

# Sensory Friendly Space Checklist

A Bridges Learning System resource for professionals working with neurodivergent youth



Creating a sensory-friendly space (i.e. classroom, office, area, room) is a great strategy to increase access for autistic and neurodivergent individuals.

There are two key points to keep in mind when creating a space that is truly sensory-friendly:

- 1. The space and the items within it need to be catered to the unique needs of the individuals it serves.** Sensory needs vary greatly from one person to the next. Getting to know the neurodivergent individuals you serve and their unique sensory needs is key to creating a space that works for them.
- 2. Minimize the sensory input that individuals cannot disengage from without leaving the space.** Think of it as a buffet in which the space is an empty plate. Individuals are not simply handed a plate filled with food they didn't want or ask for. They choose what to add to their plate (i.e. playing with a fidget toy, smelling a scented marker, bouncing on a yoga ball, etc.) but can also choose to leave their plate empty.
  - Examples of important sensory input to minimize: Noise pollution, harsh lighting, and inescapable smells (good or bad)

With those key points in mind, review your space and use the checklist that follows to aid you in making your space more sensory-friendly. While this list is a great starting point, it is not exhaustive and may not encompass individual needs. Remember to work closely with individuals to create a space that benefits all!

## Lighting and visuals

- The space takes advantage of any natural light available.
- The space avoids use of fluorescent overhead lighting. If fluorescent lights must be used, they are covered by fire-safe filters that soften their impact.
- There are multiple options of lighting within the space. In a classroom or large office, this could look like leaving the larger space open to natural light and/or with lights on as well as including a sectioned off area using curtains or fabric with darker or softer lighting.
- Visual clutter is minimized as much as possible. There are limited items out and on display, and items that are used irregularly are in storage that is visually separated (i.e. in a bin rather than on a shelf).

## Movement, stimming and regulation

- The space is oriented in a way that gives individuals options for how they sit, stand, lay, move, etc.
- There are seating and standing options outside of chairs/desks, such as floor pillows, couches, yoga balls, hanging chairs, kneeling chairs, balance boards, etc.
- Individuals have clear permission to move how they need to, even while doing listening activities. Clear permission might look like written into classroom rules, frequent verbal and written reminders, or visual reminders on the wall of the space.
- There is a designated “calm corner” for individuals to decompress. This creates an opportunity for individuals to get a break without requiring them to leave the space entirely.
- There are numerous and diverse options of toys and tools that give tactile and proprioceptive sensory input. This might include fidget toys, coloring pages, weighted blankets, lap pads/wraps, etc.

## Textures and smells

- There are multiple options of textures for students to engage with and disengage from as they choose. This can include textured pillows, blankets, other upholstery, fidget toys with various textures, a bin with scraps of fabric with various textures, etc.
- There are multiple options of smells for students to engage with and disengage from as they choose. This can look like having a bin of scented items like scratch and sniff stickers, scented markers, bubbles, playdough, etc.
- Room fresheners or diffusers that prevent individuals from disengaging if they need to are NOT used.

## Sound

- The space is free from noise pollution or the space has adequate sound absorbing materials to minimize noise pollution, such as fabric, upholstery, carpet, acoustic panels, or anything else soft.
- Individuals can disengage from the noises in the space, as needed (i.e. take a break from the room, put on headphones, etc.).

## Interoception

- There are no unnecessary bathroom rules such as hall pass required, only bathroom breaks when we're in between activities, etc. Autonomy to use the bathroom at any point is a nonnegotiable need for many people who have hypo- and hyper-sensitive interoception. This applies to all age groups, including adults.
- There are frequent opportunities AND reminders to snack and hydrate.