

THE FIVE MINUTE

Sensory Triggers Checklist

DEVELOPED BY
DR. MEGAN ANNA NEFF, PSY.D.

What are Sensory Triggers?

INTRODUCTION



Imagine that you're trapped in a small room. It's filled with blaring music, flashing lights, overwhelming chatter, and a jumble of overpowering scents. Your heart races, head pounds, and an intense urge to escape from the sensory onslaught comes over you.

You cannot get out of here fast enough.

This fleeting glimpse offers just a taste of sensory overload's overwhelming reality. At its core, sensory overwhelm entails a barrage on the nervous system, as various sensory triggers converge to create an incredibly distressing situation for the person living it.

Sensory triggers act as catalysts for overload, evoking profound feelings of distress and overwhelm. These triggers can be sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or physical sensations, and they can all significantly impact our daily lives.

Identifying these triggers is the initial step in cultivating sensory safety, as self-awareness empowers us to recognize and respond more effectively. As an Autistic-ADHD individual with alexithymia, I find checklists particularly helpful, offering concrete examples to ease the process.

I developed the following **Five-Minute Sensory Trigger Checklist** to help you identify your own personal sensory triggers. It covers various sensory domains with common examples for each. Mark the items that resonate with you, and consider additional triggers not listed here. I hope you'll find this to be a helpful starting point for your sensory self-reflection and exploration.

Warmly,

Dr. Neff

The Sensory Triggers Checklist



LIGHTING

- Bright or harsh lighting
- Flickering or flashing lights
- Overhead fluorescent lighting
- Intense or direct sunlight
- Rapid changes in lighting
- Dim or low lighting
- Glare or reflections
- Colored or neon lights
- Strobe lights or disco lighting
- Rapidly moving or flashing visuals

Other lighting triggers:

ENVIRONMENT

- Crowded or busy spaces
- Confined environments
- Overly cluttered or disorganized environments
- Strong or overwhelming scents in the environment
- Harsh or uncomfortable seating surfaces
- Unpredictable or rapidly changing environments

Other environmental triggers:

TEMPERATURE

- Extreme heat or cold
- Rapid changes in temperature
- Stuffy or stagnant air
- Drafts or breezes
- Humidity
- Dry air
- Sweating
- Feeling too hot or too bundled up

Other temperature triggers:

TACTILE

- Rough or abrasive textures
- Itchy or scratchy materials
- Light or gentle touch
- Heavy or deep pressure
- Wet or sticky sensations
- Moisture
- Sensitivity to temperature (e.g., hot or cold objects)

Other tactile triggers:

The Sensory Triggers Checklist



GUSTATORY

- Strong or overpowering flavors
- Spicy or hot foods
- Bitter tastes
- Sour tastes
- Sweet tastes
- Food touching sensitivities
- Food temperature issues
- Unfamiliar or new foods
- Textural experiences (e.g., mushy, yogurt, avocado)
- Sensitivities or allergies to certain ingredients

Other gustatory triggers:

MOVEMENT

- Fast or erratic movements
- Being in crowds or confined spaces
- Rapid changes in motion or direction
- Intense or excessive physical activity
- Certain types of transportation (elevators, escalators, or cars)
- Spinning or rotating movements

Other movement triggers:

SMELL

- Strong or overpowering odors
- Chemical smells
- Perfumes or colognes
- Certain foods or cooking smells
- Smoke or pollution
- Cleaning products
- Floral or fragrant scents

Other smell triggers:

VISUAL

- Busy visual environments
- Cluttered environments
- Strained or intense eye contact
- Specific colors or contrasts
- Overwhelming patterns or designs
- Certain types of visual media (e.g., fast-paced movies or video games)

Other lighting triggers:

The Sensory Triggers Checklist



CLOTHING

- Rough or scratchy fabrics
- Tags or labels on clothing
- Tight or constricting clothing
- Clothing that is too tight around specific body parts
- Uncomfortable or restrictive footwear
- Clothing that is too loose or baggy
- Specific textures, patterns, or colors that bother you
- Sensitivity to certain types of fabric (e.g., wool, lace)

Other clothing triggers:

PEOPLE

- Loud or intrusive voices
- Prolonged eye contact
- Personal space invasion
- Social demands and small talk
- Physical touch or proximity from others
- Unpredictable or unexpected movements from others
- Overstimulating social interactions or group settings
- Specific facial expressions or gestures

Other environmental triggers:

SOUND

- Loud noises
- Sudden bursts of sound
- Background noise or chatter
- High-pitched or piercing sounds
- Echoes or reverberations
- Crowded or busy environments
- Certain types of music or specific instruments
- Repetitive or constant noises (pen clicking)

Other sound triggers:

NOTES

The Sensory Triggers Checklist



Now that you have completed the sensory trigger checklist, it can be beneficial to compile your responses in one place for clearer visualization. By writing them out here, you can easily refer to and review your triggers.

