

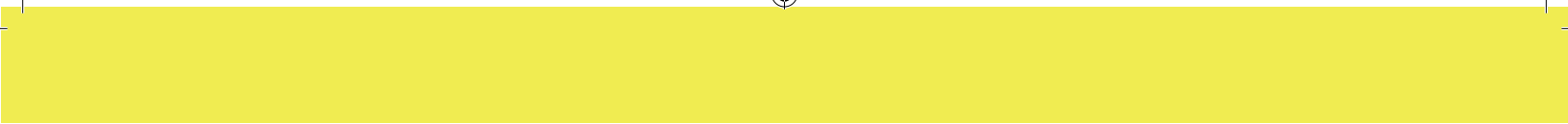
Frazzled Fred's Guide to The Sensory World of Autism

This is not Rocket Science Folks



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With support from Highland Council Occupational Therapists



My name is Fred, I'm 15 and I have something called an Autism Spectrum Condition, it's a bit of a mouthful so we will call it ASC from now on if that's OK with you. One key element of my ASC, is that my sensory systems are a bit messed up. Unfortunately, even though the guy who originally described ASC in 1943 (Kanner), said at the time that there were likely to be problems, the rest of you "normal" people have not really taken this on board until the diagnostic criteria changed in 2013. Unless of course you are an Occupational Therapist, some of them have been a bit fanatical about it since the 1970s.








The thing is, it's no good to us if only one element of society are aware of it. We need you all to be skilled up if you are around us regularly, as this impacts on our everyday functioning and can make things incredibly difficult all day, every day, which can have a massive effect on how we behave day to day.

I'm going to try to explain it to you so that you can understand if you also have it, or you can support my friends if you are an adult.

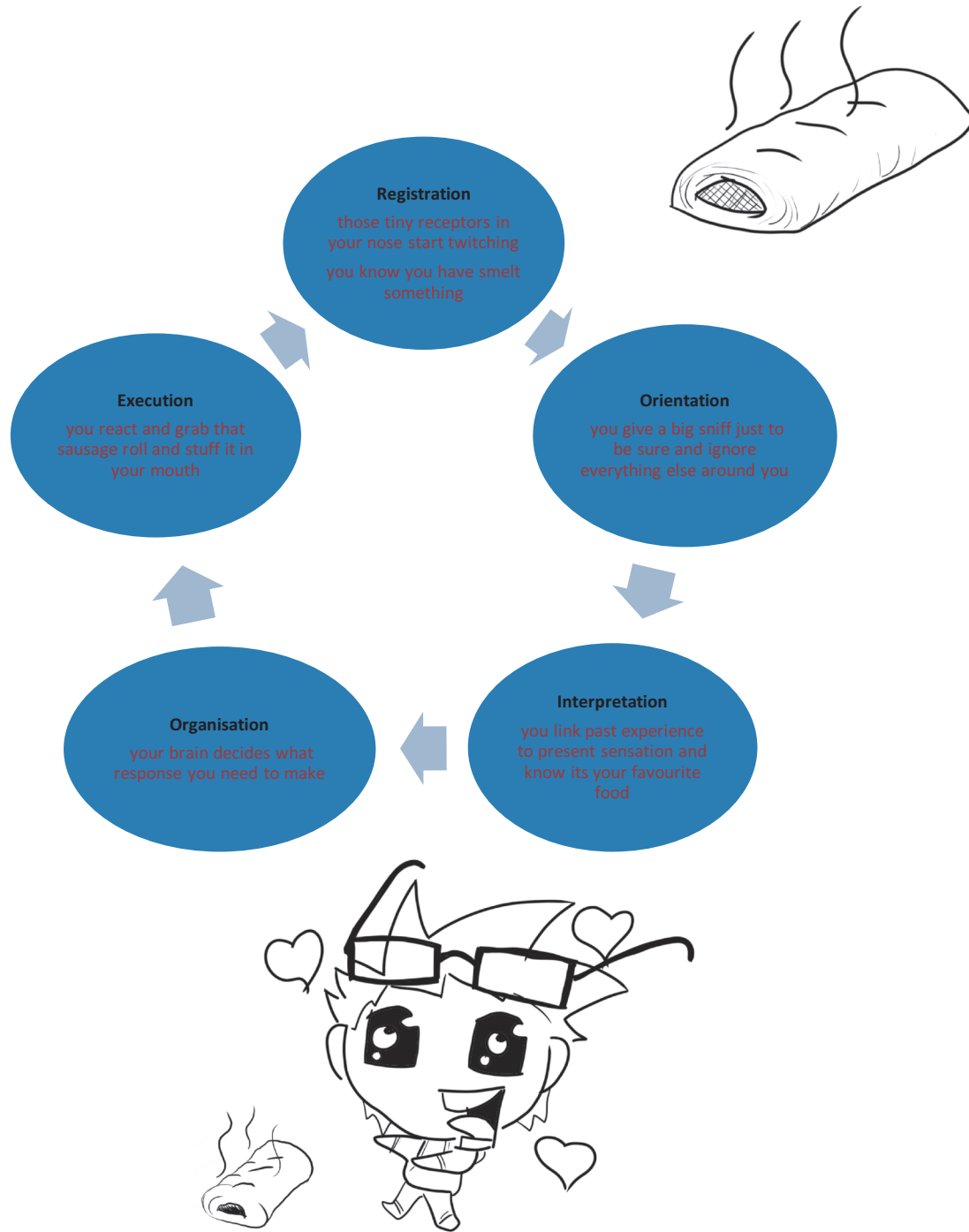
I will also introduce you to some of my friends as we go along, as not all of us have the same issues.

