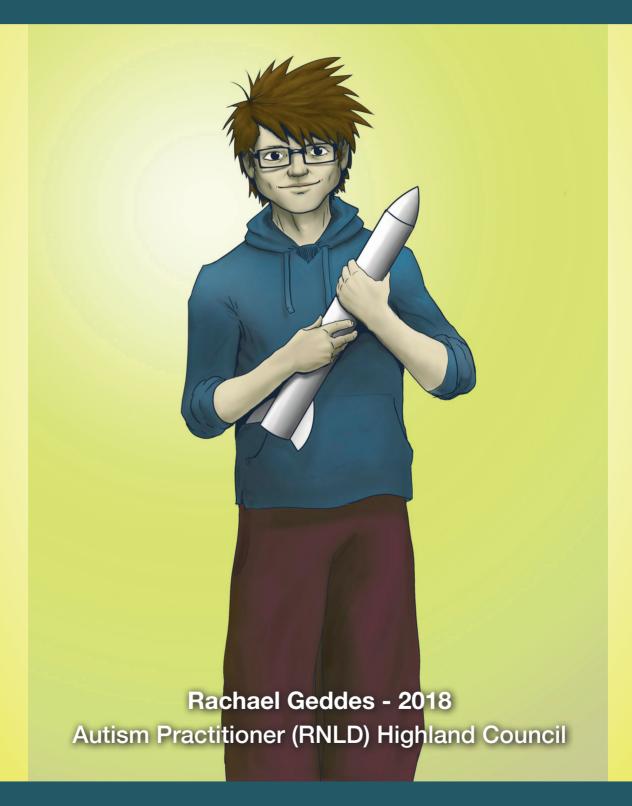
# Frazzled Fred's Guide to The Sensory World of Autism This is not Rocket Science Folks



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:



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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.

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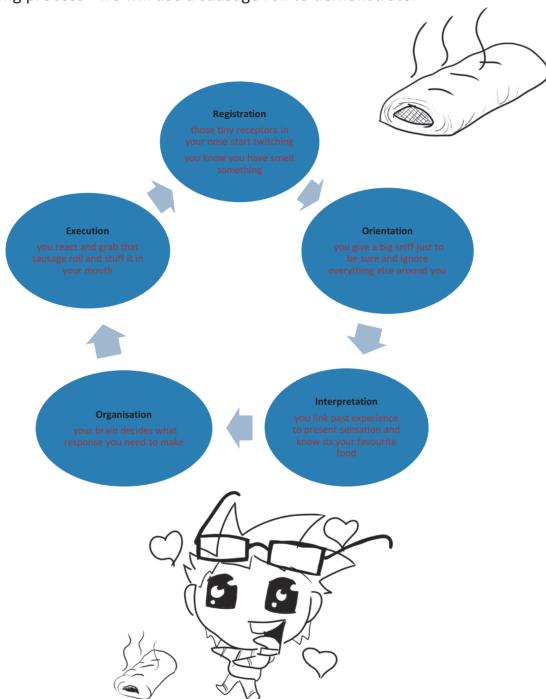








Ok, so if your senses work properly, you should be able to go through the following process - we will use a sausage roll to demonstrate:



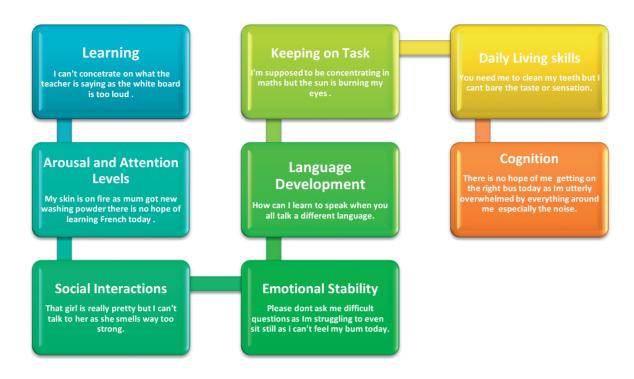
If you are having massive struggles with your sensory systems not doing what they are supposed to, this is going to impact on the following:











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.









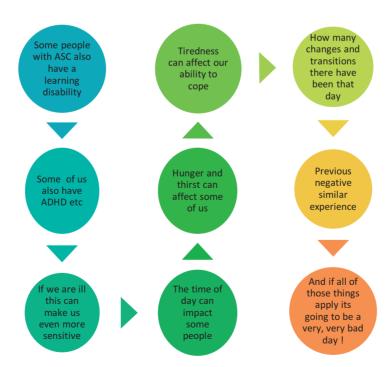








This can get even more complicated depending on what is happening in our lives and any other conditions we may be struggling with, as we are not all the same. As the saying goes if you have met one autistic person you have only met one autistic person!









