



Building a Family Sensory Toolkit



A resource to support the webinar delivered
by Tigger Pritchard
'The Sensory Impact of School Holidays'
(www.bridgingtheneurodivide.com)

July 2023 for
The PDA Space Portal
(www.thepdaspacespace.com)

Created by Helen Edgar



The Sensory System

Everyone has a sensory system; autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people may find some of their senses are more or less sensitive and different from other people's. Autistic needs are fluid, as is the sensory system; what is tolerated one day may not be tolerated the next.

More sensitive = hyper-sensitivity

Less sensitive = hypo-sensitivity

Hypersensitivity: a more intense / heightened response to sensory stimuli, to the point it could feel very uncomfortable or even painful (e.g., light/sound/taste/touch/smell/movement/pain).

Hyposensitivity: a lower response to sensory stimuli, may be unaware of pain or not as responsive as you may expect (e.g., light/sound/taste/touch/smell/movement/pain).

Having a highly responsive sensory system can be wonderful as it enables you to experience the world intensely but can also be exhausting and difficult to manage. Holidays can bring more challenges for neurodivergent people as lots of things change, which can raise anxiety and cause more sensory dysregulation.

Changes may include:

Weather

Clothing

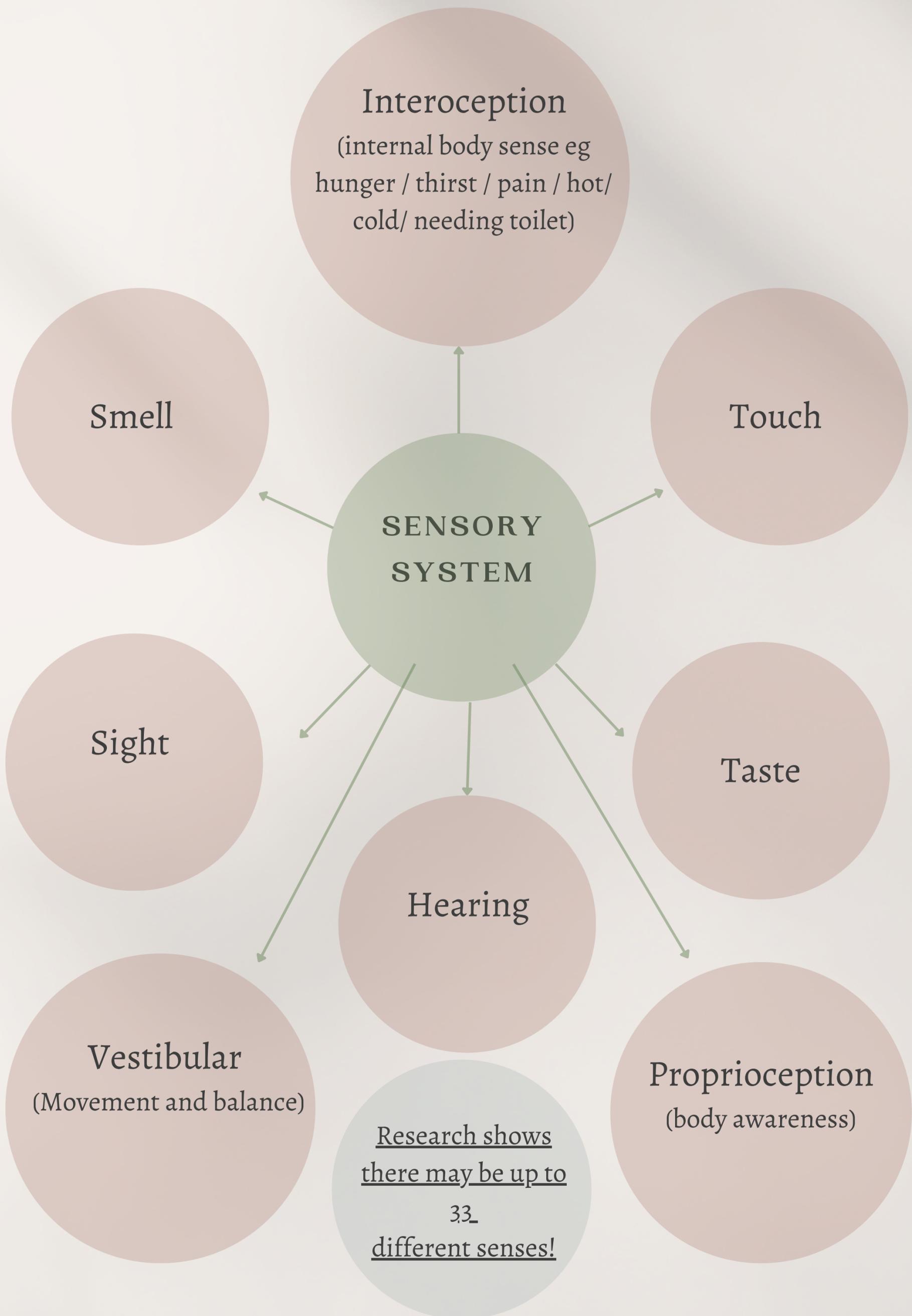
Types of Food

Routines of the day

Going different places and being with different people



The Sensory System



Sensory Detective

Autistic people can be a lot more or less sensitive to certain things. Holidays can create uncertainty as your usual dependable routines and ways of living may suddenly change.

Uncertainty can increase anxiety.

It can help to recreate the sensory elements and the things that help your child or young person in their usual routines to provide consistency during the holidays.

Try to be a **Sensory Detective** and think about what sensory input your child or young person is struggling with. Also, think about when they are most happy and regulated. What sensory input do they enjoy, what calms or stimulates them, and what works well?

You can use the following page as a template to stick on your fridge or type into the notes on your phone to help you work out your child's areas of difficulty and what may help them regulate their sensory system. This will help you build up your **sensory toolkit**.