So let's start with what the sensory systems are, and what they are supposed to do:



System	Bit of the body	Job it does
Sight (Visual) 	Retina - this a small bit inside our eyes that switches on with lights	Gives lots of information to our brain about what we can see around us such as people and objects. It should also help us to see boundaries, to stop us walking into anything - My mate Steph is rubbish at this she looks drunk and she's only 12 lol! This is also linked to her balance
Hearing (Auditory) 	Another bit inside our ears helps us to pick up sounds and send them off to the brain	Helps us to hear different types of sound such as a quiet whisper, or a loud shout, a high pitch like my annoying sister or a low growl like granddad, also being able to tell how near or far away the noise is.
Smell (Olfactory) 	Little receptors up your nose that are best friends with the ones on your tongue	Helps the brain to register the stinky stuff around us, such as flowers, and nice stuff like sausage rolls, but also nasty stuff like stinky armpits and bad breath! George is very likely to point this out to you!
Taste (Gustatory) 	These are little receptors on our tongues who are best friends with the little receptors in our noses	This system helps us to taste different things like sweet chocolate, sour lemons, savoury sausage rolls (my fave) salty crisps or spicy curry.
Touch (Tactile) 	Skin - All of our skin has cells which make it sensitive, some bits have more than others which make it extra sensitive these bits are mouth, hands and private bits like willies lol	It gives us information about how things around us feel such as, hard like a brick, soft like a feather, sharp like a knife, dull like a rolling pin, hot like a fire or cold like an ice-cube.
Balance (Vestibular) 	Inside our ears- When we move our heads and take in information from other senses, such as our eyes. Our ears send information to our brain to help us stay upright lol	Where am I in space, am I moving or am I still, who or what is moving around me, such as cars. How fast are things going and in what direction? Crossing the road is a flipping nightmare as I can't tell how fast things are.
Body awareness (Proprioception) 	Muscles and joints - Give our brains information when we move	Should tell us what each bit of our body is doing such as my bum is sat on a chair or I'm holding a ball in my hands, being able to stick my hand in my bag and find my pen without looking -No chance ha ha.

Ok, so if your senses work properly, you should be able to go through the following process - we will use a sausage roll to demonstrate:



If you are having massive struggles with your sensory systems not doing what they are supposed to, this is going to impact on the following:



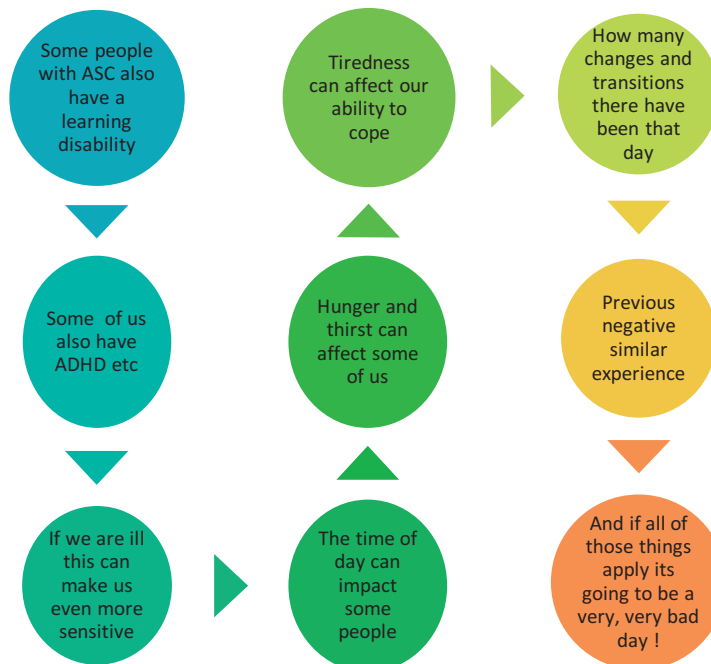
Imagine a mountain bike riding around in your brain. If you are neuro-typical (opposite to autistic), your bike will stick to a straight track and go very quickly from start to finish. Whereas our bikes have to do a very complicated track through a forest with loads of obstacles, and that can be incredibly frustrating and exhausting when you are riding that track all day every day.



When this all becomes too much, especially when you have not developed any coping strategies, it leads to either melt down or shut down, as we can no longer cope.

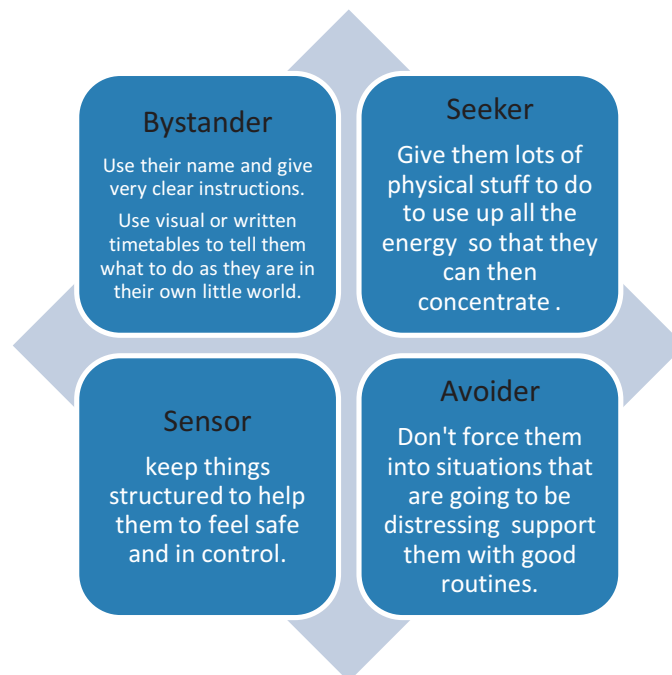


This can get even more complicated depending on what is happening in our lives and any other conditions we may be struggling with, as we are not all the same. As the saying goes if you have met one autistic person you have only met one autistic person!





