



WSPCF Guide to the WSSC Sensory Package

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1. Introduction

This guide has been written by the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF), a parent carer-led organisation that represents families of children and young people (aged 0-25) with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) across West Sussex.

Our aim is to help you, as a parent carer, understand:

- What the Sensory Package is and how it can support your child or young person
- How it can help you work more effectively with your child or young person's setting (nursery, school or college)
- How to use the resources mentioned to improve communication with professionals

The Sensory Package has been developed by the Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT) at West Sussex County Council (WSCC). It includes documents, tools and resources designed to support children and young people who experience sensory differences. Although originally created for school staff and professionals, we've found that the information is incredibly helpful for Parent Carers too.

We know that sensory needs can be complex and that your child or young person may present differently at home than they do in their setting. They may also be masking their difficulties, which can make it harder to get the right support. This package can help you understand their sensory experience, advocate for their needs, and work collaboratively with their setting to create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Whether you're just beginning to explore sensory needs or have been navigating this journey for a while, this guide and the Sensory Package are here to support you to support your child or young person.

Remember, you are the expert on your child or young person, but you may not know enough about sensory differences to interpret what you see - so this guide can help! Your insights, observations and experiences are essential in shaping the support they receive, and by working together with professionals and using tools like this, you can help your child or young person grow and succeed in their own way.

We'd love to hear what you think and invite you to become a member of WSPCF. By joining us, you'll be part of a friendly, supportive community of Parent Carers working with services co-productively to make them better for all SEND families in West Sussex. Your voice really matters - together, we can help shape a brighter future for our children and young people.

Visit www.wspcf.org.uk to find out more and get involved!

2. What Is the Sensory Package?

The Sensory Package is a collection of resources created by the Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT) at West Sussex County Council. It includes helpful documents for school staff and professionals, links to websites and further reading, video clips explaining sensory processing and practical strategies for home and school.

Although designed for professionals, these resources are incredibly useful for Parent Carers. They can help you understand your child's sensory strengths, differences and needs, support your child or young person at home and communicate more effectively with your child's setting.

3. Where to Find the WSCC Sensory Package

You can explore the full WSCC Sensory Package and many other useful ASCT resources here: schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/19632

In the ASCT Resources section (right hand side of the webpage), you will find a downloadable file which contains the full version of the Sensory Package with lots of useful resources and information to help you support your child or young person with any sensory challenges they may face.

The guidance below will help you to learn more about what sensory differences are, how you can identify them in your child using the WSCC Sensory Package, and suggest strategies to try.



4. Understanding Sensory Differences

Sensory processing differences are common in many children and young people - not just those who are autistic. These differences affect how a child receives and responds to information from the world around them. Distressed behaviour could be a reaction to sensory input that feels overwhelming or uncomfortable - like loud noises, bright lights, or certain textures.

A helpful phrase to remember is: "See behaviour, think sensory."

It's a way of pausing and asking, "What's this behaviour trying to tell me right now?"

We all have 8 sensory systems, and your child may experience differences in one or more of these:

- Tactile – touch (eg clothing textures, soft fabrics, rough surfaces).
- Gustatory – taste (e.g. food textures, flavours).
- Olfactory – smell (e.g. perfumes, cleaning products).
- Visual – sight (e.g. bright lights, busy rooms).
- Auditory – hearing (e.g. loud noises, background chatter).
- Proprioception – body awareness (e.g. knowing where their body is in space).
- Vestibular – movement and balance (e.g. swings, climbing, sitting still).
- Interoception – internal body signals (e.g. hunger, needing the toilet, emotions).

Every child is different. Some may seek out certain sensations, while others avoid them.

Understanding your child's sensory experience can help you support them more effectively, both at home and in their (educational) setting.

In this guide, we have listed a few key strategies for each of the 8 sensory systems listed above, that might help your child to manage sensory input at home or at school. This list can't cover everything, and it is worth noting that not every strategy will work for every child or young person. Some children are 'avoiders' of a certain sensory input and will try to get away from it, whilst others will be 'seekers', looking outward for a stimulus to help themselves regulate. There are also many more suggestions in the full WSCC Sensory Package.

