## **Workplace Sensory Guide**

# A practical resource for neurodivergent success in work environments

### **©** Assess Your Workspace

Identify sensory challenges and opportunities in your work environment

#### **Communication Tools**

Templates for discussing accommodations with managers and colleagues

### Practical Solutions

Immediate strategies and long-term accommodation ideas

### **4** Crisis Management

Quick response plans for sensory overload at work







# **Understanding Workplace Sensory Challenges**

Why traditional work environments can be difficult for neurodivergent people

### The Neurodivergent Brain at Work

Neurodivergent brains process sensory information differently. What might be "background noise" to a neurotypical colleague could be completely overwhelming to you, making it impossible to concentrate or perform your best work.

### Remember

Your sensory needs are neurological differences that require practical support, just like any other workplace accommodation.

### **Common Workplace Sensory Challenges**

### **Auditory**

- Open office chatter and phone calls
- Keyboard typing and mouse clicking
- Air conditioning and heating systems
- Microwave beeps and coffee machines
- Sudden loud noises or alarms
- Meeting room acoustics

#### Wisual

- Fluorescent or LED lighting
- Screen glare and blue light
- Cluttered or busy visual environments
- Movement in peripheral vision
- Flashing or changing displays
- Color contrast issues





### **Tactile**

- Office chair fabric or materials
- Keyboard and mouse textures
- Paper handling and filing
- Temperature fluctuations
- Unexpected physical contact
- Uniform or dress code fabrics

### **Olfactory**

- Perfumes and colognes
- Cleaning products and chemicals
- Food smells from kitchen areas
- New carpet or furniture off-gassing
- Bathroom and waste odours
- Printer toner and office supplies

### **Understanding Your Rights**

**Reasonable Adjustments:** Under disability discrimination laws, employers must make reasonable adjustments to help you perform your role. Sensory accommodations often cost little to nothing and can significantly improve your work performance.

**What's "Reasonable":** Adjustments that don't cause undue hardship to the business, don't fundamentally alter the role, and don't pose safety risks. Most sensory accommodations easily meet these criteria.





### **Your Workplace Sensory Assessment**

Identify specific challenges and opportunities in your work environment



### How to Use This Assessment

Walk through your typical workday and rate each sensory element. Focus on how these factors affect your ability to concentrate, feel comfortable, and perform your best work.

Rating Scale: ✓ Comfortable | ∧ Sometimes Challenging | ★ Major Problem | + Need More Of This

### **Solution Environmental Assessment**

### **Auditory Environment**

<ul> <li>Background conversation levels</li> <li>Phone and notification sounds</li> <li>Equipment noise (printers, AC, etc.)</li> <li>Meeting room acoustics</li> <li>Ability to control audio environment</li> </ul>						
Visual Environment						
Lighting quality and intensity						
Screen glare and positioning						
Visual clutter and distractions						
Color schemes and contrast     Natural light availability						
Natural light availability						
Physical Comfort						
Chair comfort and adjustability						
<ul> <li>Desk height and ergonomics</li> </ul>						
Temperature control      Air quality and airculation						
<ul> <li>Air quality and circulation</li> <li>Personal space boundaries</li> </ul>						





•	Interaction expectations	
•	Meeting frequency and format	

**Social Environment** 

Social events and gatheringsCommunication styles

• Flexibility for breaks \_\_\_\_

# **©** Priority Areas for Improvement

Based on your assessment, identify your top 3 sensory challenges that most impact your work:

1. Biggest Challenge:		

2. Second Priority:

3. Third Priority:





### **Communicating Your Needs**

Templates and scripts for accommodation conversations

### Initial Conversation with Your Manager

#### **I** Email Template: Requesting a Meeting

"Hi [Manager's Name],

I'd like to schedule a brief meeting to discuss some workplace adjustments that would help me perform at my best. I have some sensory processing differences that affect my concentration and productivity, and I believe there are some simple accommodations we could implement.

I have some specific suggestions that I think would be beneficial for both my performance and the team. Would you have 20-30 minutes available this week?

Thanks, [Your Name]"

### In-Person Conversation Script

"I have some sensory processing differences that affect how I work best. For example, [specific example like 'open office noise makes it difficult for me to concentrate']. I've identified some accommodations that would really help my productivity, like [specific solution like 'using noise-canceling headphones' or 'working from a quieter area'].

These changes would help me contribute more effectively to the team. Would you be open to discussing these options?"











### Written Request Template

"Dear [Manager/HR],

I am requesting workplace accommodations related to my sensory processing needs. These accommodations will help me perform my role more effectively.

#### **Current Challenges:**

- "Open office noise makes it difficult for me to concentrate on detailed tasks, reducing my productivity by an estimated 40%"
- "Fluorescent lighting causes eye strain and headaches, particularly during afternoon hours"
- "Unexpected interruptions and sudden loud noises cause me to lose focus and require 10-15 minutes to regain concentration"
- "The current workspace layout with high visual activity in my peripheral vision makes it challenging to maintain attention on computer work"

#### **Requested Accommodations:**

- Permission to wear noise-cancelling headphones during focused work periods, with agreement on visual signals for urgent communication"
- "A desk lamp to replace overhead fluorescent lighting at my workstation"
- "Relocation of my desk to a quieter area of the office, preferably facing a wall to reduce visual distractions"
- "Scheduled 'quiet time' from 9-11 AM daily when non-urgent conversations are minimised in our work area"
- "Use of a small desk partition or privacy screen to reduce peripheral visual stimulation"
- "Advance notice (24 hours when possible) of schedule changes, office moves, or unusual noise (construction, events)"

#### **Expected Benefits:**

- Improved concentration and productivity
- Reduced need for breaks due to sensory overload
- Better quality work output

I'm happy to discuss these requests and explore implementation options.