How you can help these Guys



So now let's get down to the nitty gritty, who has heard of a "Sensory Diet"? Unfortunately, it doesn't involve sausage rolls, but it is still amazing!

OK, so firstly get it out of your head that we all need a referral to an Occupational Therapist, there is a chance that some of us will do in the long term, but to start with we need the people who know us really well to get together with us, if we are able, or on our behalf if we are not at that time, and discuss what they have observed in all of the different situations that we go into, and discuss how we might be helped to deal with things better. I will give you a couple of examples for me and friends:

Fred - Mum reported to the group that I hate the radio on in the car and I often put my hands over my ears. She has noticed that I am much calmer if we travel in silence. Mrs Newell my teacher noticed that after lunch in the dining room, I find it really difficult to concentrate in the afternoon. She asked me if it was because of how loud it is, which I think it is, but I also find all the people around me really difficult. Mrs Newell arranged for me to have lunch in the base with a small group of friends. I then get the option to spend time alone in a chill out space if I need it. People have recognised that loud noise and big groups are difficult for me and are making allowances, this makes it easier for me to concentrate.

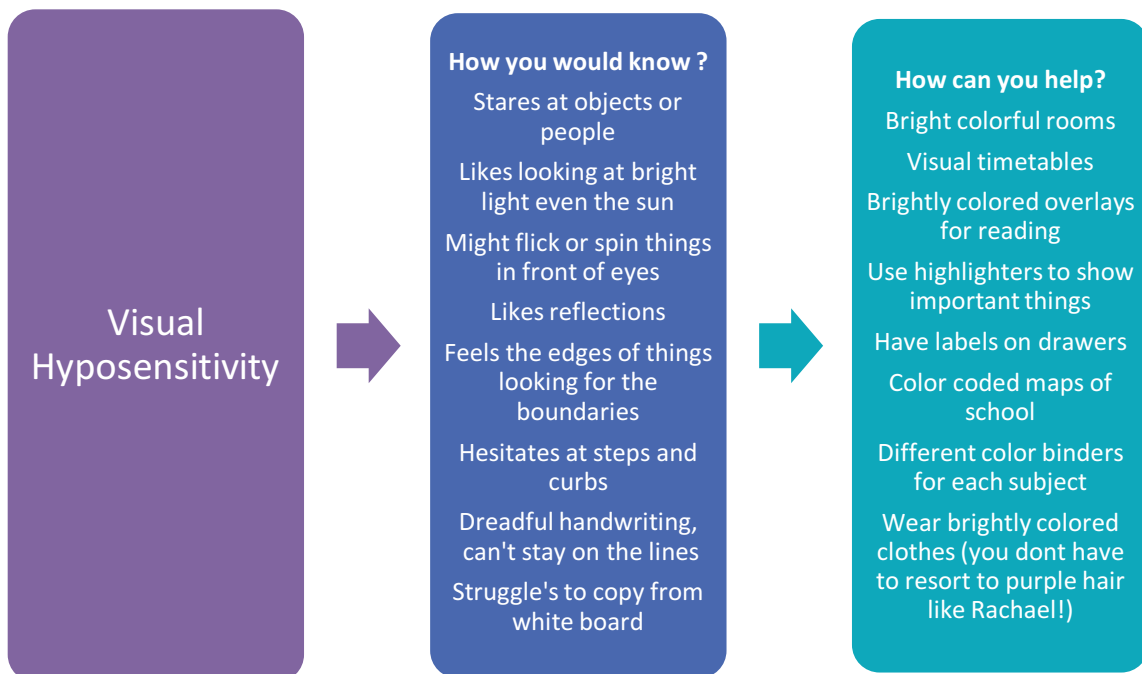
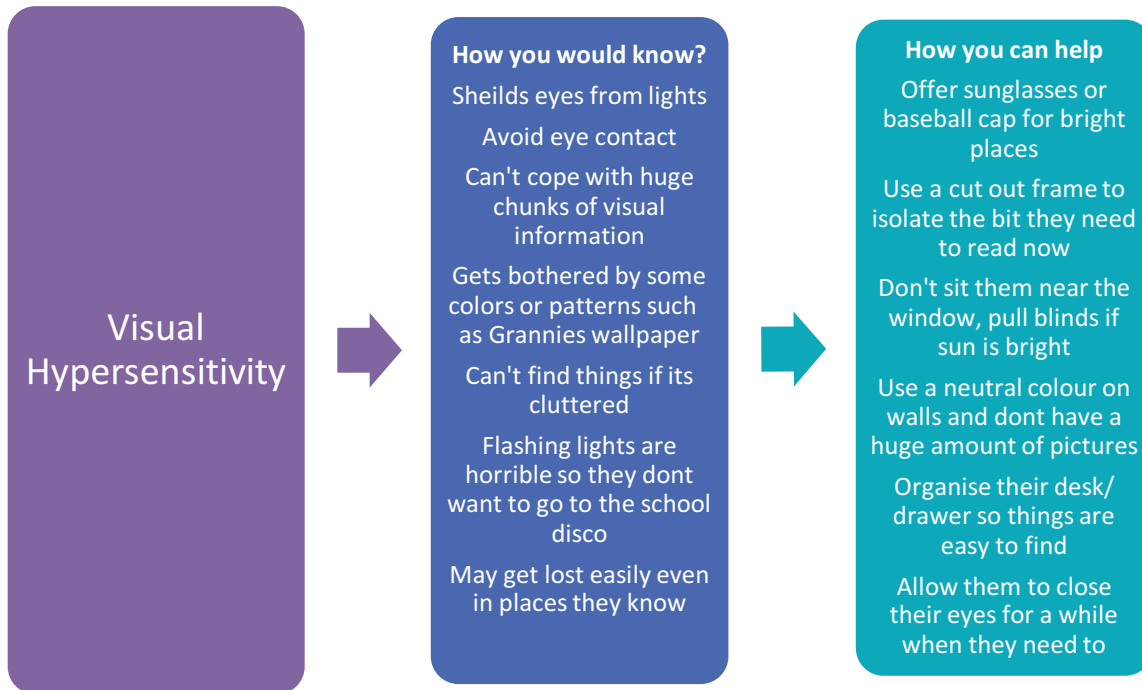


