

Module 6

Sensory issues and ADHD

Flourish



Regulating your senses



» Table of Contents

03

About Your Senses

What are your 8 senses?

06

Three Concepts

Explore three concepts unique to neurodivergent sensory systems.

07

The Impact of Sensory Issues on Adhd Womens Lives

Discussion of areas impacted by different sensory processing issues, including a reminder of our stress model.

09

The Importance of Stimming

The importance of being able to regulate your nervous system and sensory system

13

Sensory Modulation in 6 Steps

How and why it's important to use your senses to help manage your stress and emotions.

17

Step 1: Finding your Preferences

Generate your sensory preferences.

» Table of Contents

18

Step 2: Finding Your Triggers

Generate your sensory triggers.

20

Step 3: Find Your Soothers and Energizers

Generate a list of your soothers and energizers.

23

Step 3: Use Timer Check-Ins

Use this self-awareness tool with your senses.

24

Step 5: Make your Sensory kit

Generating your sensory kit to help you when you need to relax or rev up.

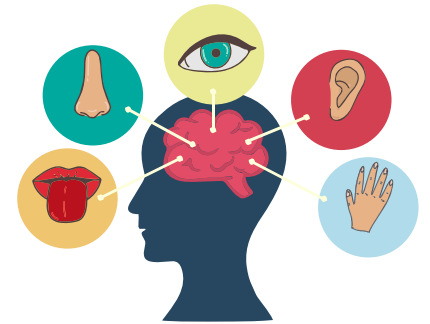
25

Step 6: Start to Incorporate Sensory Breaks

Take some of the information you've learned to begin this new practice.

Sensory Issues and ADHD

The Sensory System



Research shows adhd children and adults have different sensory systems. These differences can make life challenging if they are not understood or accommodated. In this module we will learn about how to use y our senses help regulate your stress and emotions.

Sensory issues and ADHD

External Senses

Smell



Taste



Hearing



Touch



Sight



Sensory issues and ADHD

Internal Senses

Vestibular System

Sense of balance and motion,
speed of movement, direction of
movement

Interoceptive System

Internal sensations such as
hunger, thirst, heartbeat,
breath, and muscle tension

Proprioceptive System

Sense of body position and
movement, weight, tension,
and resistance in activities

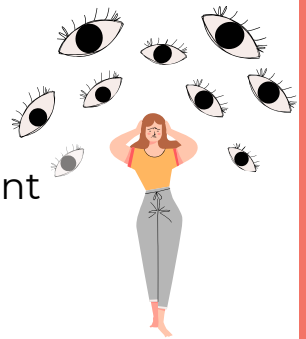
Sensory issues and ADHD

Three Concepts

We call you a "**sensory seeker**" if you feel like you crave stimulation.



If you feel overwhelmed by sensory experiences, we call you "**sensory sensitive**".



You likely experience both of these situations at different times.

Can you relate to these experiences?



Multisensory Processing

ADHD can also affect how you process information from multiple senses simultaneously. For instance, you might need help comprehending speech in a bright environment.

Have you experienced anything like this?



Sensory Issues and ADHD

Areas of Impact

Due to sensory issues, performing well in school or work may be challenging.

• Social situations may be difficult. They may involve too many sensory stimuli, like bright lights or loud music, overwhelming you. This might result in you isolating yourself or avoiding these activities.

• Stress and anxiety can be triggered. When overwhelmed by sensory input, it may trigger a stress response. This can cause feelings of anxiety or panic.

• Your executive functioning can be impacted. When your sensory systems are over or under-stimulated, your ability to attend, focus, and think well is impaired.

• Emotional regulation is impacted. You may become emotionally dysregulated by stress or boredom.

Your behavior may be impacted. Sometimes sensory

- dysregulation happens without your awareness. This can result in behavior that you don't understand.

You often need to be taught to care for your special sensory needs and recognize them

Sensory issues and ADHD

Areas Impacted By your Sensory Issues



Emotional Regulation



Anxiety and Stress



School/Work



Socializing



Excutive Functioning



Behaviors

Sensory Issues and ADHD

Flourish Stress Model



Remember our stress

model? 1. Rest

2. Challenge

3. Challenge-overwhelm

4. Overwhelm

Modulating our senses and being aware of what sensory input and environments we prefer can keep us from tipping over into overwhelm.