Clothing

Environment

Gustatory

Lighting

Movement

People

Smell

Sound

Tactile

Temperature

Visual

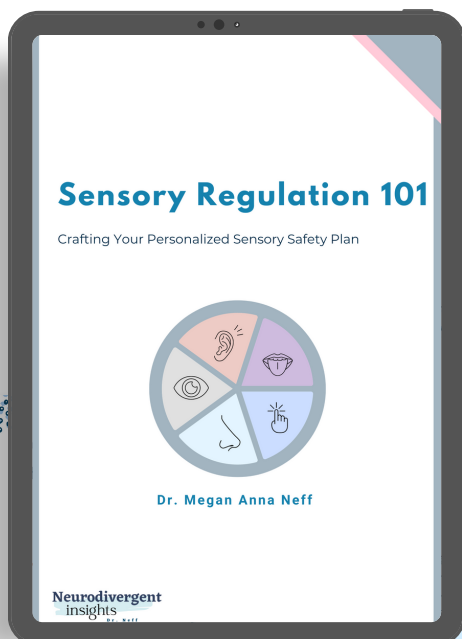
Other

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Check out the Sensory Regulation 101 Workbook:

<https://neurodivergentinsights.com/neurodivergentstore/p/sensory-safety-plan>

You'll find a workbook dedicated to crafting your sensory safety plan.



Why Is Sensory Regulation Important?

?

Building Your Sensory Kit

Step One: Choose a Container

The first step to building a sensory kit is to find a container to hold your items. This can be whatever you'd like, from a small, discreet pouch to something larger like a lunchbox or a tote bag. As long as it is easily portable and can keep your items organized and accessible, it's good!

See if you can find a container that you love and brings you delight. This may mean finding a playful container or one that is connected to an area of interest. Here are a few examples:

Why Does Sensory Regulation Matter?

AT A GLANCE

- Cognitive Regulation
- Behavioral Regulation
- Emotional Regulation
- Sensory Regulation

*Sensory regulation is a foundation for other forms of self-regulation.

Exploring Your Sensory Likes

Lighting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural lighting Dim lighting Warm lighting Artificial light Colorful lights (LED) Moderate lighting Yellow (has been lighting) White (has been lighting) Other 	Visual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visually serene or organized Neurocalm colors Neurocalm patterns Patterns or bright decor Dark colors Neurocalm Everything spread out/breathable Other
Tactile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light touch Deep pressure touch Soft touch Stretching fabric Soft textures Soft fabrics Soft surfaces Soft or slick or smooth Other 	People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of people Only a few people A small group of people Alone People you don't know Other

Creating a Sensory Safety Plan

Step Four: Plan For When Things Go Wrong!

Step Two: Identifying Your Sensory Triggers

Exploring Sensory Accommodations and Supports

Tactile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft and plush textures (e.g., blankets, blankets) Sensory balls or fidget toys with different textures Textured surfaces or paper (e.g., heavy paper or textured paper) Weighted blankets or sensory vests Weighted blankets or sensory vests Weighted blankets or sensory vests Weighted blankets or sensory vests Other 	Small <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Other
--	--

What Is a Sensory Safety Plan?

Cultivating A Sensory Lens

What is a Sensory Lens?

Creating a sensory safety plan starts with crafting what I refer to as a "sensory lens."

Having a sensory lens means seeing and understanding the world through the filter of your sensory experiences. It brings awareness to how your senses shape your moment-to-moment experience.

Cultivating A Sensory Lens

A sensory journal is helpful in the initial process as you begin tracking your daily experiences to better understand your preferences, triggers and day-to-day experiences.

Keep a Sensory Journal

Create a sensory journal to document your observations and reflections on your sensory experiences. Take note of specific triggers, preferences, and reactions to different sensory inputs. This will help you identify patterns and better understand how your senses influence your daily life.