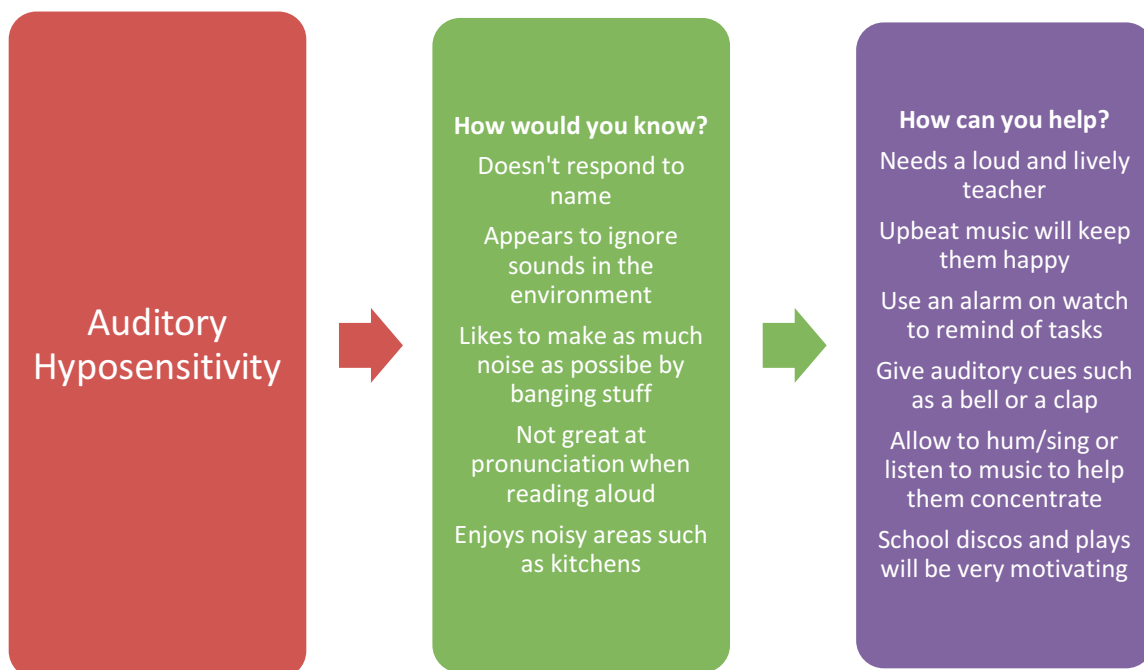
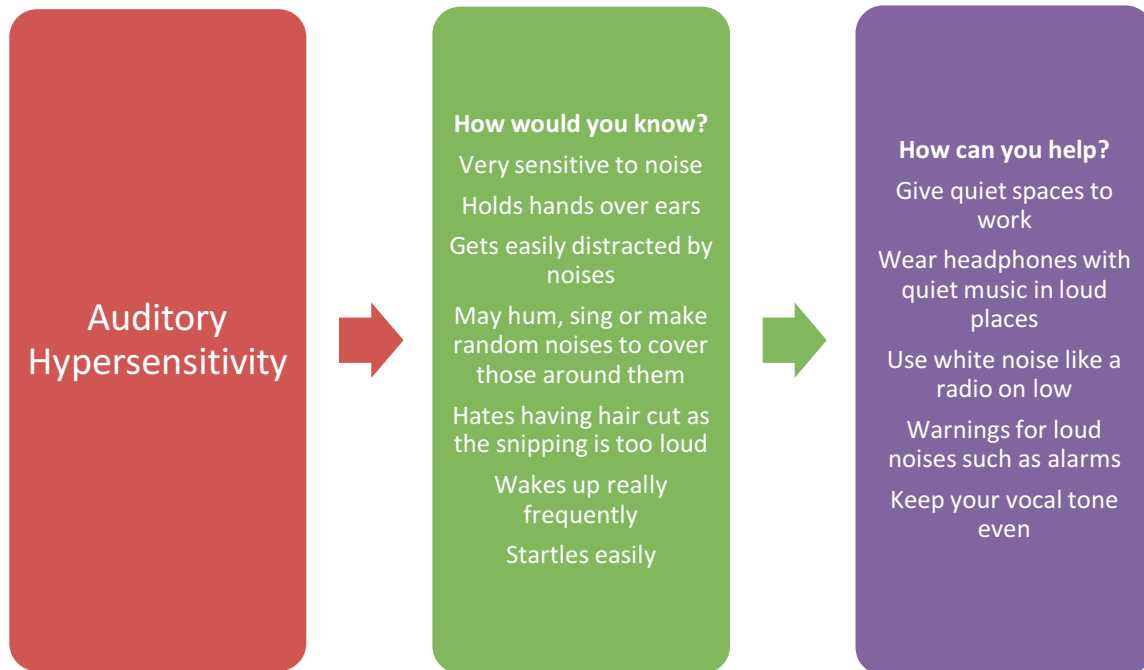
Steph - Steph's dad has noticed that she finds it really difficult to walk in a straight line particularly in busy places. Mrs Cannock her teacher finds that she struggles to sit still especially when she is getting tired. Dad helps Steph by linking arms when they are out and about. Everyone, including Steph, agrees that it would help if she did regular deep pressure exercises to try to improve her proprioception, she does them at regular intervals during the day and feels much better and less tired.

