

# SENSORY PROFILE

## What is it?

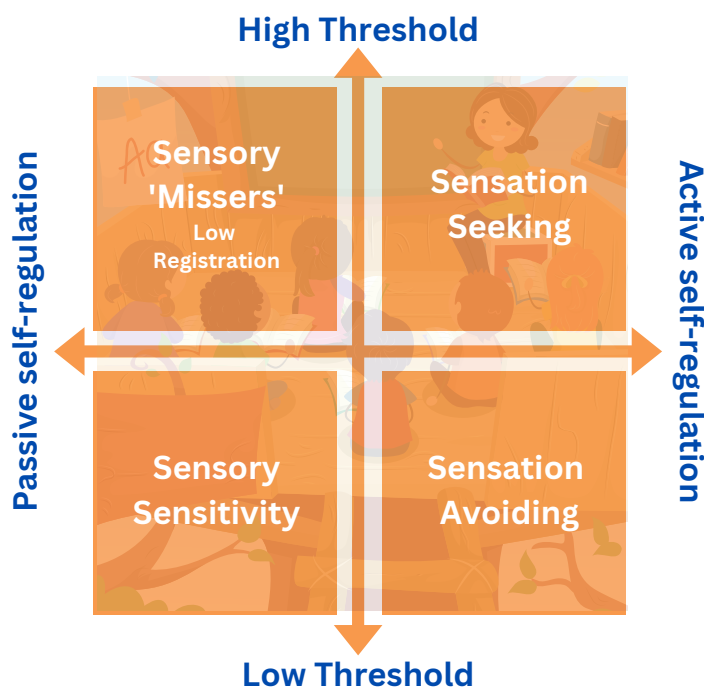
A sensory profile is a tool that helps parents and professionals understand how a child processes and responds to sensory information from their environment. Sensory information refers to what we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Every person has a unique sensory profile, which means they may have different sensitivities and preferences when it comes to sensory experiences.

## Why is it important?

A sensory profile is important because it can provide valuable insights into a child's sensory needs and challenges. By understanding how a child responds to different sensory inputs, parents and professionals can better support the child's overall development and regulation. Regulation involves children's developing the ability to self-manage their own behaviour and reactions.

For example, a child with sensory sensitivities may become easily overwhelmed by loud noises or bright lights. By identifying these sensitivities through a sensory profile, parents can make adjustments to the child's environment to create a more comfortable and supportive setting. They can provide the child with strategies to manage sensory overload or offer activities that promote sensory regulation. Likewise, a child with sensory-seeking behaviours may enjoy activities that provide intense sensory input, such as swinging or jumping.

Understanding these preferences can become a powerful tool for parents to not only support their child's growth but also increase their own window of understanding and tolerance for various behaviours.



**Dunn's Sensory Processing Model** helps us understand how children respond to sensory information by dividing their reactions into four quadrants. It's important to note that we can sit within more than just one quadrant.

## Examples in the classroom

*Please note the following names have been chosen at random. Examples are simplified to demonstrate the sensory needs of each quadrant of Dunn's Sensory Processing Model. Inspired by Kelsie Olds <http://Occupaytional.com>*

Emma is a Sensory 'Misser' and Jake is a Sensory Seeker.

Both kids are expected to sit still with their hands in their laps and legs crossed while the teacher delivers instructions. They both have a high threshold for sensory input, meaning their brains need more engagement to fully process information. Unfortunately, the teacher's verbal instructions lack movement, visuals, or variation in tone—making it difficult for them to stay engaged.

In an effort to meet his sensory needs, Jake (the seeker) starts shifting in his seat. He first leans forward, then kneels, then swings his legs back and forth. Eventually, he bumps into a classmate, mumbles an apology, then gets distracted by a small crack in his desk. He starts tracing it with his fingers, and picking little bits of wood and paint off.

Meanwhile, Emma (the misser) has completely tuned out. She looks like she's paying attention—calm body, eyes forward—but she isn't processing the lesson. There are no outward signs that she is struggling, yet her mind has wandered into daydreaming mode. She's missing all the important details. At the end of the lesson, Jake gets in trouble for being disruptive—he bumped a classmate, was fidgeting, and started picking at his desk. Emma, on the other hand, appears to be engaged, but when she struggles with her work, she may be mistakenly labelled as having a learning delay. In reality, both kids simply needed more sensory engagement—movement, visuals, or interactive elements—to truly absorb the lesson.

Noah is Sensory-Sensitive, and Lily is Sensory-Avoidant.

They are working on an assignment in a classroom where the fluorescent lights buzz softly, and the air conditioning hums in the background. This background noise may seem unimportant to most, but for these two, it has a big impact.

Lily (the avoider) is quietly working but starts humming and softly tapping her pencil against the desk. Without realising it, she's instinctively trying to drown out the background noise with sounds she can control.

Noah (the sensitive one), however, is completely overwhelmed. The buzzing from the lights, the hum of the AC, and now Lily's humming—it's all too much. His brain locks onto the noises, making it impossible for him to focus on his work. His frustration builds silently until suddenly, he slams his workbook shut and rips the page out, then pushes his chair back forcefully, nearly knocking it over. His body has gone into full fight-or-flight mode.

Both children are at risk of being labelled as having "behaviour problems." Lily may be seen as a distraction, while Noah's outburst could be considered defiance. However, their reactions were not intentional—they were sensory-driven. With the right support strategies, both children could have tools to self-regulate without disrupting their learning.



**Upon completing the Sensory Profile Assessment we hope to gain a better understanding into an individual's sensory preferences, help parents and teachers to incorporate appropriate sensory activities or strategies into the individual's routine and give them some strategies which can have a positive impact on their behaviour and overall development.**