5. How Can I Use the WSCC Sensory Package alongside this guide?

Inside the WSCC Sensory Package, you'll find a helpful sensory checklist (ASCT Sensory Toolkit) This can guide you in spotting which sensory areas your child or young person might find challenging - whether it's sound, touch, movement, or something else.

Once you've filled out the checklist, you'll have a clearer picture of your child or young person's sensory experience and how different types of sensory input may be affecting them. From there, you can explore this guide and the full WSCC Sensory Package for practical strategies tailored to each area of need.

It can also be helpful to share your completed checklist with your child's nursery, school or college. It gives staff a better understanding of what's happening at home, supports your conversations about additional help, and highlights any needs that might not yet be recognised in the setting.

6. Using Checklists to Spot Patterns

Using a sensory checklist (like the [Autism and Social Communication Team](#) (ASCT) Sensory Toolkit) can be a powerful way to understand and explain your child or young person's sensory needs. The checklist helps you spot patterns in how they respond to different types of sensory input, so can highlight possible sensory triggers. This will also help you share clear, practical examples with teachers and professionals, making it easier to work together on supportive strategies.



7. How Can It Help at Home?

You can use the Sensory Package to:

- Spot patterns in your child or person's sensory responses (e.g. sensitivity to noise, touch, light).
- Create a sensory-friendly environment at home.
- Keep a sensory diary to track triggers and calming strategies.
- Share what works with your child's nursery, school or college.

8. How Can It Help in School?

Many children mask their sensory discomfort during the school day, only to become dysregulated at home.

The Sensory Package helps you:

- Explain what you're seeing at home.
- Advocate for reasonable adjustments in school.
- Work with staff to co-produce a personalised support plan.
- Suggest tools like sensory breaks, quiet spaces, or calming routines.



9. Exploring the Eight Sensory Systems

Now that you've learned how the Sensory Package can support your child or young person at home and in school, this next section takes a closer look at the eight sensory systems. Each system affects how your child experiences the world - from touch and taste to movement and internal body signals.

For each sensory area, we've included:

- Signs you might notice at home or in a setting.
- What might be going on behind the behaviour you are seeing.
- Practical strategies to try at home or share with professionals.

Remember, every child is different. Some may seek out certain sensations, while others avoid them. These strategies are not one-size-fits-all, but they can help you build a better understanding of your child's sensory experience and support their regulation and wellbeing.





a. Tactile - touch

Some children and young people may really enjoy touch - they might seek out certain textures such as hair, sticks, water play. Others may find touch uncomfortable or even distressing - they might pull away from cuddles, dislike certain fabrics, or avoid messy activities.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- Avoid hugs, hair brushing, or certain fabrics.
- Dislike messy play (e.g. sand, paint, glue).
- Pull away from light touch or unexpected contact.
- Constantly touch things or people.
- Enjoy tight squeezes, wrapping up in blankets, or rough-and-tumble play.
- Be bothered by clothing labels, seams, or socks.

What's Going On?

The tactile system helps us process touch - everything from a gentle breeze to a firm hug. Some children are hypersensitive (over-responsive) and want to avoid touch. Others are hyposensitive (under-responsive) and seek out more intense sensations. Some children and young people experience both, depending on the situation.

Strategies to Try at Home

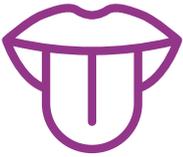
For Those Who Avoid Touch:

- Let them choose their own clothes with preferred textures.
- Cut out clothing labels or turn socks inside out.
- Use firm, predictable touch (light touch can feel startling).
- Offer tools like a paintbrush or sponge for messy play.
- Let them wash hands with a flannel instead of directly touching water.

