise problem. Avoid masking a strong smell with another strong smell. If smells trigger headaches or nausea, reducing the source is usually more useful than adding fragrance. **Consider:** Pick one scent source that could be removed or contained.

Visual calm and clutter

Visual overload is not the same as untidiness. A room can be organised yet feel busy, and a lived-in room can still feel comforting. Try visible homes for frequently used items, covered storage for distracting items and a clear resting surface. Labels or transparent boxes help some people; others prefer closed cupboards. Avoid making every surface bare if seeing familiar objects helps with memory and orientation. **Consider:** Create one low-demand visual zone rather than trying to reorganise the whole house.

A place to reset

A sensory recovery space does not need to be a separate room. A chair, bed corner or small nook can become a predictable place to recover. Include only what is useful: perhaps a preferred blanket, adjustable light, headphones, water or a familiar object. Let people use the space without questioning or pressure to rejoin. Keep exits clear and avoid enclosed setups that restrict movement. **Consider:** What would help you feel that this space belongs to you?

Kitchen and mealtimes

Kitchens combine noise, light, smells, textures and many simultaneous decisions. Making food easier can mean changing the environment, not just the recipe. Try quieter preparation times, non-slip mats, familiar utensils, a predictable cupboard layout and permission to eat in a different room. For some people, separate foods, lower-odour options or a seat away from appliances can make meals more manageable. **Consider:** Which single kitchen sensation makes preparing or eating food harder?

Bedroom and sleep

A bedroom can support rest when light, temperature, sound and bedding are adjustable to the person using it. Consider blackout or filtered light, soft bedside lighting, comfortable temperature and familiar fabrics. Keep charging lights and notifications in mind. Weighted blankets are not suitable for everyone; anyone using one must be able to remove it independently and should seek appropriate advice if there are health or mobility concerns. **Consider:** Try changing one sleep-environment factor for several nights and notice whether it helps.

Bathroom and personal care

Bathrooms can be sensory-intense because of echoes, bright light, water pressure, wet textures, temperature changes and strong product smells. Offer alternative shower heads, towels, lighting and unscented products where possible. A predictable sequence, dry towel within reach and non-slip surfaces can reduce stress. Any changes around water and electrics should be installed safely by a qualified professional. **Consider:** Which part of personal care feels most demanding: before, during or afterwards?

Shared homes, different needs

One person may need music while another needs silence. One may prefer a warm room while another needs cool air. Neither preference cancels out the other. Agree on adjustable zones, times and signals. For example, use headphones for personal audio, designate a quiet hour, or choose different lighting in separate corners. Make requests specific: “Could the television be lower for twenty minutes?” often works better than “It is too noisy.” **Consider:** What household agreement would protect everyone’s needs more fairly?

Low-cost changes first

You do not need a renovation or specialist shopping list to make meaningful changes. Start with the changes that are reversible and free: move a chair, change the time a noisy task happens, reduce notifications, rearrange storage or create a signal for needing quiet. Then consider small purchases only when you know what problem they solve. **Consider:** Choose one free change, one small change and one idea to revisit later.

Build your home plan

Your plan should be small enough to use on a difficult day. Pick the room or activity that creates the most strain and change one thing at a time. A useful plan names the trigger, the adjustment, who needs to agree and how you will tell whether it helps. There is no need to complete every room at once. Review what worked and keep what genuinely supports you. **Consider:** Use the interactive planner on the next page to make your own starting point.

Your sensory priorities and home plan

Circle or tick the areas that matter most: lighting · sound · textures · smells · visual clutter · temperature · kitchen · sleep · bathroom · shared spaces. Choose just one manageable adjustment to try first.

The room or activity I want to make easier: _____

What feels difficult at the moment: _____

One change I can try: _____

How I will know whether it helps: _____