

Sensory Integration Policy - Gosberton House Academy and Outreach Service

The majority of pupils at GHA operate within the Autistic Spectrum - they may experience life in different ways to their peers. The sensory integration diet / environment / activities available at GHA provide core strategies to assist the pupils in overcoming / reducing the difficulties they have with communication, social interaction and demonstrating flexibility of thought and action .

Within Gosberton House Academy and the Outreach Service ,we are committed to assisting children to achieve their potential - cognitively and emotionally - and supporting them through providing a multi-sensory environment in which their individual learning styles are paramount to our teaching. Promoting Sensory integration is a vital aspect of our work in helping our pupils to be ready to learn - it has grown out of our belief that the physical and emotional well being of our pupils is the foundation for their ability to make sense of the cognitive demands of the educational curriculum.

What is Sensory Integration?

Sensory Integration is the ability to process, interpret and use appropriately, information received through the senses - tactile, auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, vestibular and proprioception. Processing is via the central nervous system and organised by the brain.

Sensory integration - a balanced nervous system - develops through the normal childhood activities and experiences; it is the foundation for later more complex learning and behaviour.

For some children sensory integration development is atypical, these children may experience difficulties in learning, motor skills and behaviour. The child with an AS often experiences sensory information in a different way, this may cause them to be in a heightened 'fright / flight' mode for much of their day and this may be a barrier to learning.

Many pupils at GHA demonstrate either hyper - reactivity or hypo - reactivity. Their responses to sensory input may be inconsistent and show variations on a daily basis. Some of the children appear unresponsive to sensory input because their nervous system has gone into 'shutdown' mode to protect them from sensory stimulation - as they are actually highly responsive to sensory stimulation and will react in a 'hyper' way that they cannot regulate except by 'shutting down'.

What does this look like at Gosberton House Academy?

Examples of Hyper -reactivity seen at GHA

- Distress with certain sounds - eg: can tolerate loud music but not coughing by another person
- Sensitivity to light - eg: child wants to sit in a darkened part of the classroom and complains that the light hurts his eyes.
- Discomfort with certain textures - eg: can't stand labels, woolly clothing is scratchy
- Aversion to certain smells and tastes - eg: notices perfumes, dislikes eating spicy foods prefers bland foods
- Irrational fear of heights and movement - eg: can't go on fairground rides, spin in the PE spinners
- Frequent startle reactions - eg: planes overhead, a child crying

Examples of Hypo - reactivity seen at GHA

- Disregard of sudden or loud sounds - eg: some children do not react to the playground whistle signals
- Unaware of painful bumps, bruises, cuts etc - eg: child who doesn't mention that they have cut themselves, falls over and shows no reaction
- Absence of startle reaction - eg: some children do not react to sudden loud sounds / movements and continue with their own agenda regardless.
- Lack of attention to environment, persons or things - eg: the children that we regard as very 'passive', who show little awareness or interest in the rest of the group; children who show no regard for change in temperature ie: have to be told to remove / replace clothing according to whether it is hot / cold.
- Lack of dizziness with excessive spinning - eg: the children who can have multiple turns on the waltzer at the fairground, crave being spun around
- Delayed responses - eg: the need to give some children even longer to process information / verbal questioning than we normally allow

GHA provides a multi-sensory learning environment in which staff assist and enable pupils to enjoy learning, through providing experiences that contribute to the development of sensory integration. (during their Academy day and beyond, in both inside and outside space.)

Action

Sensory Circuits

Sensory Circuits take place in the hall, each morning between 8.45 and 9.30am. They are organised and led by an experienced TA who has received specific training in Sensory Integration work.

The sensory circuit has 3 areas - alerting, organising and calming - through following individualised programmes of physical exercises children are helped to refine and focus their concentration in readiness for the day's learning.

All children are assessed to determine if access to sensory circuits may be beneficial. The decision as to whether a child should attend circuits is based on their perceived need to work on the vestibular and proprioceptive senses - motor planning and gross motor skills, improvements in co-ordination and organisation. { Sensory Circuits is over viewed by a specialist OT]

(please refer to Sensory circuit documentation - appendix)

(staff from other schools/services are welcome to observe/participate)

Activate

All classes participate in Activate sessions; these take place at registration time morning and afternoon. Activate is a fun and enjoyable music and exercise programme to develop co-ordination devised by Val Sabin. There are controlled breathing and calming exercises alongside the energetic movements.