For Those Who Seek Touch:

- Provide opportunities for messy play (e.g., with playdough, sand, paint).
- Make sensory bins/bags filled with materials and objects they like to touch.
- Try hand massage or lotion rubs as part of a calming routine.





b. Gustatory - taste

Some children and young people really enjoy exploring different tastes - they might love trying new foods, enjoy strong flavours, or seek out crunchy or chewy textures. Others might be very sensitive to tastes and textures - they may refuse certain foods, dislike strong flavours, or prefer bland and simple tastes.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- Refuse certain foods based on texture, temperature, or flavour.
- Gag or become distressed when trying new foods.
- Eat only crunchy, bland, or beige foods.
- Seek out strong flavours like sour, salty, or spicy.
- Chew or mouth non-food items (e.g. sleeves, pencils, toys).
- Avoid brushing teeth or using certain toothpaste flavours.

What's Going On?

The gustatory system helps us process taste and oral sensations. Some children and young people are hypersensitive (over-responsive) and find certain tastes or textures overwhelming. Others are hyposensitive (under-responsive) and seek strong flavours or oral stimulation to feel regulated.



Strategies to Try at Home

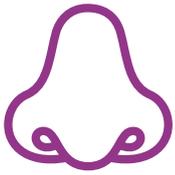
For Those Who Avoid Taste/Textures:

- Offer familiar foods alongside new ones.
- Let them explore food through play without pressure to eat.
- Use bland or predictable flavours.
- Try different temperatures and textures slowly.
- Offer alternatives to brushing (e.g. flavoured flossers, water-only brushing).

For Those Who Seek Oral Input:

- Provide crunchy snacks like carrots, breadsticks, or rice cakes.
- Offer strong flavours in moderation (e.g. sour sweets, pickles).
- Use chewable jewellery or safe mouthing tools.
- Offer straws, water bottles with resistance, or gum (if age-appropriate).
- Include oral activities in calming routines (e.g. blowing bubbles, sucking smoothies).





c. Olfactory - smell

Supporting children who are sensitive to scents or seek out strong smells

The olfactory system helps us process smells like food, flowers, cleaning products, and people. Some children and young people find certain scents overwhelming or upsetting, while others seek out strong or unusual smells for comfort or stimulation. These reactions can affect how they feel, behave, and cope day to day.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- React strongly to smells like perfume, cleaning products, food, or other people.
- Avoid certain places (e.g. bathrooms, kitchens, shops) because of strong scents.
- Seek out smells by sniffing objects, people, or food.
- Become overwhelmed or anxious in environments with lots of different smells.
- Struggle to focus or settle when a scent is distracting.

What's Going On?

The olfactory system helps us detect and process smells. Some are hypersensitive (over-responsive) and find certain scents overpowering or distressing. Others are hyposensitive (under-responsive) and may seek out strong or unusual smells to feel regulated.

Smell can affect mood, behaviour, and even appetite - and it's often overlooked as a sensory trigger.

Strategies to Try at Home

For Those Who Avoid Smells:

- Use unscented or low-scent products (e.g. soaps, detergents, air fresheners).
- Avoid strong-smelling foods during mealtimes.
- Keep windows open or use fans to improve ventilation.
- Let your child choose their own toiletries or clothing based on scent.
- Offer scent-free zones at home or school or access to a smell they like to help them manage smells they do not (e.g. hankerchief with their favourite smell).

For Those Who Seek Smells:

- Provide safe-smelling items (e.g. scented playdough, fabric squares, essential oil rollers).
- Use smell-based activities like baking, herb sorting, or scented sensory bins.
- Offer calming scents during transitions (e.g. lavender pouch in a pocket).
- Include olfactory input in sensory breaks or calming routines.





d. Visual - sight

Supporting children and young people who are sensitive to light, colour, or visual clutter means recognising how their visual environment affects their comfort, focus, and behaviour. Bright lights, busy displays, or fast-moving visuals can feel overwhelming and lead to distress or distraction. Understanding these sensitivities helps create calmer, more accessible spaces at home, in school, and in the community.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- Squint, cover their eyes, or avoid bright lights.
- Struggle in visually busy spaces (e.g. cluttered rooms, crowded displays, supermarkets, bowling alleys).
- Be distracted by movement, flickering lights, or patterns.
- Seek out visual input (e.g. watching spinning fans, lining up toys, staring at lights).
- Find it hard to focus on tasks with lots of visual information.

What's Going On?

