

Sensory Profiling - What is it?

We all experience life through our senses: visual, auditory, touch, oral, taste, position, and movement sense. Sensory information comes from your own body and the environment around you. Each of us has a unique sensory profile.

A sensory profile provides a specific approach to understanding the way an individual responds to sensory information in their environment. Sensory profiles use a research based framework to determine how sensitive an individual is to the input of sound, visual images, movement, smells, taste, and textures.

People with autism and other intellectual disabilities may have an atypical sensory processing capacity. This means that the way they process sensory input may make it difficult for them to process in a particular environment. Studies show that up to 95% of individuals with an autism diagnosis experience sensory processing that is atypical.^{1 2 3}

What are the benefits?

The purpose of sensory profiling is to gain information that will enable strategies to be developed to increase the individuals access to pleasant sensory input. The occupational therapist will provide a report detailing the sensory profile of the individual, and a list of strategies for increasing pleasant sensory input and reducing unpleasant or distressing sensations. Desensitising to specific sensory inputs may also be recommended if appropriate.

The information gained from a sensory profile assessment can assist by giving the information needed to create an environment where sensory input is pleasant and pleasurable for the individual rather than being unpleasant and distressing. This can lead to a decrease in anxiety and improved mood.

How is it done?

A sensory profile is conducted by an occupational therapist. It involves use of an assessment tool to determine how sensitive an individual is to the various types of sensory information.

The assessment will involve observation of the client and interview with a parent or carer who knows the individual well.

The total duration of the assessment is 1.50 to 2.00 hours.

SENSORY PROFILING

Sensory Profiling is recommended for individuals who have an intellectual disability or have been diagnosed with autism.

¹ Ausderau, K.K., Sideris, J., Little, L.M., Furlong, M., Bulluck, J.C. & Baranek, G.T. (2016). Sensory subtypes and associated outcomes in children with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism Research*, 9 (12), 1316-1327.

² Hazen, E.P., Stornelli, J.L., O'Rourke, J.A., Koesterer, K., & McDouge, C.J. (2014). Sensory symptoms in autism spectrum disorders. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 22(2), 112-124.

³ Stewart, C.R., Sanchez, S.S., Grenesko, E.L., Brown, C.M., Chen, C.P., Keehn, B., Velasquez, F., Lincoln, A.J. & Muller, R. (2016). Sensory symptoms and processing of nonverbal auditory and visual stimuli in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 46