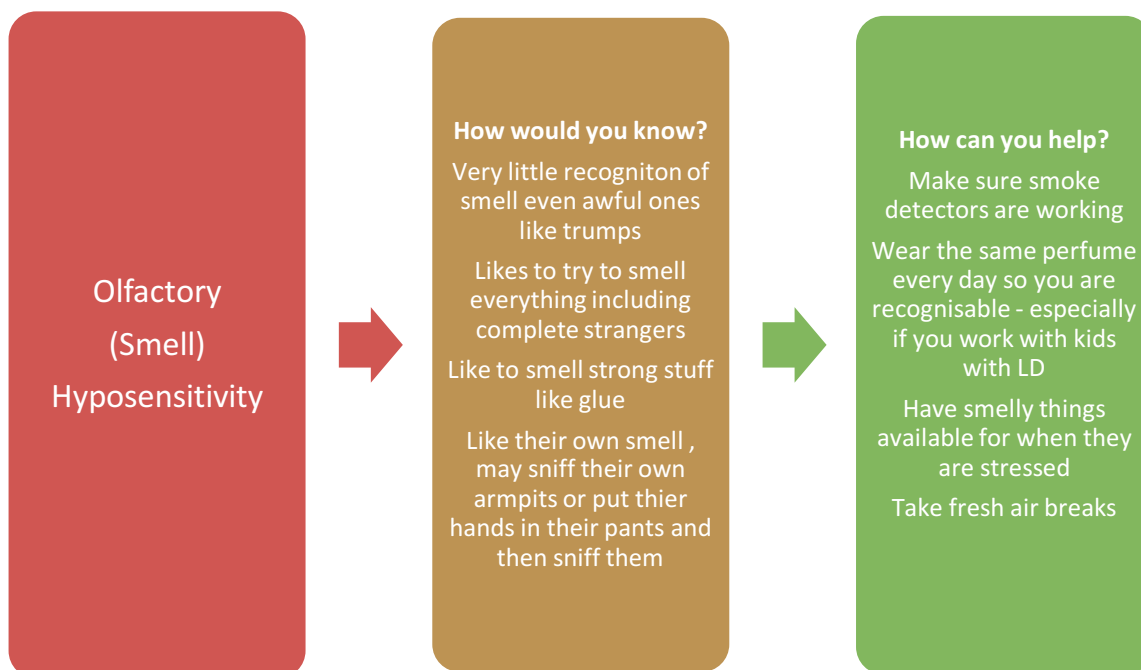
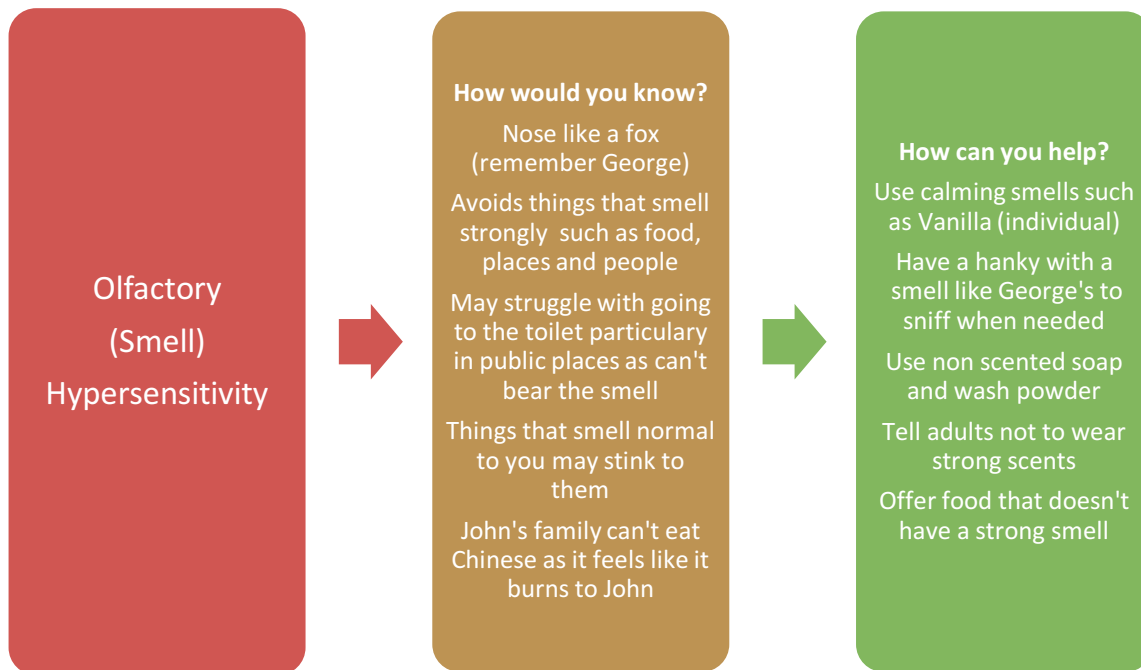
George - George has an unbelievable sense of smell, I think he was maybe a fox in a previous life! He loves to smell things that he likes, such as citrus fruit and mints, but he finds it really difficult to focus if there are strong smells around him that he doesn't like. He is also extremely honest, so if you have bad breath he is going to tell you lol! All of the support staff around George know what he can't cope with so don't wear strong perfume, but also ensure they don't have sweaty armpits either! They suck a lot of mints in that class particularly after coffee break, as coffee breath is one of his big hates. He carries a hanky in his pocket all the time that has lemon essential oil on it, so he can sniff that to calm himself if he needs too. Mrs Turner is helping George to think of other people's feelings around being told that they stink using social stories!

