



Tip Sheet



Supporting Sensory Differences in the Workplace

People experience sensory input in different ways, and what feels comfortable or supportive for one person may be distracting or overwhelming for another. A person-centred approach recognises these individual preferences and involves working collaboratively with employees to create environments they can thrive in.

The following strategies outline workplace adjustments that can be explored with employees to ensure accommodations align with strengths, preferences and needs.

Work environment adjustments:

These adjustments focus on adapting the physical environment to reduce unnecessary sensory load and promote comfort.

- **Quiet or low distraction spaces:** Provide access to quieter rooms with reduced noise or visual clutter to support focus, regulation and recovery.
- **Noise management options:** Tools such as noise cancelling headphones or earplugs can help manage auditory input. Clearly defined spaces with consistent sound environments add predictability and reduce stress.
- **Lighting adjustments:** Offer softer desk lamps, dimmable lighting or glare reduction options to minimise visual strain.
- **Predictable and organised workspaces:** Consistent layouts and reduced clutter can improve comfort and focus.
- **Temperature comfort:** Allow flexibility in heating, cooling or airflow to accommodate different sensory preferences and needs.
- **Workstation location:** Where possible, provide options to avoid high traffic areas and position away from printers/ kitchens.

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Flexible work approaches:

These strategies provide flexibility to help employees manage sensory experiences throughout the day.

- **Work from home options:** A controlled environment can reduce sensory overwhelm.
- **Flexible breaks:** Regular sensory or movement breaks can prevent overload and support wellbeing.
- **Task chunking:** Breaking down tasks into smaller, manageable steps can reduce cognitive load, support organisation and help prevent overwhelm, which may in turn improve a person's capacity to manage sensory input.

Building inclusive practices:

Creating predictable, respectful and inclusive environments supports all employees and reduces unnecessary sensory stressors.

- **General awareness education:** Teamwide learning increases understanding of sensory differences and fosters inclusive culture.
- **Flexible meeting structures:** Shorter meetings, written contributions and advance agendas reduce sensory and cognitive load.
- **Reducing unnecessary sensory input:** Be mindful of scents, lighting changes, loud equipment and unpredictable noise.

Supporting self-regulation:

Supporting self-regulation helps employees manage transitions and maintain comfort throughout the workday.

- **Encourage self-awareness and communication:** Provide opportunities and support employees to express when they need adjustments or different options.
- **Provide transition time:** Advance notice before task changes reduces uncertainty and helps employees prepare for changes in the sensory environment.
- **Provide opportunities:** For staff to have access to strategies such as quiet spaces, movement breaks or calming tools, movement tools, tactile items or fidgets where appropriate.

When employers and employees work together to understand sensory needs and preferences, they can create workplaces where everyone can participate comfortably and confidently.

Key takeaways

- ▶ Work collaboratively with employees to understand their individual sensory preferences, challenges and strengths, rather than assuming what supports may be helpful.
- ▶ Consider practical adjustments to the physical environment, work practices and approaches to reduce unnecessary sensory stimuli and support comfort, focus and participation.
- ▶ Review accommodations regularly and remain flexible, recognising that sensory needs and effective supports may change over time.



Scan QR code for more resources from the Neurodiversity Works toolkit, designed to create inclusive workplaces.

**Autism Queensland is here to help—
get in touch to learn more:**



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