The visual system helps us process what we see - colours, shapes, movement, and brightness. Some children and young people are hypersensitive (over-responsive) and find visual input overwhelming. Others are hyposensitive (under-responsive) and seek out strong or repetitive visuals to feel regulated.

Visuals can provide comfort and a sense of security - such as photos of family, favourite characters, or familiar places.

Strategies to Try at Home

For Those Who Avoid Visual Input:

- Use soft lighting or dimmable lamps.
- Reduce clutter in key spaces (e.g. bedroom, homework area).
- Offer sunglasses, hats, or visors in bright environments.
- Use plain backgrounds for tasks like reading or writing.
- Limit fast-moving or flashing visuals (e.g. screens, toys).

For Children and Young People Who Seek Visual Input:

- Provide safe visual toys (e.g. lava lamps, glitter jars, spinning tops).
- Use visual schedules, now/next boards, or colour-coded routines.
- Offer calming visual activities (e.g. sorting colours, watching bubbles).
- Include visual breaks during transitions or busy times.
- Try pattern-based play like puzzles, matching games, or gaming.





e. Auditory - hearing

The auditory system helps us process sounds - from voices and music to background noise and sudden bangs. Some children and young people may find certain sounds overwhelming or painful, while others seek out noise or make sounds to feel calm and focused. These differences can affect how they cope in busy environments like classrooms, shops, or social settings.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- Cover their ears or become distressed by loud or unexpected sounds.
- Struggle in noisy environments like classrooms, shops, or social events.
- Be distracted by background noise or multiple voices.
- Seek out sound by humming, tapping, or making repetitive noises.
- Talk loudly or enjoy noisy toys and music.

What's Going On?

The auditory system helps us process sounds - from speech and music to environmental noise. Some children and young people are hypersensitive (over-responsive) and find certain sounds overwhelming or painful. Others are hyposensitive (under-responsive) and seek out sound to feel regulated or engaged.

Sound sensitivity can affect focus, emotional regulation, and participation in everyday activities.

