



PDA Sensory Profile Checklist

Identifying sensory sensitivities across all seven systems

Many PDA children have significant sensory processing differences that are often overlooked or misattributed to behaviour. This checklist helps you identify your child's sensory profile across all seven sensory systems. Share it with your OT or support team.

How to use this checklist

Tick items that consistently apply to your child. You may find both over-sensitivity (hypersensitivity) and under-sensitivity (hyposensitivity) — both are common in autism/PDA and are not contradictory.

1. Tactile (Touch)

- Distressed by clothing tags, seams, or certain fabrics
- Dislikes being touched unexpectedly
- Avoids messy play, certain textures, or sticky substances
- Highly sensitive to water temperature in baths/showers
- Seeks intense physical pressure (weighted blankets, tight clothing)
- Seems not to notice minor injuries or pain

2. Auditory (Sound)

- Distressed by sudden, loud, or unexpected sounds
- Covers ears in busy environments
- Highly sensitive to specific sounds (chewing, breathing, ticking)
- Seeks loud music, TV, or sound stimulation
- Difficulty filtering background noise — easily distracted

3. Visual

- Sensitive to bright or fluorescent lighting
- Distracted by visual clutter or busy environments
- Seeks visual stimulation — spinning objects, screens, lights
- Difficulty with eye contact or looking directly at people

4. Olfactory (Smell)

- Highly sensitive to food smells — may refuse to enter certain rooms
- Distressed by perfumes, cleaning products, or body odours



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- ■ Seeks specific smells for comfort
- ■ Smells objects or people frequently

5. Gustatory (Taste/Food)

- ■ Strong food preferences — limited variety
- ■ Sensitive to food temperatures, textures, or mixed foods
- ■ Seeks very strong flavours (very salty, sour, or spicy)
- ■ Difficulty with certain utensils or eating environments

6. Proprioceptive (Body Awareness)

- ■ Seeks heavy physical input — crashes into things, jumps, roughhouses
- ■ Appears clumsy or unaware of their body in space
- ■ Needs to fidget or move to concentrate
- ■ Chews clothing, hair, or objects

7. Vestibular (Movement/Balance)

- ■ Seeks spinning, swinging, or rocking
- ■ Car travel is soothing or is distressing
- ■ Avoids playground equipment — fears heights or movement
- ■ Seeks constant movement — cannot sit still

Next Steps

What to do with your checklist results

- Share with your child's Occupational Therapist for a full sensory assessment
- Use to identify the environments and activities that cost your child the most energy
- Adapt daily routines to reduce unavoidable sensory demands
- Inform school staff about specific sensory triggers and preferences