

FREE WORKSHEET

Sensory Profile Worksheet

All eight senses, your child, and what helps

For many autistic children, the sensory environment is a major factor in how regulated, focused, and comfortable they feel. This worksheet walks you through all eight sensory systems so you can observe, document, and share your child's profile with the people who support them. There are no right or wrong answers; your observations are the most valuable data you have.

"My child has sensory issues" tells a teacher nothing. "Loud unexpected sounds cause immediate distress and can take 30 minutes to recover from" tells them exactly what to do.



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How to use this worksheet

Observe your child over one to two weeks across different settings. Home, school, the grocery store, the playground, the car. Notice what draws them in and what makes them withdraw or react. Fill in your notes as you go; don't try to remember everything at once.

Two patterns to watch for

Seeking means your child actively pursues a sensation. They turn the volume up, spin, crash into things, smell everything before tasting it. Seeking isn't bad. It's how their nervous system regulates.

Avoiding means your child works to get away from a sensation. They cover their ears, refuse a shirt, gag at certain foods, melt down in fluorescent lighting. Avoiding isn't being picky. It's a real sensory response.

Most children seek in some systems and avoid in others. The pattern matters more than any single sense.

What you'll do

- Read the seeking and avoiding signs for each sense
- Write your observations on the lines provided
- After two weeks, look across all eight sections for clusters and themes (page 11)
- Share a one-page summary with your OT, school team, and any new provider

A NOTE ON RIGOR

You are not diagnosing your child. You are recording what you actually see. An OT or pediatrician can take your observations and turn them into a formal sensory profile and a "sensory diet" plan. Your job is to capture the raw data; theirs is to interpret.

1. Visual (sight)

The visual system processes light, color, movement, and detail. Some children are drawn to high-contrast or moving visuals; others find busy environments overwhelming and need visual simplicity to stay regulated.

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Stares at lights, fans, or spinning objects for long stretches
- Holds objects very close to their eyes or looks at them from unusual angles
- Drawn to bright screens, flashing lights, or high-contrast patterns
- Watches the same video clips repeatedly, closely studying images

SIGNS OF AVOIDING

- Squints, covers eyes, or melts down under fluorescent lighting
- Distressed in visually cluttered rooms or busy stores
- Prefers dim spaces or asks for lights off
- Struggles to focus in classrooms with lots of decorations

How does your child react in brightly lit or visually busy spaces (grocery store, gym, party venue)? Do they seek out visual stimulation or try to reduce it? What setting is hardest, and what helps?

2. Auditory (sound)

The auditory system processes volume, pitch, and unexpectedness. Auditory-sensitive children may react intensely to sounds others barely notice; auditory seekers may create or pursue sound constantly.

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Hums, makes repetitive sounds, or seeks loud music
- Taps surfaces, bangs objects, or makes noise just to hear it
- Turns the TV or music up very loud
- Loves crowded, noisy places like arcades

SIGNS OF AVOIDING

- Covers ears at blenders, hand dryers, fire alarms
- Anxious or distressed at sudden or unexpected sounds
- Refuses school events like assemblies or fire drills
- Hard time focusing with background noise (fans, hallway, conversations)

What sounds reliably upset your child? What sounds do they seek out or create on their own? How do they handle unexpected loud sounds, and what helps them recover?

3. Tactile (touch)

The tactile system processes touch on the skin: texture, pressure, temperature, pain. It includes light touch (which can feel threatening to some children) and deep pressure (which many autistic children find organizing and calming).

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Seeks tight hugs, weighted blankets, being squeezed
- Touches everything: textures, surfaces, other people
- Loves messy play (sand, slime, mud) and tactile exploration
- Prefers very tight clothing or layers

SIGNS OF AVOIDING

- Distressed by tags, seams, or certain fabrics
- Refuses certain types of clothing (seamed socks, scratchy shirts, belts)
- Reacts strongly to light or unexpected touch
- Avoids messy textures: finger paint, grass, sand, certain foods

What textures or touch does your child seek? What clothing or touch situations regularly cause distress? How do they respond to unexpected light touch versus firm, expected touch?

4. Gustatory (taste)

The gustatory system processes taste plus the texture and temperature of food in the mouth. For many autistic children, eating challenges are rooted in genuine sensory differences, not preference or defiance.

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Prefers very strong flavors: salty, spicy, sour, sweet
- Mouths non-food objects (pens, collars, toys) past typical age
- Seeks crunchy or chewy textures
- Wants to taste unfamiliar objects or substances

SIGNS OF AVOIDING

- Limits diet to a small number of accepted foods
- Refuses foods based on texture, temperature, or smell before tasting
- Gags or vomits in response to certain textures or flavors
- Distressed if accepted foods change brand or shape

What foods does your child consistently accept? What textures or flavors cause the strongest reactions? Has their diet become more restricted over time, and what helps when they try something new?

5. Olfactory (smell)

Smell has a strong connection to the emotional brain, which is why certain scents can trigger immediate, intense reactions (calm or distress) with very little warning.

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Smells people, objects, or food before interacting
- Seeks strong scents: perfumes, candles, cleaning products
- Enjoys scented lotions, markers, scratch-and-sniff items
- Notices and comments on smells others don't detect

SIGNS OF AVOIDING

- Refuses rooms with strong odors (cafeteria, locker rooms)
- Nauseated or distressed by perfumes, air fresheners, food smells
- Refuses certain hygiene products because of scent
- Leaves the table or won't eat near strongly scented foods

What smells does your child seek or comment positively on? What smells reliably cause distress or refusal? Are there environments they avoid primarily because of smell?

