

Supporting Children with ADHD and Sensory Processing Differences

A guide for parents and caregivers

Children with ADHD often experience sensory input differently *and* have challenges with attention, impulse control, and regulation. These systems interact, which means their support needs look different from children with sensory differences alone.

How These Profiles Differ

Children with sensory processing differences may struggle with certain sensations, but their responses are often predictable. When ADHD is also present, sensory experiences can feel more intense, inconsistent, or harder to manage because the attention system is working differently.

What You Might Notice

- Sensory overload that looks like impulsivity, hyperactivity, or “not listening”
 - Difficulty filtering background noise
 - Missing internal cues like hunger or bathroom needs
 - Fast escalation because early signs of overwhelm are missed
 - Big movement, crashing, or sensory seeking tied to attention and regulation
 - Hard transitions even when sensory needs are met
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Why Support Looks Different

Children with ADHD + sensory differences often need:

- More co-regulation (a calm adult helping their body settle)
- Predictable routines and visual supports
- Help noticing early signs of overwhelm
- Movement-based regulation built into the day
- Environmental adjustments to reduce sensory load
- Step-by-step transitions with countdowns
- Strength-based engagement to support participation

Children with sensory differences alone may rely more on:

- Identifying triggers

- Using sensory tools independently
 - Avoiding or adapting specific sensations
 - Predictable responses to sensory input
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Ways to Support at Home

- Create calm, predictable routines with visual supports
 - Offer sensory breaks: movement, deep pressure, quiet corners
 - Use sensory-friendly tools (headphones, fidgets, soft clothing)
 - Support co-regulation with a slow voice and grounding activities
 - Reduce sensory load by dimming lights, lowering noise, and simplifying clutter
 - Provide choices to support autonomy
 - Gently name sensations and validate the experience
 - Build transition rituals (countdowns, previews, first-then supports)
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The Heart of It

Supporting ADHD + sensory differences means helping your child understand their body, feel safe in their environment, and build the regulation skills they will grow into over time.

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