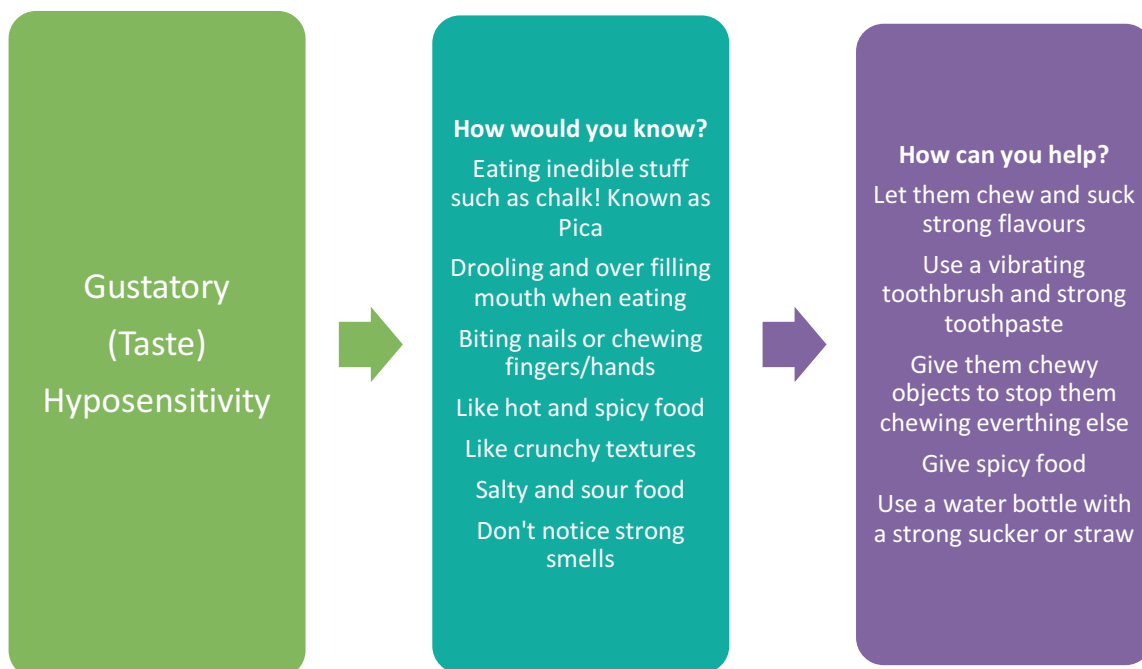


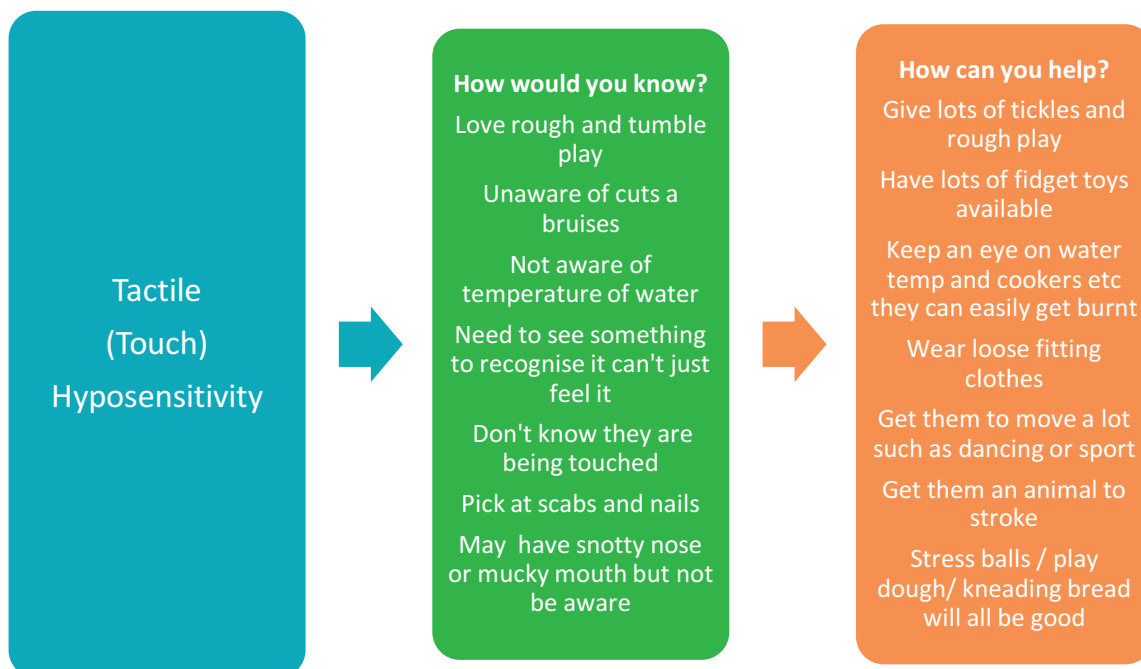
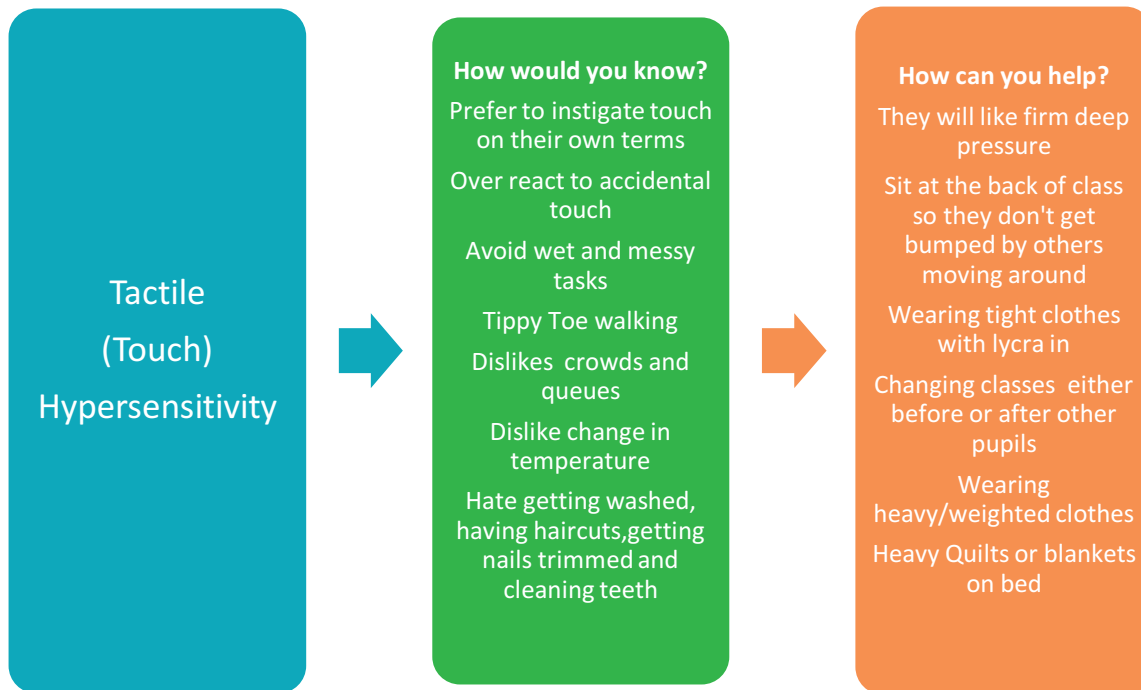
Okay, so what next? let's go through the senses and give you some ideas of how you would know if a kid you are working with has problems in each area and what you can do to help them.