Why not try this for the whole family? We all have sensory needs, and it may be a nice way to model and for everyone to work together and open up conversations about their own sensory responses.

Interoception and Alexythemia

If you or your child / young person also have difficulties with interoception and alexithymia, then managing the sensory system will likely be more complicated and complex.

Alexithymia: difficulties identifying, understanding and expressing your emotions or/and those of others

Interoception: relates to a person's ability to understand and interpret internal body signals and sensations. If you have difficulties with interoceptive awareness, you may not understand your body signals to know if you are hungry, thirsty, hot, cold, need the toilet, or are in pain.

There are several ideas to help develop an awareness of your interoception signals that may help to understand emotions and what tools to use to help regulate them.

Kelly Mahler has a lot more information on her website with some great ideas to look up, such as how to use body scan techniques.

There is a link to further resources and information on Tigger's website here:

www.bridgingtheneurodivide.com/interoception



Building a Sensory Tool Kit

Sense

Difficulty

What helps

Sight		
Hearing		
Taste / food		
Smell		
Touch		
Proprioception (body awareness)		
Vestibular (movement and balance)		
Interoception (internal sense eg hot / cold / hungry / pain)		

Why not try this for everyone in your family, it may help to open up conversations!



A Family Sensory Tool Kit



What would your family sensory toolkit look like ?

You could have a sensory toolkit basket at home or an individual bag for each of you for when you go on day trips or holiday.



Signposting

1

www.thepdaspace.com

Family support workshops, webinars, coaching and online peer support groups

2

www.bridgingtheneurodivide.com

Tiggers amazing website, neurodivergent advocate, mentor, consultant and trainer

3

www.autismunderstood.co.uk

Website designed by autistic young people, for autistic people

4

www.autisticparentsuk.org

Autistic Parent network offering peer support

5

www.pdasociety.org.uk

PDA Society UK

6

www.autism.org.uk

National Autistic Society UK

I am not an Occupational Therapist, please seek professional advice if you have any sensory concerns.





A free community resource to support
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Autistic Realms

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