

How to Create a Sensory-Friendly Classroom for Autistic Students:

Autistic individuals often process sensory stimuli differently than non-autistic peers. These real and valid differences can make classrooms difficult for Autistic students. The noise, lighting, smells, and commotion in a room can make the space uncomfortable or even painful for them. These autistic students may experience high anxiety, which interferes with learning. Students may be unable to pay attention as they try to cope. Sensory-friendly classrooms may make it easier for Autistic students to engage and learn.

 **Some Autistic people are hyper-sensitive (over-responsive) to their environment and may avoid sensory input when overwhelmed. They ‘feel’ the sensory input more intensely than others.**

 **Other Autistic people are hypo-sensitive (under-responsive) to their environment and crave sensory input. They experience less sensory input than others so they may seek it out.**

The same autistic person can be both over- and under-responsive at different times. Most students will spend the majority of their school day being one or the other.

Under-responsive



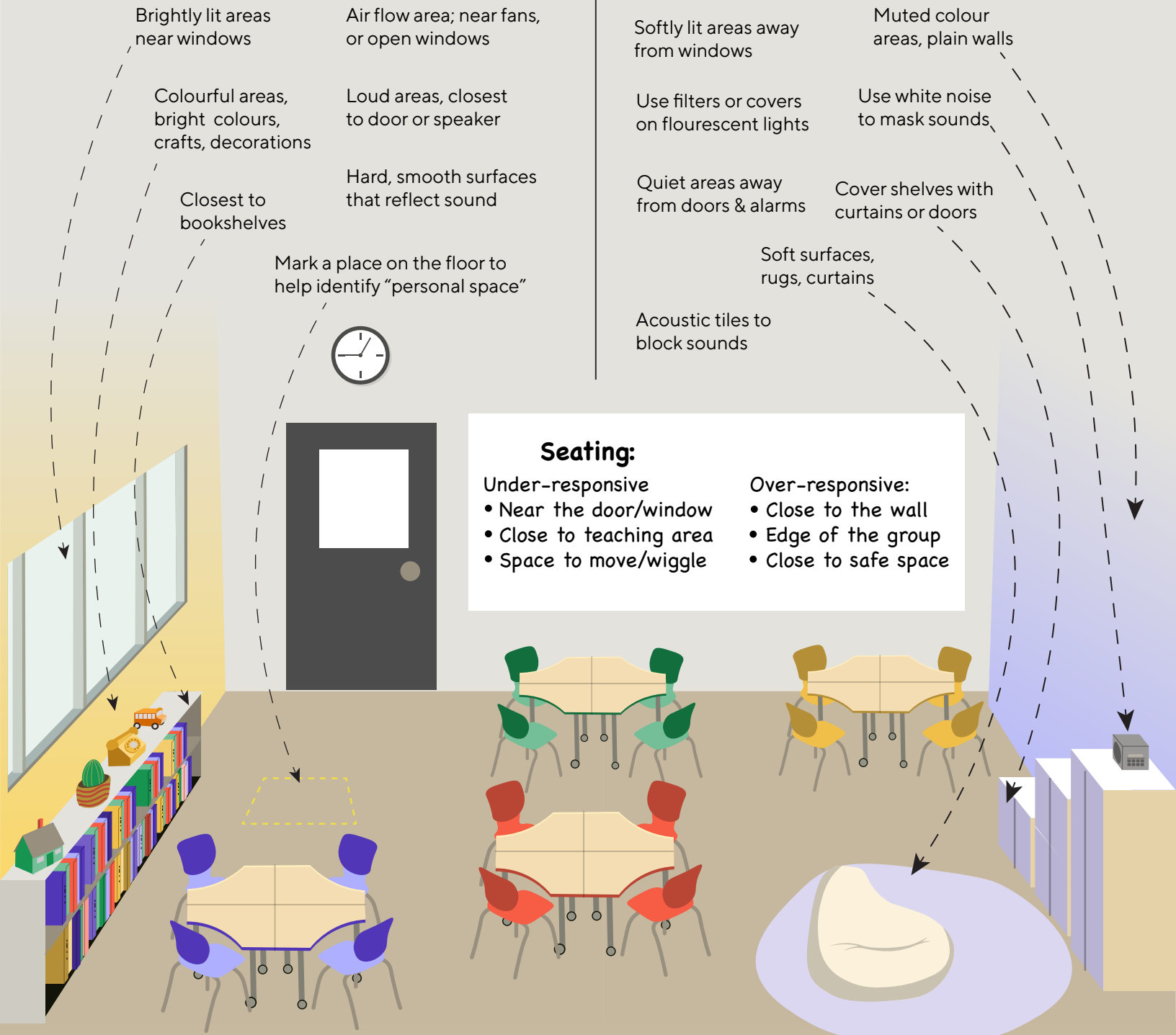
- Makes noise a lot, taps pen or drums
- Eats many types of food, chews on objects
- Invades the personal space of others
- Makes banging noises and hums
- Likes to sniff objects and people
- Forgets to eat and drink
- Climbs, jumps, and runs at inappropriate times

Over-responsive



- Enjoys quiet activities
- Will only eat soft, bland foods
- Dislikes being touched by others
- Covers ears and cries around loud noises
- Gags when near strong scents
- Constantly wants to snack or drink water
- Likes to hide away in small spaces

Create Zones to Respond to Different Needs



Possible Support Tools for Common Sensory Behaviours

- Making noise or humming → Calm loop, earbuds, or headphones
- Banging or tapping pens or other objects → Soft pad to tap that mutes sound. If tapping is to cover other sounds, try headphones
- Chewing on hair, clothing or pens → Water bottle with a pop-up straw, chewing gum, ‘Chewelry’
- Rocking on chair, or balancing on chair leg → Wobble stool, resistance band, fidget toys or disc cushions

Additional Things to Consider:

-  **Seating:** Consider the natural volume and temperament of students that will be close by. Try to prioritize friendships that keep students motivated to attend and participate.
-  **Speaking to the student about behaviour:** Always try to speak to the student in private. Autistic children often feel embarrassed if they are called out in front of peers.
-  **Take a collaborative approach:** work with the student to discover why they are engaging in the behaviour, and what tools or accommodations may be useful.

Additional Resources:



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