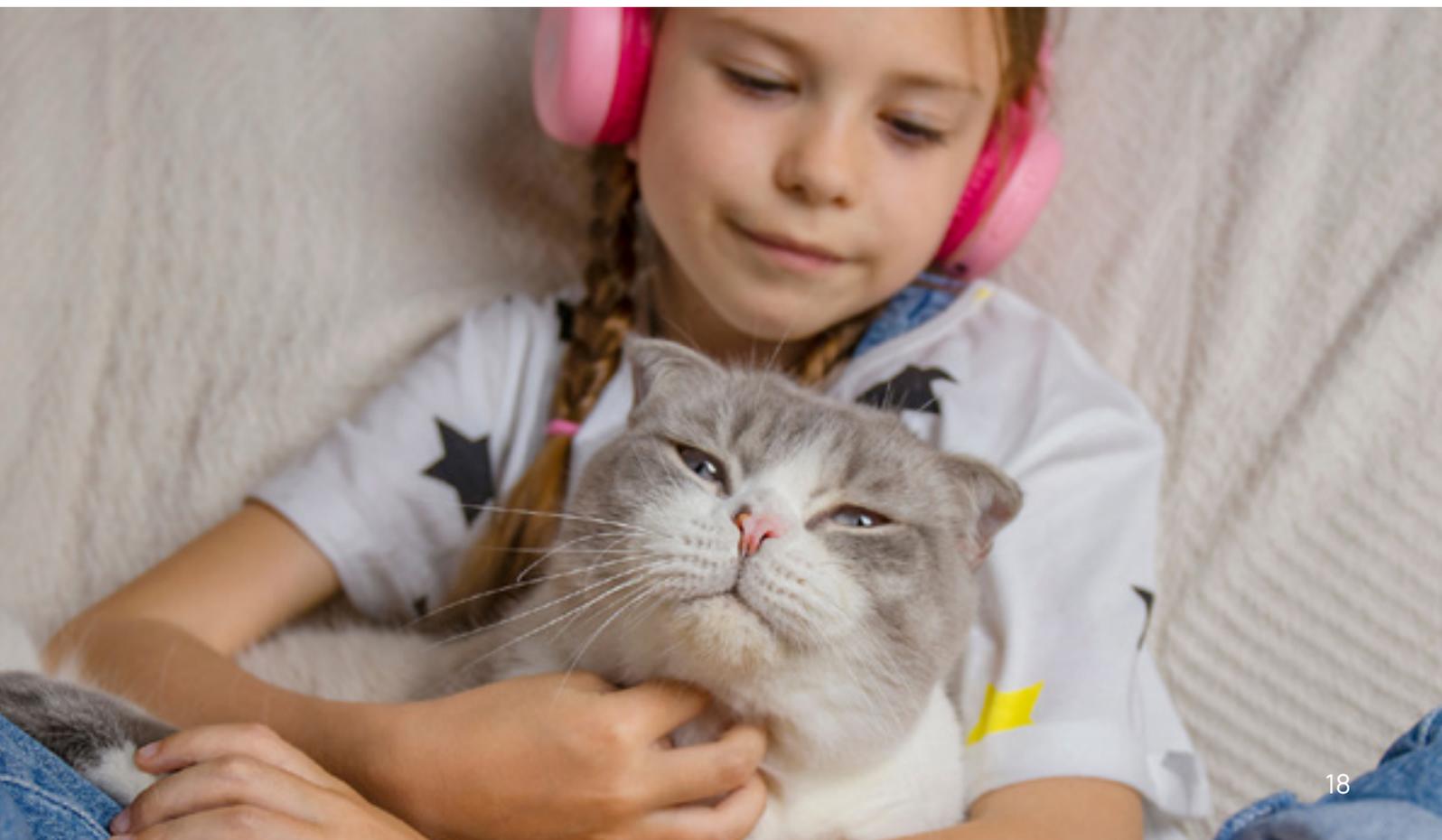
Strategies to Try at Home

For Those Who Avoid Sound:

- Use noise-cancelling headphones, ear buds or ear defenders.
- Create quiet zones at home for rest and regulation.
- Prepare them for noisy situations with visual cues or social stories.
- Use soft music or white noise to mask unpredictable sounds.
- Offer breaks after noisy activities or outings.

For Those Who Seek Sound:

- Provide safe sound-making toys (e.g. musical instruments, tapping boards).
- Include sound-based activities in routines (e.g. singing, rhythm games).
- Let them hum, tap, or vocalise during transitions or calming time.
- Use headphones with preferred music (e.g. with one ear bud in, one out).





f. Proprioception - body awareness

Supporting children and young people who are unsure of their body position or seek deep pressure and movement.

The proprioceptive system helps us sense where our body is in space - even without looking. It tells us how much force to use when lifting, pushing, or holding things, and helps with coordination and balance. Some children and young people may seem clumsy or bump into things, while others seek deep pressure or heavy movement to feel calm and in control.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- Bump into furniture, people, or doorways.
- Struggle with fine motor tasks like writing or using cutlery.
- Enjoy crashing, jumping, or squeezing into tight spaces.
- Seek out deep pressure through hugs, weighted items, or rough play.
- Seem unaware of how hard they're gripping, pushing, or pulling.

What's Going On?

Children and young people who are under-responsive to proprioceptive input may need extra movement or pressure to feel regulated. This can affect how they move, interact, and manage everyday tasks. Supporting proprioception can improve coordination, focus, and emotional regulation.

Strategies to Try at Home

- Offer "heavy work" activities like pushing a laundry basket, carrying books, or helping with chores.
- Use resistance bands, climbing frames, or obstacle courses.
- Provide deep pressure tools like weighted blankets, lap pads, or tight hugs.
- Include movement breaks during transitions or seated tasks.
- Try calming routines like yoga, stretching, or animal walks.



g. Vestibular - movement & balance

Supporting children and young people who are sensitive to movement or seek out motion to feel regulated

The vestibular system helps us stay balanced, coordinate movements, and understand where our body is in relation to gravity. It's activated by activities like swinging, spinning, jumping, or climbing. Some children and young people may avoid movement because it feels unsettling, while others crave it and seek out constant motion to feel calm and focused.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- Avoid swings, climbing frames, or fast movement.
- Feel dizzy or unsteady during certain activities.
- Seek out spinning, jumping, or rocking.
- Struggle with balance or coordination.
- Move constantly or find it hard to sit still.