#### Bystander - High Passive

Struggles - These people are a bit detached they can hurt themselves without knowing, they will miss instructions and you calling their name, they are probably cluttered and disorganised. They might loose their way even in familiar places.

Strengths- Really good at detailed tasks as they can shut other stuff out , can cope with different situations.

#### Seeker - High Active

Struggles - this person will be full of energy and won't know what to do with it - they probbaly do a good impression of Tigger, they may be a bit touchy feely and are generally very disruptive in school.

Strengths - they have huge amounts of energy and like change they will probably be good at risky activities such as rock climbing.

Types of Sensory Profile adapted from Winnie Dunn 2009 A lovely lady who understands us!

#### Sensor - Low passive

Struggles- This kid is very easily distracted by pretty much anything so concentrating is a big struggle. They complain a lot and like a lot of structure.

Strenghs - they are very tidy , like the same stuff all the time so you don't need much imagination to please them.

#### Avoider - Low active

Struggles - life is pretty overwhelming for these guys they struggle to block out and get easily overwhelmed - they will avoid lots of input as they just can't cope so social situations are pretty awful.

Strengths - like to be organised and tidy

# How you can help these Guys

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# Bystander

Use their name and give very clear instructions.

Use visual or written timetables to tell them what to do as they are in their own little world.

# Seeker

Give them lots of physical stuff to do to use up all the energy so that they can then concentrate.

#### Sensor

keep things structured to help them to feel safe and in control.

# Avoider

Don't force them into situations that are going to be distressing support them with good routines.



stink using social stories!



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

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.



# Visual Hypersensitivity

## How you would know?

Sheilds eyes from lights

Avoid eye contact

Can't cope with huge chunks of visual information

Gets bothered by some colors or patterns such as Grannies wallpaper

Can't find things if its cluttered

Flashing lights are horrible so they dont want to go to the school disco

May get lost easily even in places they know

## How you can help

Offer sunglasses or baseball cap for bright places

Use a cut out frame to isolate the bit they need to read now

Don't sit them near the window, pull blinds if sun is bright

Use a neutral colour on walls and dont have a huge amount of pictures

Organise their desk/ drawer so things are easy to find

Allow them to close their eyes for a while when they need to





Stares at objects or people

Likes looking at bright light even the sun

Might flick or spin things in front of eyes

Likes reflections

Feels the edges of things looking for the boundaries

Hesitates at steps and curbs

Dreadful handwriting, can't stay on the lines

Struggle's to copy from white board



Bright colorful rooms

Visual timetables

Brightly colored overlays for reading

Use highlighters to show important things

Have labels on drawers

Color coded maps of school

Different color binders for each subject

Wear brightly colored clothes (you dont have to resort to purple hair like Rachael!)







Visual

Hyposensitivity



# Auditory Hypersensitivity

# How would you know?

Very sensitive to noise

Holds hands over ears

Gets easily distracted by

May hum, sing or make random noises to cover those around them

Hates having hair cut as the snipping is too loud

Wakes up really frequently

Startles easily

## How can you help?

Give quiet spaces to work

Wear headphones with quiet music in loud places

Use white noise like a \_\_\_ radio on low

Warnings for loud noises such as alarms

Keep your vocal tone







## How would you know?

Doesn't respond to name

Appears to ignore sounds in the environment

Likes to make as much noise as possibe by banging stuff

Not great at pronunciation when reading aloud

Enjoys noisy areas such as kitchens



Needs a loud and lively teacher

How can you help?

Upbeat music will keep them happy

Use an alarm on watch to remind of tasks

Give auditory cues such as a bell or a clap

Allow to hum/sing or listen to music to help them concentrate

School discos and plays will be very motivating







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Olfactory (Smell) Hypersensitivity



Nose like a fox (remember George)

Avoids things that smell strongly such as food, places and people

May struggle with going to the toilet particulary in public places as can't bear the smell

Things that smell normal to you may stink to them

John's family can't eat Chinese as it feels like it burns to John

# How can you help?

Use calming smells such

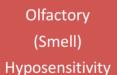
Have a hanky with a smell like George's to sniff when needed

Use non scented soap and wash powder

Tell adults not to wear strong scents

Offer food that doesn't have a strong smell







# How would you know?

Very little recogniton of smell even awful ones like trumps

Likes to try to smell everything including complete strangers

Like to smell strong stuff like glue

Like their own smell, may sniff their own armpits or put thier hands in their pants and then sniff them