There are manuals for Foundation Stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2 - class staff are able to choose an appropriate level of exercises for their group within these stages. Some classes are able to access activate through the interactive whiteboard.

(please see manuals in PE cupboard - consultation with PE co-ordinator to identify level)

Some pupils access a Lycra resistance programme.

GHA is an Active quality mark Academy and a member of the Agilitas Sports Partnership - there is a very strong ethos of participation in all physical activities during lessons and playtimes. GHS believes that exercise and sporting activities promote emotional wellbeing as well as physical health.

(please see PE policy / Sports Premium information)

Playtime / lunchtime activities

GHA benefits from a stimulating and attractive outside environment - there are a variety of play areas to give our pupils choice and experiences that they can transfer into play out of Academy - either within the family or community areas. Much of the equipment promotes sensory integration - the climbing frame, trampoline, bike riding and scooters, trim trail, bats and balls.

Diet / food

GHA provides hot dinners in line with government guidance - the emphasis is on providing a sociable eating environment and supporting the children to make healthy choices. Many of the families report that their children eat a very limited range of foods, there are children who prefer soft foods / hard, dry foods, those who like to keep everything separated on the plate and those who happily mix strange combinations.

Children are encouraged and challenged to taste different foods, given very small tastes and rewarded for their efforts - a programme of desensitisation as required.

All children have the opportunity to cook each week and take great pride in their work - staff are experts at promoting healthy choices and creating independent cooks.

Classroom strategies to promote sensory integration:

GHA operates within the SPELL philosophy to create a framework for teaching and learning (recognised through NAS accreditation) Please see Autism Policy.

Environment : the low arousal and calm, ordered classroom environment assists pupils in maintaining a calm, organised frame of mind. The use of visual supports reduce the anxiety felt by many pupils who may be overwhelmed by noise and chatter (auditory sensitivities) and ear defenders are available for those pupils who require them. The consistent application of classroom routines helps pupils to organise themselves - many of them have poor motor planning - so that in time they are able to sort out their belongings for themselves.

Communication: communication underpins all social interactions and comprehension is vital for cognitive learning. At GHA specific speech & language programmes are carried out but communication targets are also integrated into the fabric of classroom activity (please see Communication Policy)

Posture: stability on the chairs for working at the tables is crucial to assist the children in an awareness of body space and preparing them for using fine motor skills eg writing, scissor work, handling tools. 'Good sitting' is promoted at all times - chair square to table when working or turn to teacher to give attention, sitting with bottom to back of chair no perching on the edge. There are sensory cushions available for those children who have great difficulty sitting still to work - consult SLT / OT before using . Where children's legs don't touch the floor we try to have a small stool under their feet to give the stability.

Fine motor: difficulties with handwriting, cutting and handling tools may be due to tactile difficulties or lack of awareness regarding use of pressure. All classrooms have a variety of handwriting pens, children in class 2+ use pens for literacy work and writing as they give a better response to even weak pressure and often act as a motivator. There are handwriting / mark making and scissor skill programmes for use in class to teach the skills but the emphasis is also on transferring skills into general use eg children produce beautiful writing in a handwriting session but can't produce writing of the same standard in other lessons.

(ideas for activities can be taken from 1st Move A gross and fine motor skills resource for teachers: Lincolnshire CC and Lincolnshire NHS)

Visual : the classroom environment is low arousal, calm colours, tidy surfaces and minimalist -individual lessons where the children are focused and engaged are full of real life experiences and objects that make use of all the senses. There is a consistent application of CIP (Communication in Print) and PECs (picture exchange communication system) to aid learning, provide instructions / labels and support behaviour. Spoken language is reduced and verbal prompting used - the ASD children respond to visual support more readily than lots of spoken language, especially when they are anxious or stressed. (please see communication policy)

There are resources to support pupils who may find it helpful to use coloured overlays when reading.

