

# Making the most of her sensory preferences



## What are sensory preferences?

A “sensory preference” is when a child either dislikes or craves a specific sensation. This could be anything from sounds, smells, tastes, sights, textures, or movements. Some children might dislike the feeling of a scratchy tag in their clothing. Some children might constantly crave the feeling of bouncing on their trampoline. Other children might not be able to stand the taste of certain foods.

A strong sensory preference may seem like a challenge or a limitation, but it doesn’t need to be. When you recognize and work with your child’s sensory preferences, you can create situations that make it easier (and more fun!) for her to learn new things.

## Why are sensory preferences important for children with autism?

Sensory preferences are especially important for children with autism because they are often over- or under-sensitive to certain sensations. This makes it even more important for you to be aware of your child’s sensory needs so that you can help her to stay focused.

### Over-sensitive

If your child is **over-sensitive** to a certain sensation, just a small amount of it might be too much for her. Any amount of that sensation might make it hard for her to learn:

- If she is over-sensitive to certain sounds, she might cover her ears when she is in a noisy classroom
- If she is over-sensitive to taste, she might be a picky eater

### Under-sensitive

If your child is **under-sensitive** to certain sensations, it will take a lot of that sensation to satisfy her. If that sensation is missing, it might make it hard for her to learn:

- If she is under-sensitive to some sounds, she may turn the volume way up on the TV
- If she is under-sensitive to movement, she may want to constantly be on the move

Remember that your child might have a combination of over- and under-sensitivities, even within the same sense. For example, she may be over-sensitive to one sound but under-sensitive to another.

If your child has over- or under-sensitivities, she will need a bit of support from you to help her stay engaged. Knowing what your child’s sensory needs are will help you make small changes so learning is easier for her.

## How to make the most of your child's sensory needs

Once you understand your child's sensory preferences, you can use this information to think of ways to create a better learning environment for her.

### Over-sensitive

If your child is **over-sensitive** to certain sensations and tends to avoid them, try thinking of ways to reduce those sensations so that she can focus and learn:

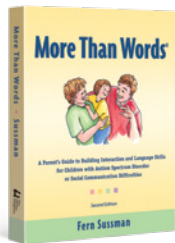
- If she's bothered by the sound of chair legs scraping against the floor in her classroom, you could place socks over the feet of the chairs to muffle the sound

### Under-sensitive

If your child is **under-sensitive** to sensations and seeks them out, you may have to find creative ways of fulfilling this craving so that she can focus and learn:

- If your child is under-sensitive to movement, she might become distracted during calm activities like story time. If so, it might help to introduce some movement into this activity to help her stay engaged.

By planning for your child's sensory needs, you can help her feel her best both emotionally and physically. This will help her feel happy, stay engaged and will create more opportunities for her to learn!



These ideas are from the Hanen More Than Words® guidebook for parents of children with autism or social communication difficulties. For a limited time, **save 20% on this resource with code AAM2019.**

Learn more at [www.hanen.org/MTWguidebook](http://www.hanen.org/MTWguidebook)

### About The Hanen Centre

The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit organization committed to promoting the best possible language, literacy and social skills in young children. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically. For more information, visit [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org).