Sensory issues and ADHD

Disregard of Sensory Issues in Childhood

Sensory issues are often overlooked in children with ADHD.

Symptoms are sometimes dismissed as overreaction or disobedience.

Consider these examples:

Emotional outbursts or meltdowns in environments like grocery stores, due to sensory overload from the variety of sounds, lights, and crowds.



Difficulty eating certain foods due to their textures, which can trigger sensory discomfort.



The need to engage in self-stimulatory behaviors, known as stimming, to help regulate sensory input.



Have you seen adults respond negatively to children exhibiting these behaviors?

Misunderstanding and penalizing ADHD children's sensory responses leads to distress and confusion.

It promotes masking and disconnects that child from their body and their senses.



Sensory Issues and Adhd

Natural Regulation Techniques

From early on, you, as an ADHD woman and other neurodivergent individuals, may naturally try to regulate sensory overload and sensory craving through techniques like self-stimulatory behavior(stimming).

Understanding the natural ways you regulate yourself can help you devise ways to support yourself.

It can also help you to help others. understand you.

Below are some examples of stimming:

Visual:

Flipping pages,
watching the water, or
spinning objects.

Verbal/Auditory:

Expressing oneself
through sounds, such
as humming, singing,
or
repeating phrases.

Tactile:

Using touch to self-
soothe, like rubbing
fingers or chewing
inside cheeks.

Vestibular

(Balance-Based):
Finding Comfort
in movement,
such as spinning,
rocking, swinging,
jumping.

**Repetitive
behaviors:**

Fidget tool use,
opening, and closing
things,
zipping/unzipping
fasteners, flicking,
twirling hair,
tapping.

Others:

Skin picking, scratching,
tearing, shredding
paper, chewing on
objects,
licking one's lips, or
biting or sucking on
things.

Affirming Stimming

Stimming is a natural way of managing sensory experiences and regulating stress and emotions. If stimming behaviors become harmful, the focus should be on finding alternative, safe ways to stim rather than trying to stop the behavior.

Sensory Issues and ADHD

Sensory Modulation



Understanding your senses can help you to:

- Manage the stress response associated with sensory overload.

Nourish yourself through your senses.



- Seek out stimulation when you are understimulated.



- Help regulate your stress level and regulate your emotions by using sensory modulation.



Sensory Issues and ADHD

Emotions, Stress and Senses

When we have the right amount of sensory input, not too much, not too little, we can keep our nervous system balanced and everything works well.

When we feel overwhelmed by too much sensory input, it may result in stress and anxiety.



In contrast, understimulation, which the adhd brain can feel at times, can lead to boredom and disengagement.



When you can recognize these states you can act to change your sensory input to influence how you feel. As a result, you can feel safer in your body, have better emotional regulation, clearer thinking, more freedom in learning and creating, faster recovery from stress, and overall health improvements. Understanding how this works for you can increase feelings of self-trust and self- confidence!

Sensory issues and ADHD

Emotions, Stress and Senses

This sounds great doesn't it?

But how do you do this?

There are six steps you can practice.

1. Align your life as much as possible with your preferences.
2. Avoid your sensory triggers.
3. Figure out what soothes and stimulates your senses.
4. Checking in with your senses regularly.
5. Make a sensory kit .
6. Take sensory breaks.

The following pages will teach you about these steps.

Step 1. Learn Your Sensory Preferences

*Circle any that are true for you or
write on the line underneath
each section*

Visual

Are there a specific
kinds of lighting,
colors or patterns
you prefer to see?

Proprioceptive and vestibular

Are there movement or
physical activities that
you prefer?

Sound

Are there specific
sounds that are pleasant
to you?

Tactile

Are there specific
fabrics or textures you
like for blankets, sheets
or clothing?
Are there ways you like
to be touched?

Temperature

Is there a
temperature that
you prefer?

Taste

Are there specific
tastes
textures or foods that
you prefer?

Odor

Are there specific
scents you enjoy or
prefer?