What's Going On?

Children and young people who are hypersensitive to vestibular input may feel unsafe or anxious during movement. Those who are hyposensitive may need extra motion to feel regulated and alert. Supporting vestibular needs can improve focus, emotional regulation, and physical confidence.

Strategies to Try at Home

For Those Who Seek Proprioceptive Feedback:

- Introduce new movement activities slowly and predictably.
- Offer gentle rocking or swaying in a safe space.
- Use stable seating (e.g. chairs with arms, footrests).
- Avoid sudden or fast movements during transitions.
- Let them control the pace of movement (e.g. self-pushing on a swing).

For Those Who Seek Movement:

- Provide access to swings, trampolines, or rocking chairs.
- Include movement breaks during the day (e.g. jumping jacks, dancing).
- Use wobble cushions or movement-based seating for tasks.
- Try calming movement routines like yoga or animal walks.
- Offer safe spinning toys or activities with rhythm and motion.



10. Interoception - internal body awareness

Supporting children and young people who struggle to recognise or respond to internal body signals

The interoceptive system helps us notice and interpret signals from inside our body - like hunger, thirst, needing the toilet, pain, or emotions. Some children and young people may not realise they're hungry or tired until they're overwhelmed. Others may overreact to small discomforts or struggle to express how they feel.

These differences can affect emotional regulation, self-care, and communication - especially during transitions, routines, or stressful moments.

What You Might Notice

Your child or young person may:

- Forget to eat, drink, or use the toilet until it's urgent.
- Overreact or underreact to pain, temperature, or discomfort.
- Struggle to describe how they're feeling physically or emotionally.
- Seem unaware of tiredness, hunger, or needing rest.
- Find it hard to calm down or explain what's wrong.

What's Going On?

Children and young people with interoceptive differences may be under-responsive and miss key body signals, or over-responsive and feel overwhelmed by internal sensations. Supporting interoception helps build self-awareness, emotional understanding, and independence.

Strategies to Try at Home

- Use visual reminders for eating, drinking, and toileting.
- Create calm routines for checking in with body signals (e.g. “How does your tummy feel?”).
- Offer emotion cards or body maps to help describe feelings.
- Use timers or gentle prompts for regular breaks and self-care.
- Model your own body awareness (e.g. “I’m feeling thirsty, I’ll get a drink”).
- Practice mindfulness or breathing exercises to build internal awareness.