Beery VMI - The Beery -Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration:

This is an assessment tool agreed between the consultant Occupational Therapist and GHA. All staff have received training in interpreting the data and there is a handbook of activities to use in the classroom to support the pupils. Pupils in FYC and Key stage 1 will be assessed - as the children move into middle and upper Academy it is expected that only a few children may need to work on these activities and receive further assessment.

Resistance exercises in classroom: hand exercises to promote strength are practised before writing / literacy lessons. A few children will include resistance work in their individual programmes eg Rainbow room rolling and squashing after playtime.

A variety of weighted resources are available to use with children eg vests, blankets, scarves, wrist bands, back packs. These may be used to help a child to calm, to focus on their work, or to realise where their body is located in space.

Auditory / noise sensitivity: A calm, quiet working atmosphere permeates the Academy day - it is frequently commented on by visitors. Staff work very hard to minimise unnecessary noise. Ear defenders are available for children to make the choice to use them or staff will suggest a pupil may be more comfortable using them. Quiet music is played at transition times eg returning to class after play and sometimes as background when pupils are working quietly and independently.

Multi-agency support:

Speech and Language Therapist

Speech and Language Therapists work with pupils as identified on their EHCs

Occupational Therapist

Occupational therapy support is available from both private and NHS services.

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapy support is available - the emphasis is often on the practical exercises but this impacts on the sensory integration work as physical improvements are made.

Outreach links

Gosberton House Academy provides an outreach service to support pupils and staff in mainstream schools, as part of the support a box of sensory resources is provided and training can be given on the sensory issues that pupils on the Autistic Spectrum may experience.

Sensory Profiles

Families are invited to complete a sensory profile for their child and these are updated as necessary.

The profile has been developed by staff and an independent occupational therapist, to identify sensory integration dysfunction - staff prioritise the behaviours that occur most frequently and look at ways to change them through general classroom activities and specific targets incorporated into IEPs that will lead to improving sensory integration. Sometimes there will be a need for specialist input from an occupational therapist as written into the child's statement.

Completed Parent sensory profile - to be kept in Yellow file.

Typed single profile sheet per child - this is the summary sheet with 'frequent' issues noted.

Some children need a class / Academy profile completed because reading the parent profile there are aspects where Academy is likely to have different views.

How to prioritise targets re. the Sensory Profile:

1st Priority for change - actions that cause child to be in danger / vulnerable / child harms others eg leaping out / off, self-harming, hurting others

They are likely to have major sensory modulation problems - behaviour can change instantly (all going well then suddenly terrible outburst); child is explosive / unpredictable; they are 'all or nothing' children.

Relatively few children at GHS fall into this category - often because of the steps taken to provide a predictable environment, clear communication systems, consistent routines.

These children have PSPs and require considerable support via Emotional Literacy - above and beyond the physical activities - please see IBPs on staff notice board

2nd Priority for change - sensory behaviours that interfere with learning - the child may be so overcome by the sensations arising from auditory / visual / tactile / smell / taste that they are unable to learn.

Some of these children are sensory defensive - in order to avoid the sensory sensations that they find difficult, the child remains 'passive' or they may appear to be coping until their behaviour is carefully analysed
Eg a child gives no problem in the classroom but he avoids situations that he finds difficult - refuses to go out on trips, eat certain foods, perform movements.

Eg a child was so overwhelmed by the demands made on her at school that she didn't move

Eg notice that some children become more alert when given time for more physical activities

Sensory integration issues will be incorporated into the 'Learning styles' information on the EHC.

There will be a sensory target for many children - incorporated into their IEP targets or added as a separate target.

Sensory integration issues will be discussed as part of GHA regular meetings between family and staff, there will also be at least one general meeting during the year as part of in-reach or family and friends' meetings.