# How can you help?

Make sure smoke detectors are working

Wear the same perfume every day so you are recognisable - especially if you work with kids

Have smelly things available for when they are stressed

Tales fusals sin bussle









Gustatory

(Taste)

Hyposensitivity



Being a picky eater
Gagging when eating
Not liking stong tastes,

complex textures and extreme temperatures such as Ice Cream

Prefereing water over other drinks Not liking strong smells

# How can you help?

Let them chew gum

Allow them to eat their prefered food (sometimes called the Beige Diet)

Give a packed lunch so you know they will eat something

Introduce new foods slowly

Will probably prefer food to be in seperate piles





# How would you know?

Eating inedible stuff such as chalk! Known as Pica

Drooling and over filling mouth when eating

Biting nails or chewing fingers/hands

Like hot and spicy food

Like crunchy textures

Salty and sour food Don't notice strong



# How can you help?

Let them chew and suck strong flavours

Use a vibrating toothbrush and strong toothpaste

Give them chewy objects to stop them chewing everthing else

Give spicy food

Use a water bottle with a strong sucker or straw









Tactile (Touch) Hypersensitivity

**Tactile** 

(Touch)

Hyposensitivity

## How would you know?

Prefer to instigate touch

Over react to accidental touch

Avoid wet and messy tasks

Tippy Toe walking

Dislikes crowds and queues

Dislike change in temperature

Hate getting washed, having haircuts,getting nails trimmed and cleaning teeth

## How can you help?

They will like firm deep pressure

Sit at the back of clas so they don't get bumped by others moving around

Wearing tight clothes with lycra in

Changing classes either before or after other pupils

Wearing heavy/weighted clothes Heavy Quilts or blankets on bed





# How would you know?

Love rough and tumble play

Unaware of cuts a bruises

Not aware of temperature of water

Need to see something to recognise it can't just feel it

Don't know they are being touched

Pick at scabs and nails

May have snotty nose or mucky mouth but not be aware



Give lots of tickles and rough play

Have lots of fidget toys available

Keep an eye on water temp and cookers etc hev can easily get burnt

Wear loose fitting

Get them to move a lot

Get them an animal to stroke

Stress balls / play dough/ kneading bread will all be good









Vestibular
(Balance)
Hypersensitivity

# How would you know?

Dislikes being upside

Prefers to keep feet firmly on the floor so probably doesn't like swings etc

Scared of heights and things that move

Feels dizzy and sick frequently

Bumps into stuff alot

Poor balance - rubbish on a bike

Find it hard to settle after a movement activity such as PE

#### How can you help?

Allow them to move a their own pace Generally like a snail

Swimming and walking are good exercises

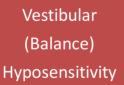
Use firm touch and deep pressure

Use the stairs not lifts or esculators

Dont make them bend

Allow them to find a comfortable postion to work in , they may need to hold their heads







How will you know? They do a lot of rocking bouncing and fidgeting

LOVE swings and roundabouts

Take lots of risks climbing and jumping

Bouncy wobbly people who have low muscle

May slump about a lot in chairs and over thier desks



movement particulary things that bounce and spin

Make them do some big movements before you ask them to do anything fine motor

Teach them handstands and cartwheels

Give them a bouncy ball or cushion to sit on if you need them to

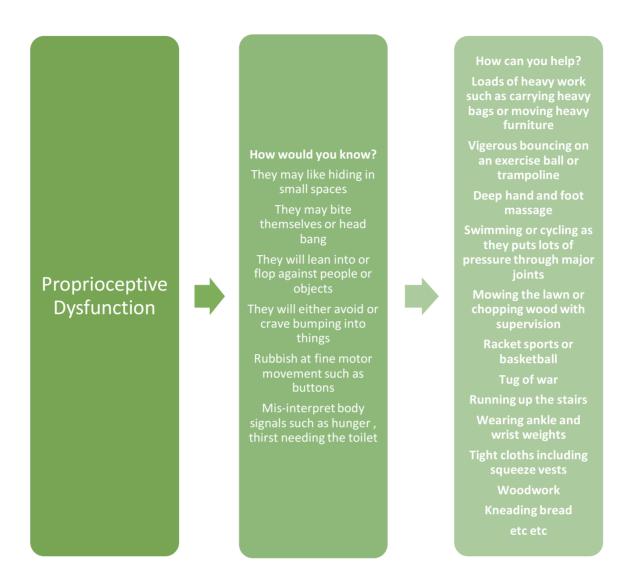
Let them spin in an office chair

**Touching toes** 



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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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Illustrations by Robert MacPherson

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