11. Feedback and Next Steps:

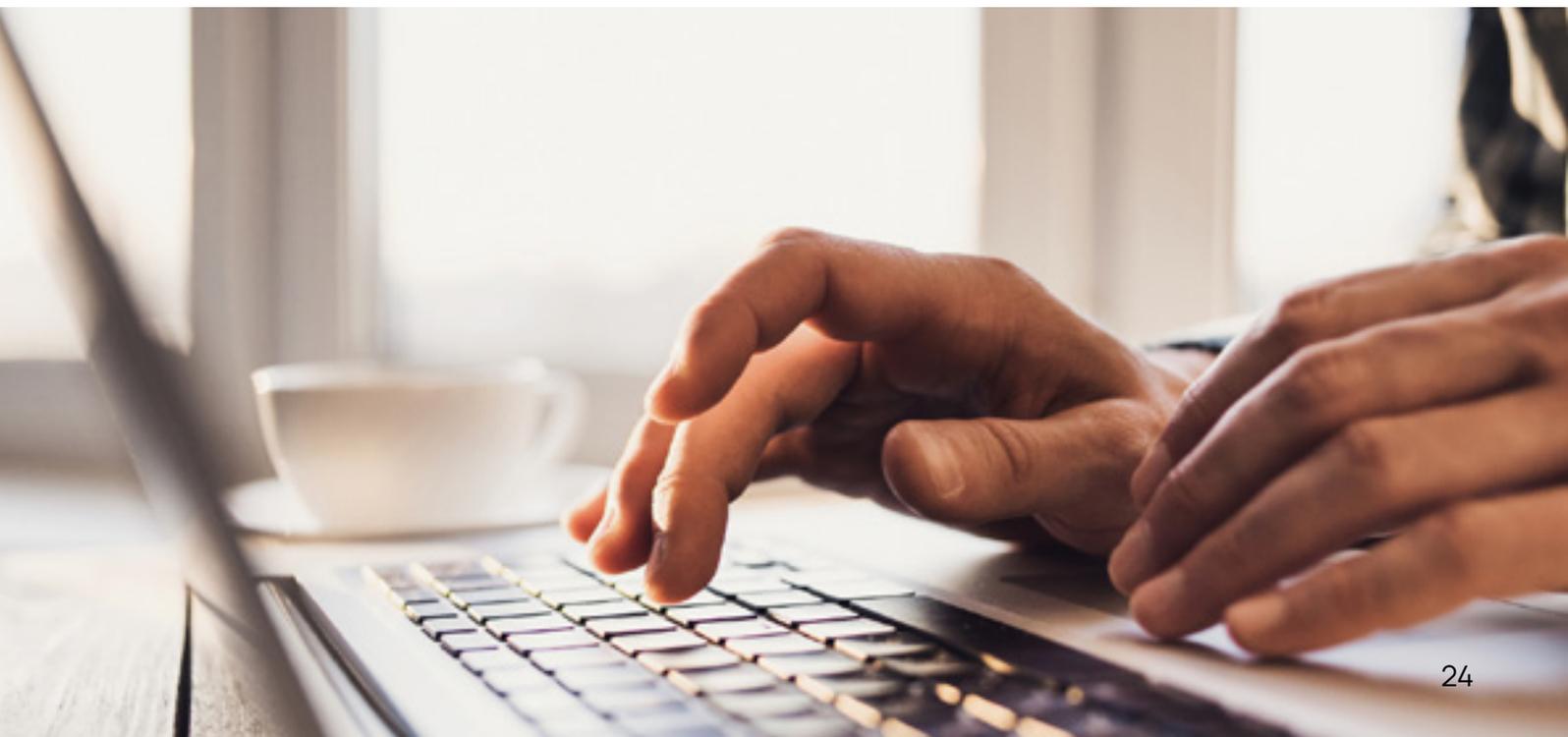
This guide was written by the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF) - a parent carer-led organisation that represents the views/voices of families with children and young people with SEND across West Sussex. We welcome feedback from all families, whether you're new to sensory support or have years of experience.

WSPCF exists to:

- Champion parent carers' views.
- Influence local services and policy.
- Co-produce solutions with the Local Authority and NHS.
- Support families through information, events and consultation.

Your feedback helps us:

- Improve this guide and make it more useful.
- Understand what's working (and what's not) in local SEND support.
- Represent your experiences in meetings with decision-makers.
- Shape future resources and training.



How to Share Your Feedback

We'd love to hear about:

- What you found helpful in this guide.
- What could be clearer or more useful.
- What support you need next.
- Your experiences.

You can share feedback by:

- Emailing us at office@wspcf.org.uk
- Joining one of our online or in-person events.
- Filling in a feedback form (available on our website): www.wspcf.org.uk



This guide has been written by and for parent carers, to help make sense of sensory differences and to support conversations with schools and professionals. It is not a clinical or diagnostic document.

The information in this guide is informed by:

- The West Sussex County Council Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT) Sensory Toolkit
- Ayres Sensory Integration theory, which underpins much sensory processing practice
- Dunn's Model of Sensory Processing, commonly used by occupational therapists
- NHS and local authority sensory processing guidance used across the UK
- The lived experience of parent carers, alongside practice based professional knowledge

These approaches recognise that:

- All children have sensory systems, and some experience sensory differences
- Sensory differences can affect behaviour, emotions, communication and wellbeing
- Understanding sensory needs helps adults respond with curiosity and support
- Small, practical changes can make everyday life easier at home and in school

This guide reflects widely used and accepted practice across education and health services, while keeping the focus on what is most helpful and accessible for families.



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