(please see family profile and single profile sheet)

Policy reviewed January 2021 to be reviewed biannually

How our senses work

[taken from NAS website]

Our central nervous system (brain) processes all the sensory information we receive and helps us to organise, prioritise and understand the information. We then respond through thoughts, feelings, motor responses (behaviour) or a combination of these. We have receptors all over our bodies that pick up sensory information, or 'stimuli'. Our hands and feet contain the most receptors. Most of the time, we process sensory information automatically, without needing to think about it much. People with sensory integration difficulties including many people with an ASD have difficulty processing everyday sensory information. People who struggle to deal with all this information are likely to become stressed or

anxious, and possibly feel physical pain. This can result in challenging behaviour.

Our seven senses

We have seven senses: sight sound touch taste smell balance ('vestibular') body awareness ('proprioception'). People with an ASD can be over or undersensitive in any or all of these areas. You may hear this referred to as being 'hypersensitive' or 'hyposensitive'.

Sensory sensitivities

Sight

Situated in the retina of the eye and activated by light, our sight helps us to define objects, people, colours, contrast and spatial boundaries. People with an ASD may experience the following differences. Hypo (under-sensitive) Objects appear quite dark, or lose some of their features. Central vision is blurred but peripheral vision quite sharp. A central object is magnified but things on the periphery are blurred. Poor depth perception; problems with throwing and catching; clumsiness. Hyper (oversensitive) Distorted vision: objects and bright lights can appear to jump around. Images may fragment. Easier and more pleasurable to focus on a detail rather than the whole object.

Sound

This is the most commonly recognised form of sensory impairment. Hearing impairments can affect someone's ability to communicate and possibly also their balance. People with an ASD may experience the following differences. Hypo May only hear sounds in one ear, the other ear having only partial hearing or none at all. May not acknowledge particular sounds. Might enjoy crowded, noisy places or bang doors and objects. Hyper Noise can be magnified and sounds become distorted and muddled. Particularly sensitive to sound and can, for example hear conversations in the distance. Inability to cut out sounds - notably background noise, which often leads to difficulties concentrating.

Touch

Touch is important for social development. It helps us to assess the environment we are in (is an object hot or cold?) and react accordingly. It also allows us to feel pain. People with an ASD may experience the following differences. Hypo Holds others tightly needs to do so before there is a sensation of having applied any pressure. Has a high pain threshold. May selfharm. Enjoys heavy objects (eg, weighted blankets) on top of them. Hyper Touch can be painful and uncomfortable; people may not like to be touched and this can affect their relationships with others. Dislikes having anything on hands or feet. Difficulties brushing and washing hair because head is sensitive. Only likes certain types of clothing or textures.

Taste

Chemical receptors in the tongue tell us about different tastes sweet, sour, spicy and so on. People with an ASD may experience the following differences. Hypo Likes very spicy foods. Eats everything soil, grass, Playdough. This is known as pica. Hyper Finds some flavours and foods too strong and overpowering because of very sensitive taste buds. Has a restricted diet. Certain textures cause discomfort; some children will only eat smooth foods like mashed potatoes or icecream. Smell Chemical receptors in the nose tell us about smells in our immediate environment. Smell is the first sense we rely upon. People with an ASD may experience the following differences. Hypo Some people have no sense of smell and fail to notice extreme odours (this can include their own body odour). Some people may lick things to get a better sense of what they are. Hyper Smells can be intense and overpowering. This can cause toileting problems. Dislikes people with distinctive perfumes, shampoos, etc.

Balance (vestibular)

Situated in the inner ear, our vestibular system helps us maintain our balance and posture, and understand where and how fast our bodies are moving. People with an ASD may experience the following differences. Hypo A need to rock, swing or spin to get some sensory input. Hyper Difficulties with activities like sport, where we need to control our movements. Difficulties stopping quickly or during an activity. Car sickness. Difficulties with activities where the head is not upright or feet are off the ground. Body awareness (proprioception) Situated in the muscles and joints, our body awareness system tells us where our bodies are in space, and how different body parts are moving. People with an ASD may experience the following differences. Hypo Stands too close to others, because they cannot measure their proximity to other people and judge personal space. Hard to navigate rooms and avoid obstructions. May bump into people. Hyper Difficulties with fine motor skills: manipulating small objects like buttons or shoe laces. Moves whole body to look at something.