Examples of sensory preferences can include:

Lighting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural lighting Dim lighting Warm lighting Artificial light Colorful lights (LED) Moderate lighting Yellow (has been lighting) White (has been lighting) Other 	Visual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visually serene or organized Neurocalm colors Neurocalm patterns Patterns or bright decor Dark colors Neurocalm Everything spread out/breathable Other 	Small <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Other
Temperature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm Cool Hot Cold Other 	Tactile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light touch Deep pressure touch Soft touch Stretching fabric Soft textures Soft fabrics Soft surfaces Soft or slick or smooth Other 	Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoors Outdoors Other
Custatory (oral) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	Sound <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of people Only a few people A small group of people Alone People you don't know Other
Clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	Proprietation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	Movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast Slow Other

Exploring Your Sensory Likes

Now that you have completed the sensory preference checklist, it can be helpful to complete your responses in one place for a clearer visualization. By writing them out here you can easily refer to and review your identified sensory preferences.

Lighting	Visual
Tactile	People
Auditory	Custatory

Examples of sensory triggers can include:

Lighting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural lighting Dim lighting Warm lighting Artificial light Colorful lights (LED) Moderate lighting Yellow (has been lighting) White (has been lighting) Other 	Visual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visually serene or organized Neurocalm colors Neurocalm patterns Patterns or bright decor Dark colors Neurocalm Everything spread out/breathable Other 	Small <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Other
Temperature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm Cool Hot Cold Other 	Tactile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light touch Deep pressure touch Soft touch Stretching fabric Soft textures Soft fabrics Soft surfaces Soft or slick or smooth Other 	Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoors Outdoors Other
Custatory (oral) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	Sound <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of people Only a few people A small group of people Alone People you don't know Other
Clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	Movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast Slow Other 	

Examples of sensory soothers can include:

Lighting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural lighting Dim lighting Warm lighting Artificial light Colorful lights (LED) Moderate lighting Yellow (has been lighting) White (has been lighting) Other 	Visual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visually serene or organized Neurocalm colors Neurocalm patterns Patterns or bright decor Dark colors Neurocalm Everything spread out/breathable Other 	Small <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Small objects or items Other
Temperature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm Cool Hot Cold Other 	Tactile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light touch Deep pressure touch Soft touch Stretching fabric Soft textures Soft fabrics Soft surfaces Soft or slick or smooth Other 	Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoors Outdoors Other
Custatory (oral) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	Sound <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of people Only a few people A small group of people Alone People you don't know Other
Clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft Crunchy Chewy Other 	Movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast Slow Other 	

Building a Sensory Safety Plan

To begin crafting your own sensory safety plan, the first step is to take time to deeply understand your personal sensory profile, including your Sensory Likes, Triggers, and Soothers.

Sensory Likes **Sensory Triggers** **Sensory Soothers**

While this may sound overly simplistic, many neurodivergent people find themselves disconnected from their bodies or struggling with body awareness to the extent that they are unaware of their sensory preferences. Additionally, if you have navigated life by masking your neurodivergent traits, you may have never deeply considered your true sensory preferences and needs because you've been too busy repressing them!

If you find yourself in this situation, it's even more crucial to identify and explore your sensory preferences. Taking time to cultivate this self-awareness forms the solid foundation for building an effective sensory safety plan.

Building Your Sensory Kit

Here are some examples of what you might include in your kit:

- Taste
 - Corn or mint
 - Crunchy or chewy snacks
 - Sweeties
 - Hotspices
- Small
 - Essential oils
 - Scented fabrics
 - Aromatics sachets
 - Essential oils
 - Scented fabrics
 - Aromatics sachets

Need more ideas? Refer back to the list of Sensory Soothers you identified as helpful in step three.

Building Your Sensory Kit

Step Two: Identify Your Sensory Preferences

Next, you'll gather things that help to soothe you and will fit in your container. Consider the five primary senses, and for each sense—sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell—think about what sensory input helps you feel calm and grounded.

Thankfully, you've already done this step! Go back and review your sensory preferences and identify specific forms of sensory input that you find soothing.

Creating a Sensory Safety Plan

Step One: Identifying Your Sensory Preferences

Exploring Your Sensory Likes

CLOTHING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compression clothing (tight) Loose-fitting clothing Custom fabric Knitwear Seamless garments Compression garments Breathable materials Soft and gentle fabrics Knitwear and knitted fabric Medium-weight fabrics Neurocalm Sensory Strip (organic cotton, muslin) Relaxation (downy top, vest, etc.) Weighted or pressure-based clothing Non-toxic/water-based dyes Neck tags Layering options for temperature regulation Other resistant or hypoallergenic materials Other 	MOVEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circle walking or jumping Swinging or being in motion Stretching or bouncing Swimming Swimming or floating Hand-flapping, finger tapping Head or shoulder shaking Weighted or deep pressure activities Proprioceptive activities (e.g., pushing against objects, sitting weights) Other
--	--