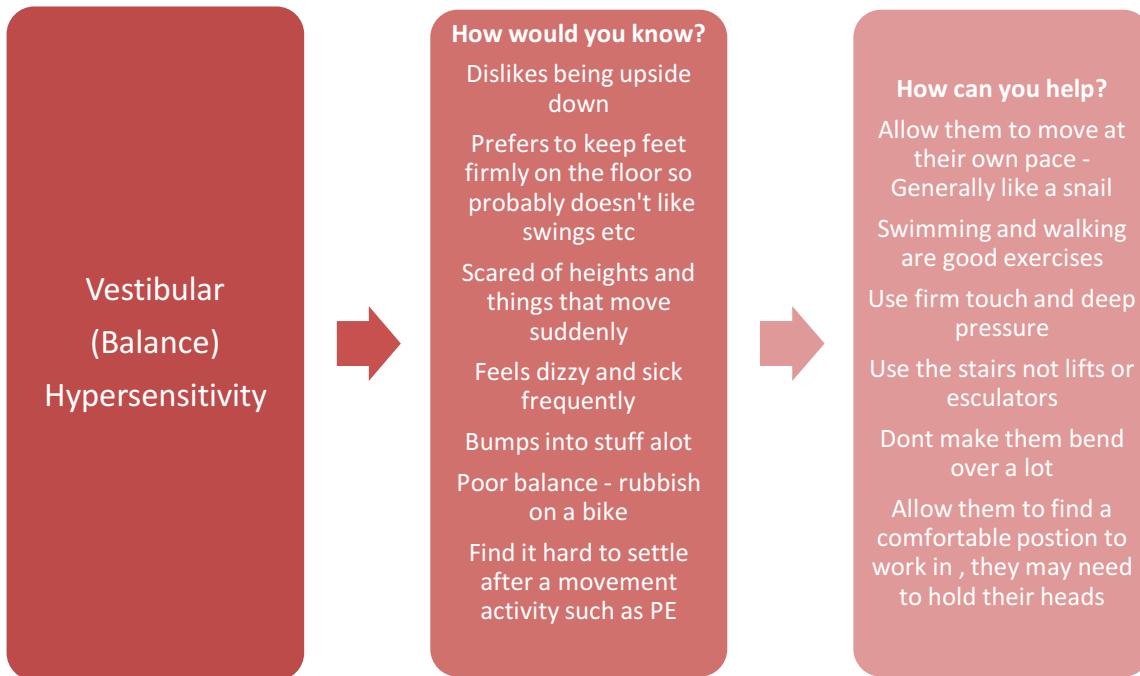


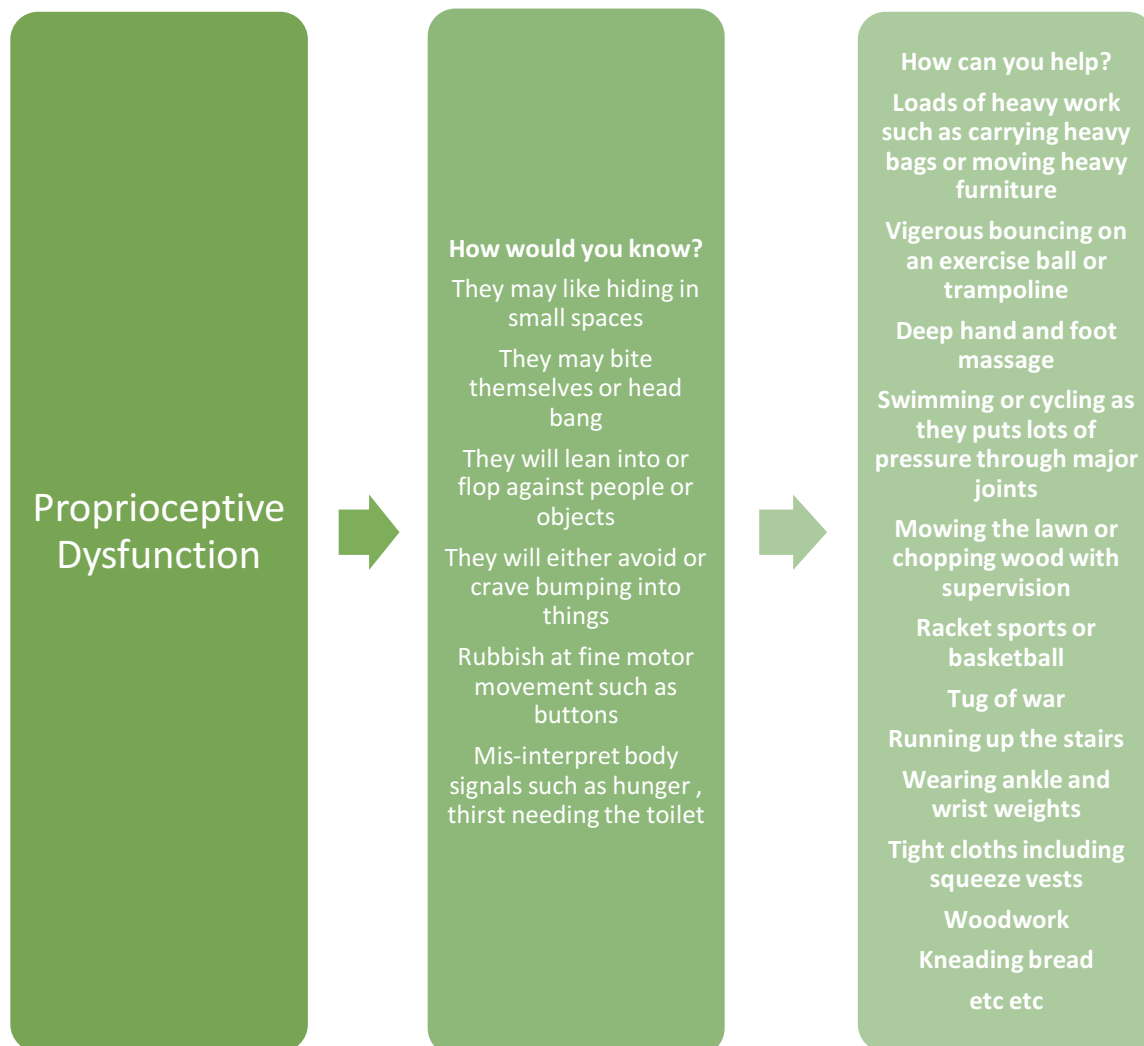












We hope that you have enjoyed our simple guide and that it has given you some ideas to use with the kids that you know, if you are interested in learning more we highly recommend

Winnie Dunn - Living Sensationally, you can also watch her on YouTube

Susan Culp - A Buffet of Sensory Interventions

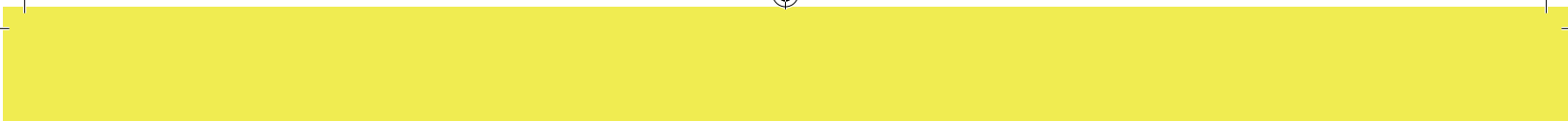
Brenda Smith Myles and friends - Asperger Syndrome and Sensory Issues

Best Wishes

Rachael and Fred

Notes

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