

Become a Sensory-Friendly Church

Welcoming People with Sensory Processing Issues

Awareness



- Sensory processing issues can affect 1 in 6 people
- Affects all ages
- Caused by many conditions & diagnoses
- Can be very stressful, uncomfortable, painful and overwhelming
- People may not be able to attend church or participate without modifications and/or sensory tools

Where to Start

- **FREE** video training to learn what to look for and how to help:



[OvercomerMinistries.com/sfc](https://www.OvercomerMinistries.com/sfc)

- Consider each of the senses
- Provide sensory tools
- Evaluate each area of the church & all events
- Make modifications to the church environment

Become a Sensory-Friendly Church



Over-Responsive

Too much sensory input:
avoider, hypersensitive, overload,
overwhelmed, meltdown, shutdown

- Use: natural & warm light
dimmer switches
lamps
- Avoid: fluorescent light
strobe lights
flickering light
visual clutter
- Helpful: hats
hoodie
sunglasses
- Minimize: decorations
floor designs
wall posters
bright colors
- Keep a clean & organized
environment
- May look away from the
speaker when listening

Under-Responsive

Need sensory input:
seeker, delayed or dulled responses,
oblivious, underwhelmed, tuned out

- Use: focused light
spot light
laser pointer
pulpit light
stage light
highlighted text
- Use novelty to increase
focus, such as changing
fonts, colors, or locations
of signs & text
- Movement can be used
as a visual cue, such as
a demonstration
- Dim congregational
lighting and use
stage lighting to
direct visual
attention



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Sound



Over-Responsive

Too much sensory input:
avoider, hypersensitive, overload,
overwhelmed, meltdown, shutdown

- Loud & unexpected sound can be painful
- Noise can cause a neurological stress response and prevent people from attending
- Keep volume consistent or warn of loud noises
- Provide noise reducing headphones in all sizes
- Provide a Calm Room & good acoustics
- Create a Quiet Section away from windows, doors, and air vents
- May make noise or listen to personal music to mask other noise

Under-Responsive

Need sensory input:
seeker, delayed or dulled responses,
oblivious, underwhelmed, tuned out

- Auditory information & cues are easily missed
- Directed sound may help focus attention, such as sitting near the speaker or pulpit
- Reinforce verbal or auditory information with other senses, such as written directions or diagrams
- Provide auditory cues to focus attention, like saying their name
- May make their own noise or use personal music to fill need for auditory input



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Touch

Over-Responsive

Too much sensory input:
avoider, hypersensitive, overload,
overwhelmed, meltdown, shutdown

- Light touch can be aversive or painful
- Provide:
 - separate entrance
 - predictable routine
 - non-touch greetings
 - uncrowded transitions
 - spacious seating
 - lap blankets
- Welcome casual clothes
- Food textures may be aversive, such as communion wafers
- Provide as much control as possible for baptism
- Allow people to opt out of lines & greeting times

Under-Responsive

Need sensory input:
seeker, delayed or dulled responses,
oblivious, underwhelmed, tuned out

- Tactile cues may be missed, such as being unaware of dirty hands
- Provide:
 - variety of textured fidgets
 - tactile learning experiences
- May seek touch:
 - high-fives
 - handshakes
 - hugs
- Tactile experiences may be calming, such as a sensory bin
- May be less aware of temperature
- Can enjoy messy activities



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Body Awareness



Over-Responsive

Too much sensory input:
avoider, hypersensitive, overload,
overwhelmed, meltdown, shutdown

- Exaggerated sense of own body movements, which can cause fear & anxiety
- May prefer to sit still and not participate, use small movements, or move stiffly
- Provide: weighted items
heavy pressure
squeeze fidgets
- May have difficulty with smooth coordinated movements, such as passing the offering or communion plate

FREE
Video Training



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Under-Responsive

Need sensory input:
seeker, delayed or dulled responses,
oblivious, underwhelmed, tuned out

- Lacks input for good body awareness and to judge force or pressure needed
- Needs movement & heavy pressure to be grounded
- Provide: weighted items
squeeze fidgets
resistance/pressure
alternative seating
wobble seats
kick bands
- Accidentally squeezes hard during hugs/handshakes & may break pencils or toys
- May have difficulty passing the offering or communion plate

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Movement



Over-Responsive

Too much sensory input:
avoider, hypersensitive, overload,
overwhelmed, meltdown, shutdown

- Exaggerated sense of movement can cause fear, anxiety, and nausea
- May avoid or fear:
risers
stairs
curbs
stages
playgrounds
- Prone to motion sickness
- Provide: weighted items
ramps
- Can have a neurological stress response or have gravitational insecurity with movement, if balance is challenged, or if their feet leave the ground

Under-Responsive

Need sensory input:
seeker, delayed or dulled responses,
oblivious, underwhelmed, tuned out

- Lacks movement cues, so may crave movement or be unaware of movement
- Provide regular breaks to move in church, such as:
pass the offering plate
hand out Bibles
pass papers
run errands
- May lack balance
- Weighted items can be calming
- Provide alternative seating:
office chair
wobble seat
kick bands
rocking chair
glider

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Over-Responsive

Too much sensory input:
avoider, hypersensitive, overload,
overwhelmed, meltdown, shutdown

- Smells can be aversive and cause nausea, illness & a neurological stress response
- Provide:
good ventilation
Fragrance Free space
Fragrance Free service
- Avoid:
perfumes & fragrances
chemical cleaners
kitchen or food odors
bathroom odors
- May avoid places/odors:
meals/restaurant/potluck
locker rooms
people's homes
camp/youth rooms

Under-Responsive

Need sensory input:
seeker, delayed or dulled responses,
oblivious, underwhelmed, tuned out

- Olfactory cues may be missed, such as being unaware of hazardous smells or seeking out smells inappropriately
- Allow personal scented items, such as scented lip balm to smell, a scented fidget, or a handkerchief scented with essential oil
- Scents may be calming to a person seeking olfactory input

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Over-Responsive

Too much sensory input:
avoider, hypersensitive, overload,
overwhelmed, meltdown, shutdown

- Flavors are exaggerated and may be aversive, cause nausea & illness
- May need alternative communion choices, such as diluted juice or wine
- Unfamiliar foods, such as potluck meals and restaurants can cause anxiety or a neurological stress response
- May prefer bland food, bring their own food, or turn down meal invites

FREE
Video Training



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Under-Responsive

Need sensory input:
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oblivious, underwhelmed, tuned out

- Flavors may be muted or dulled and may crave sensory input for the mouth, such as chewing
- Can crave strong flavors and be calmed by them, such as cinnamon, sour, spicy, and strong mint
- May blurt out, excessively talk, or chew on nonfood items like pencils or clothing. Provide safe alternatives, such as:
 - gum
 - chewy foods
 - strong flavors
 - coffee stir stick
 - chewable fidget