Step 2: Learn you Sensory Triggers

Circle any true for you or write on the line underneath each section

Visual Triggers

Bright Lights
Flourescent lights
Low light
Glare
Blinking light
Cluttered Space
Patterns
Other

Proprioceptive Triggers

Jumping, pushing, climbing
Sudden contact or touch
Starting or stopping quickly
Maneuvering through spaces

Sound Triggers

Abrupt noise
Concurrent conversations
Constant annoying sounds
Leaf blowers
High volume sounds

Tactile

Itchy coarse fabric
Tight clothing
Light touch
Tags
Seems
Vibration
Other textures

Temperature

Hot or cold weather or temperature
Fluctuating temperature

Taste

Certain flavors
Certain textures

Vestibular Triggers

Certain movements like spinning or changing head position
Climbing a ladder
Looking down
Rapid acceleration or deceleration
Being on a boat or in a car

Odor Triggers

Chemical smells
Sweet Smells
Any smells that are overwhelming to you

Step 1- 2: Your Sensory Preferences and Triggers

Briefly look at the two preceeding worksheets on
preferences and triggers and write down anything
that comes to mind here

Things I like

☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	

Things that Trigger Me

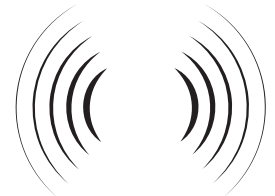
☐	
☐	
☐	
☐	

Step 3: Using Your Senses to Calm and Soothe You

The following are ideas in each of the sensory domains for activities that can be calming when you are overstimulated or feel overwhelmed. Look through these ideas and see if any resonate with you.

Movement

Slow-Paced Dancing
Rocking Chair
Water-Based Activities
Tai Chi/Qi Gong
Cycling

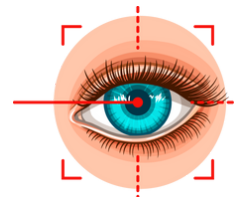


Auditory

Binaural Beats
Podcasts/Audiobooks
Singing/Humming
Water Fountain/Aquarium Sounds
Sound Machine/Fan
Sound Baths/Singing Bowls
Classical Music
Nature Soundtracks
Mindfulness Exercises with sound

Environmental soothers

Plants/Greenery
Space Heater/Personal Fan
Adjustable Desk Lamp
Personal Workspace Items
Window Access
Designated Break/Relaxation Space
Good Air Quality
Curtains/Blinds
Water Feature (Small Fountain)



Visual

Sunsets/Sunrises
Aquariums/Virtual Fish Tanks
Nature walks, bird watching, star gazing
Mandalas/Fractal Art
Soothing Digital Themes
Coloring books, drawing, painting
Watching rain or snow
Looking at art or photography
Drawing/Painting
Coloring Books
Visual Meditation (e.g., guided imagery)

Tactile soothing

Weighted Blankets/Soft Textiles
Fidget Toys/Stress Balls
Specific activities like kinetic sand play
Water play
Art
Baking and gardening
Baths
Massage
Petting and animal



Scent

Aromatherapy
Scented Lotions or Soaps
Scented Tea
Candles
Cooking and Baking
Smelling Jars
Herb or Flower Gardens
Nature Walks

Step 3: Using Your Senses to Stimulate You

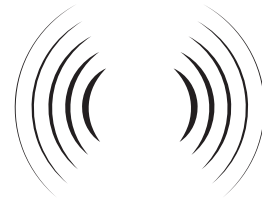
The following are ideas in each of the sensory domains for activities that can be stimulating when you feel bored. Look through these ideas and see if any resonate with you.

Movement Stimulators

Trampolining, swings, or roller coasters

High-energy sports or workouts

Fidgeting behavior, such as foot-tapping, pencil tapping, or the use of fidgets



Auditory Stimulators

Loud, upbeat music

White noise or nature sounds at a higher volume

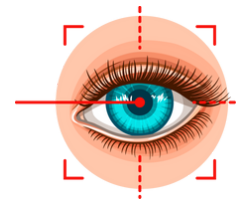
Enjoyment of sounds from crowded places like cafes or markets

A loud concert

Tactile Stimulators

Textured materials like faux fur, velvet, or corduroy

Deep pressure sensations, such as hugs, weighted blankets, or tight clothing, sports



Visual Stimulators

Bright, vibrant colors

Stimulating visuals like lava lamps, bubble tubes, or fast-paced video games

Rapidly changing lighting conditions (e.g., disco balls)

Other



Scent/Taste Stimulators

Aromatherapy

Spicy, sweet, or sour foods

Strong scents such as peppermint, citrus, or spicy fragrances

Carbonated drinks

Crunchy Snacks

Strong peppermint

Your Sensory Soothers and Stimulators

Briefly look at the two sheets soothers and stimulators and write down anything that comes to mind here

Sensory ideas for soothing and calming me

☐

☐

☐

☐

Sensory ideas for stimulating me

☐

☐

☐

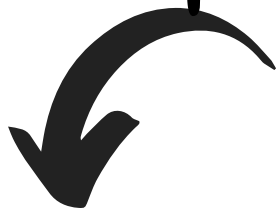
☐



Step 4: Sensory check-ins

Check-in with yourself: Self-Awareness Check-ins with your senses

Example



How Do I feel?