6. Proprioceptive (body awareness)

Proprioception is information from muscles, joints, and connective tissue about where the body is in space. It is one of the most regulating sensory systems; "heavy work" (pushing, pulling, carrying, climbing) provides strong proprioceptive input that many children find deeply calming.

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Crashes into furniture, walls, or people, seemingly on purpose
- Jumps on furniture, stomps, or bangs body against things
- Loves rough play, wrestling, being squished
- Chews on clothing, pencils, or other objects
- Carries heavy backpacks or seeks weighted items

SIGNS OF AVOIDING

- Cautious or reluctant in physical play
- Avoids weight-bearing or contact activities
- Unaware of their own strength (under-responsive)
- Overwhelmed by bear hugs they didn't initiate

Does your child crash, jump, or seek heavy physical input? How do they respond after heavy work activities like carrying groceries, jumping on a trampoline, or pushing a cart? Do they seem more regulated afterward?

7. Vestibular (movement and balance)

The vestibular system lives in the inner ear and processes movement, gravity, and balance. It tells us whether we're moving or still, upright or tilted. Vestibular input can either calm or rev up a child, depending on the type of movement.

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Spins without getting dizzy, or spins repeatedly for long periods
- Loves swings, especially linear or spinning swings
- Rocks the body, bounces on furniture, tips the chair
- Seeks roller coasters, fast slides, being spun by adults

SIGNS OF AVOIDING

- Distressed by car rides, elevators, or escalators
- Refuses to swing, slide, or move
- Fears feet leaving the ground or being tipped backward
- Gets motion sick easily or complains of dizziness

Does your child seek spinning or swinging, or avoid it? How do they tolerate car rides? Do they rock or spin as a self-regulation strategy, and at what times of day?

8. Interoceptive (internal body signals)

Interoception is the sense of the inside: hunger, thirst, the need to use the bathroom, body temperature, pain, heart rate, emotion. Many autistic children have difficulty detecting or interpreting these signals, which can contribute to meltdowns, toileting challenges, and difficulty naming emotions.

SIGNS OF SEEKING

- Seeks very cold or very hot stimuli to feel body temperature
- Engages in intense physical activity to feel heartbeat or breathing
- Asks to eat or drink when physiological hunger isn't clearly present

SIGNS OF DIFFICULTY DETECTING

- Doesn't notice or report pain, even with visible injuries
- Doesn't signal needing the bathroom until urgent
- Doesn't reliably recognize hunger or thirst
- Difficulty identifying or naming emotional states
- Behavioral changes that correspond to unreported hunger or exhaustion

How reliably does your child communicate hunger, thirst, or the need for the bathroom? Do they notice pain? Can they identify when they feel anxious, excited, or sad?

Identifying patterns

Once your notes are filled in, read back through and look for themes. Five questions to ask yourself, in order:

1. Mostly a seeker, mostly an avoider, or a mix?

Many children are seekers in some systems and avoiders in others, and that mix is completely normal. Note the dominant pattern across all eight, then mark which senses break the pattern.

2. Which systems cause the most distress?

Highlight the two or three areas that most frequently contribute to meltdowns, school refusal, or daily friction. These are your highest-priority areas to address first.

3. Which inputs reliably calm or regulate?

This is just as important as knowing what's hard. A child who calms after the trampoline has handed you a powerful tool. Document each one.

4. Are there patterns across settings?

If school is harder than home, what's different? Fluorescent lights, noise, unpredictable peer touch, cafeteria smells? Your notes can pinpoint which specific inputs make certain environments harder.

5. What does your child do to self-regulate?

Spinning, rocking, chewing, jumping, humming, seeking deep pressure. These behaviors are usually sensory-seeking, not "bad." Document what your child does on their own when overwhelmed; it tells you what their nervous system needs.

TIME-OF-DAY QUESTION

What time of day is your child most regulated? What sensory conditions are present then? Cool room, dim light, low noise, deep pressure, no demands? That's your blueprint for the harder hours.

Sharing with your team

With an Occupational Therapist

An OT is your most important partner in sensory processing. Bring this worksheet to your evaluation or next session. Real observational data shortens the assessment process significantly. Ask them to help you build a "sensory diet": a schedule of sensory inputs woven into your child's day.

With the school team

Include a one-page summary of your child's most significant sensitivities (especially auditory and tactile) in any IEP meeting or intake. Specific is actionable. "Loud unexpected sounds cause immediate distress and can take 30+ minutes to recover from" beats "my child has sensory issues."

With a new teacher or provider

At the start of each school year or when changing providers, share a one-page summary that focuses on three things: what overwhelms them, what helps them regulate, and what to do (and not do) when they're dysregulated.

REVISIT EVERY THREE TO SIX MONTHS

Sensory profiles change as children grow, develop, and receive intervention. A child who was highly touch-avoidant at five may be much more tolerant at eight. Re-observe and update your notes regularly so your team is always working from current information.

Want a digital sensory profile that travels with you?

Beacon is our AI parent companion at beacon.spectrumunlocked.com. The Sensory Profile foundation tool (free at every tier) captures the same eight systems you mapped here, plus:

- **One-tap Pass the Baton link** for any caregiver (sitter, grandparent, IEP team) to read the profile, no login required
- **Memory across conversations:** Beacon remembers what overwhelms your child and adjusts its suggestions accordingly
- **Behavior Tracker** alongside, so you can correlate sensory-heavy days with meltdown frequency

→ beacon.spectrumunlocked.com/foundation/sensory

Your observations are the data

You've watched your child longer and more carefully than any clinician ever will. That observation has real diagnostic weight when it's written down with specifics. The team doesn't need a perfect profile. They need your honest, concrete notes about what helps and what hurts.

"Specific is actionable. 'My child has sensory issues' is not a plan; 'fluorescent lights cause immediate distress' is."

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