Synaesthesia

Synaesthesia is a rare condition which some people with an ASD experience. A sensory experience goes in through one system and out through another. So a person might hear a sound but experience it as a colour. In other words, they will 'hear' the colour blue.

Ways to help -strategies used at Gosberton House Academy[to be read in conjunction with the AS Policy]

Ethos -

- be aware: look at the environment to see if it is creating difficulties for people with an ASD
- be creative: think of some positive sensory experiences

- be prepared: tell people with an ASD about possible sensory stimuli they may experience in different environments.

Sight

Hypo (undersensitive)

- Increase the use of visual supports.

Hyper (oversensitive)

- Reduce fluorescent lighting
- Wear sunglasses.
- Create a workstation in the classroom: a space or desk with high walls or divides on both sides to block out visual distractions.

Sound

Hypo

Use visual supports to back up verbal information.

Hyper

- Shut doors and windows to reduce external sounds.
- Prepare a person before going to noisy or crowded places.
- Wear ear defenders; ear plugs
- Listen to music.
- Create a workstation.

Touch

Hypo

- Use weighted blankets/ weighted animals; wrist/ankle weights

Hyper

- Warn a person if you are about to touch him or her; always approach him or her from the front.
- Remember that a hug may be painful rather than comforting.
- Gradually introduce different textures have a box of materials available.
- Allow a person to complete activities themselves (eg, hair brushing and washing) so that they can do what is comfortable for them.

Taste

Some people with an ASD are hyper or hyposensitive to taste, and may limit themselves to bland foods or crave very strong tasting food.

- Gradual desensitisation programme- handle, cook, grow, harvest a variety of foods

Smell

Hypo

- Use strong smelling products as rewards and to distract people from inappropriate strong smelling stimuli (like faeces).

Hyper

- Use unscented detergents or shampoos, avoid wearing perfume, make the environment as fragrance free as possible.

Balance

Hypo

- Encourage activities that help to develop the vestibular system. For children this could include using rocking horses, swings, roundabouts and seesaws; games like catching a ball or practise walking smoothly up steps or curbs.

Hyper

- Break down activities into small, more easily manageable steps; use visual cues such as a finish line.

Body awareness

Hypo

Position furniture around the edge of a room to make navigation easier.

- Put coloured tape on the floor to indicate boundaries.
- Use the 'arms length rule' to judge personal space. This means standing an arm's length away from other people.

Hyper

- 'fine motor' activities like lacing boards

How sensory sensitivity affects behaviour

Sometimes, a person with an ASD may behave in a way that you wouldn't immediately link to sensory sensitivities but they may be the underlying cause.

Problem: picky eater Possible reasons: sensitive to taste or texture, or unable to feel food around the mouth. Possible solutions: change the texture of food, for example purée it. Slowly introduce different textures around the person's mouth, such as a flannel, a toothbrush and some different foods. Encourage activities that involve the mouth, such as whistles or bubble wands.

Problem: chews on everything, including clothing and objects Possible reasons: may find this relaxing, or enjoy the sensation of chewing on the item. Possible solutions: offer latexfree tubes, straws or hard sweets (chill in the fridge).

Problem: smearing Possible reasons: may like the texture of faeces or not be very sensitive to smells. Possible solutions: try and introduce things like jelly, or cornflour and water to handle instead; introduce alternative strongsmelling items.

Problem: refuses to wear certain clothes Possible reasons: may dislike the texture or pressure of clothes on their skin. Possible solutions: turn clothes inside out so there is no seam, remove any tags or labels, allow the person to wear clothes they're comfortable in.

Problem: difficulties getting to sleep Possible reasons: may have difficulty shutting down their senses, in particular sight and

hearing. Possible solutions: use blackout curtains or weighted blankets; listen to music to cut out external sounds.

Problem: finds it difficult to concentrate in the classroom Possible reasons: too many distractions like noise (talking, bells, chairs scraping the floor) or visual stimuli (people, pictures on the wall). May also find holding a pencil uncomfortable (it may feel hard or cold). Possible solutions: position child away from doors and windows so there are fewer distractions. If possible use an individual workstation with some screens around it; or use classroom furniture to create a distraction free area for the child. Try different textures to make the pencil more comfortable.