Kind regards, [Your Name]"





### **Explaining to Colleagues**

### **4** Quick Tips

You don't owe anyone a detailed explanation of your neurodivergence. Keep it simple, focus on what helps you work better, and emphasise the mutual benefits.

### **©** Colleague Conversation

"I work better in quieter environments, so I'll be wearing headphones during focus time. Feel free to message me or tap my shoulder if you need something urgent."

OR

"I have some sensory sensitivities, so I might need to step out occasionally for a quick break. It helps me stay focused and productive."





### **Practical Workplace Accommodations**

*Immediate solutions and long-term adjustments* 



### **Auditory Accommodations**

#### **LOW-COST SOLUTIONS**

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- White noise machine or app
- Desk placement away from high-traffic areas
- Agreed upon quiet hours

#### STRUCTURAL CHANGES

- Private or semi-private office
- Acoustic panels or partitions
- Carpeted flooring in work area
- Phone booth or quiet rooms

### **Visual Accommodations**

#### LIGHTING ADJUSTMENTS

- Desk lamp instead of overhead lighting
- Blue light filtering glasses
- Adjustable monitor brightness
- Window seat or away from windows
- Dimmer switches for office lighting

#### **VISUAL ENVIRONMENT**

- Desk shields or partitions
- Organised, clutter-free workspace
- Multiple monitor setup
- High-contrast display settings





### Physical Comfort

#### **ERGONOMIC SETUP**

- Adjustable standing desk
- Ergonomic chair with proper support
- Footrest and keyboard tray
- Wrist rests and mouse pad
- Personal space heater/fan

#### **SENSORY TOOLS**

- Fidget tools at desk
- Weighted lap pad
- Textured seat cushion
- Stress ball or squeeze toys
- Movement breaks scheduled

### Schedule and Process Accommodations

#### **TIME MANAGEMENT**

- Flexible start/end times
- Predictable meeting schedules
- Advance notice of changes
- Extended deadlines when needed
- Regular sensory breaks

#### **COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES**

- Written instructions and follow-ups
- One-on-one meetings instead of groups
- Email communication preferred
- Meeting agendas provided in advance
- Virtual meeting options





### **Managing Sensory Overload at Work**

Emergency strategies and recovery plans

#### **⚠** When You're Overwhelmed: Immediate Response

- 1. **Recognise the signs early:** Difficulty concentrating, increased irritability, physical tension, or feeling "fuzzy"
- 2. **Remove yourself safely:** Go to bathroom, break room, outside area, or quiet space
- 3. **Reduce sensory input:** Close eyes, use headphones, dim lighting, or find silence
- 4. **Use grounding techniques:** Deep breathing, counting, or focus on physical sensations
- 5. **Allow recovery time:** Don't rush back give your nervous system time to regulate

# **88 Build Your Workplace Sensory Kit**

Keep these items at your desk or in a personal bag:

#### **IMMEDIATE RELIEF ITEMS**

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Sunglasses or eye mask
- Stress ball or fidget tool
- Essential oil or calming scent
- Soft texture item (scarf, fabric)

#### **REGULATION TOOLS**

- Water bottle and healthy snacks
- Weighted lap pad or small blanket
- Chewing gum or crunchy snacks
- Hand lotion or textured items
- Backup phone charger





### Digital Tools for Support

### Helpful Apps

White Noise Apps: Noisli, Brain.fm, or Rain Rain for consistent background sound

**Break Reminders:** Time Out, Stretchly, or phone timers for regular breaks **Breathing Apps:** Headspace, Calm, or 4-7-8 Breathing for quick regulation

### **Particular Services** Communicating During Difficult Moments

#### **Quick Phrases to Use**

"I need a 5-minute sensory break, I'll be right back."

"I'm feeling overwhelmed and need to step away briefly to refocus."

"Can we continue this conversation in [quieter location/via email/after lunch]?"

"I'm having trouble processing detailed verbal instructions right now, could you send me the details in an email?"

### **া** Recovery and Prevention

#### **After a sensory overload incident:**

- Don't apologise for your neurological needs
- Note what triggered the overwhelm
- Consider if any accommodations could prevent this
- Be kind to yourself we're usually overly critical of our own performance
- Plan for extra self-care after work

#### **Prevention strategies:**

- Schedule regular sensory breaks throughout the day
- Monitor your energy levels and adjust workload
- Communicate needs proactively, not reactively
- Build in recovery time between challenging tasks
- Track patterns to identify your triggers





### **Getting Additional Support**

You don't have to navigate workplace challenges alone. We specialise in helping neurodivergent people advocate for their needs and can work with you to develop practical strategies for work success.