Answer

I feel irritated, I can't think, I'm overwhelmed.

What Do I need?

Answer

I feel like I want to escape.

Quiet. No stimulation.

What Can I do?

Answer

I've got to go get some silence or it's going to get worse.

Let me tell someone,

I need some space and I'm overwhelmed.

I can put the do not disturb sign on my room or office door.



Step 5: Creating Your Sensory Kit

A personalized sensory kit is a great tool for managing stress or overstimulation. It should contain items that can relax or stimulate you. Including a guide with visual cues on actions to take when feeling overwhelmed or bored can be beneficial. This can be especially helpful in situations where thinking clearly is challenging. Use your preferences, soothers and stimulators to create your kit.

Here are some ideas to consider for your personalized sensory modulation kit:

1. Soft Blanket: Comforting tactile stimulation.
2. Gum or Mints: Provides oral sensory input and can help with focus.
3. Fidget Toy: Great for keeping hands busy and mind calm.
4. Scented Oil: Provides calming olfactory stimulation.
5. Personalized Playlists: Music can be a powerful mood regulator; having different playlists can help you achieve the desired state of mind.
6. Headphones: To block out noise and provide a personal soundscape or silence when needed.
7. Sensory Bottles: Shaking the bottle and watching the contents can be visually calming.
8. Handheld Massager: Useful for providing proprioceptive input and relieving muscle tension.
9. Art Supplies: A creative outlet that's both visually and tactilely stimulating.
10. Favorite Book: Reading can be a wonderful mental escape.
11. Warm or Cold Pack: Provides soothing tactile stimulation.
13. Essential Oils: Creates calming or invigorating effect.
14. Tea Bags or Instant Coffee: The ritual, taste, and warmth of a hot drink can be comforting.
15. Stress Balls: An outlet for excess energy or anxiety.
16. Noise-Cancelling Earplugs: Provides quiet in an overwhelming or noisy environment.
17. Silk Scarf or Textured Fabric: Different textures can provide calming tactile stimulation.
18. Bubbles: Watching bubbles float and slowly descend can be visually soothing, and the act of blowing bubbles can provide gentle proprioceptive input.

Step 6 : Your Sensory Break Worksheet

These are periods when you step away from a situation or activity that may be causing sensory overload or stress to engage in activities or practices that help to calm you

or

engage in activities to help you focus when feeling bored by stimulating your sensory system.

You can use ideas from your worksheets to help guide you in your beginning practice.

How often should I take a sensory break?

The best frequency for taking breaks to help manage your focus , stress, and energy levels will depend on many factors. It's best to pay attention to your own signs of overwhelm and boredom and use your checkins to determine how you are feeling. You know yourself best.

List some signs that you might need a sensory break here.

List signals that indicate you might need to take a sensory break (e.g., feeling restless, stressed, fuzzy head, bored, nervous stomach, difficulty concentrating):

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____



Sensory issues and ADHD

Step 6 : Your Sensory Break Worksheet

1. Visual Breaks:

List your preferred visual activities (e.g., reading, coloring, puzzles):

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

2. Auditory Breaks:

List your preferred auditory activities (e.g., listening to calming music, nature sounds): A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

3. Tactile Breaks:

List your preferred tactile activities (e.g., fidget toys, clay modeling):

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

4. Olfactory Breaks:

List your preferred olfactory activities (e.g., aromatherapy, smelling favorite scents):

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____



Sensory issues and ADHD

Step 6 : Your Sensory Break Worksheet

5. Gustatory Breaks:

List your preferred gustatory activities (e.g., eating a small snack, chewing gum): A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

6. Proprioceptive and Vestibular Breaks:

List your preferred physical activities (e.g., short walks, yoga, stretching):

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

