



PDA Girls Sensory Profile Checklist

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Sensory sensitivities in PDA girls are often missed — particularly because girls are more likely to mask their sensory responses at school and in public. This checklist covers all seven sensory systems with girl-typical presentations included.

How to use this checklist:

How to use this checklist: Work through each section and note items that apply. This is not diagnostic — it's a starting point for conversations with an OT or for your own understanding. Sensory needs change across environments and over time.

1. Tactile (Touch)

- Distress about clothing textures — seams, tags, certain fabrics
- Avoiding being touched, even by people she is close to
- Only accepting touch on her own terms and initiative
- Strong preference for specific clothing (often soft, stretchy, seamless)
- Finding school uniform intolerable
- Difficulty tolerating hairbrushing, nail cutting, dental hygiene

2. Auditory (Sound)

- Strong reactions to background noise — classroom, shopping centres, family gatherings
- Distress at unexpected or sudden sounds
- Using headphones, music, or noise-cancelling to self-regulate
- Covering ears in noisy environments
- Becoming dysregulated in loud or unpredictable environments
- Difficulty filtering out background noise — can't hear teacher in a noisy classroom

3. Visual (Sight)

- Sensitivity to bright or flickering lights
- Preference for low lighting or dim environments
- Avoiding visually busy spaces (crowded shops, busy classrooms)
- Distress about screens or fluorescent lighting
- Difficulty with busy worksheets or cluttered visual environments

4. Olfactory (Smell)



PDA Girls Sensory Profile Checklist

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- Strong reactions to certain foods, perfumes, cleaning products
- Avoiding environments because of smell
- Difficulty eating or being near foods with strong smells
- Noticing and reacting to smells others don't register

5. Gustatory (Taste and Food Texture)

- Limited range of accepted foods based on texture, temperature, or taste
- Strong reactions to unexpected flavours or textures in food
- Difficulty tolerating foods touching on the plate
- Very specific food preparation requirements
- Oral sensitivity that makes toothbrushing difficult

6. Proprioceptive (Body Awareness and Pressure)

- Seeking heavy pressure — tight hugs, weighted blankets, compression clothing
- Crashing into furniture, walls, or people (seeking proprioceptive input)
- Needing to move to regulate — rocking, bouncing, fidgeting
- Difficulty sitting still for extended periods
- Appearing clumsy or having poor spatial awareness

7. Vestibular (Movement and Balance)

- Seeking spinning, swinging, or fast movement
- Or: avoiding movement activities, becoming dysregulated by movement
- Difficulty with activities requiring balance
- Car travel being dysregulating or triggering
- Strong reaction to unexpected movement or physical instability

Girl-Specific Sensory Patterns to Note

PDA girls are more likely to mask sensory responses at school, meaning the profile may only be visible at home. School reports of 'no sensory issues' can be misleading. The after-school meltdown driven by accumulated sensory load is extremely common in PDA girls.

- She appears comfortable at school but is overwhelmed at home (masking at school)
- Clothing or uniform causes consistent morning difficulties



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- After-school meltdowns linked to sensory overload from the school day
- Eating at school is minimal or difficult — sensory cafeteria environment
- She avoids social spaces (assembly, lunch hall, PE) for sensory rather than social reasons

What to Do With This Checklist

1. Complete the checklist across home and school contexts
2. Note whether responses are stronger in one setting — this can indicate masking
3. Share with an OT for a full sensory assessment if several areas are marked
4. Use to inform reasonable adjustments requests at school
5. Revisit every 6–12 months — sensory profiles change with age and environment

Helpful Tip

Our general PDA Sensory Profile Checklist (FD23) covers all children — this checklist adds girl-specific notes. Both are available at pdaaustralia.com.au/resources