

Accessing the Community

Accessing the community for children with sensory processing difficulties can be challenging.

The world is full of sensory information and environments can often be unpredictable which can cause children to become overwhelmed and unable to regulate. Having some strategies available to you, based on your child's individual needs, can help you and your child explore and access your community.

Supermarket/ Shopping Centre –

- Noise - Can you try ear defenders or noise cancelling headphones? Can you build up your child's experience of the supermarket by going in at a quiet time
- Movement – Can you try some calm and alert activities prior to going into the supermarket? Can you break up walking around by doing some jumping on the spot, star jumps etc. before carrying in. Can you give them a big hug to help calm them
- Light – If the fluorescent lights are too bright – trying wearing a cap and/or sunglasses
- Can you encourage your child to have a list and to follow it through – if they like rules and routine it will be important not to deviate from the list as this may distress them
- Can you go at a less busy time and buy 1 item, if they manage this 2 items etc. to build up the experience for them. You can do this at a different time to when you need to do shopping and don't need to rush
- Some supermarkets and shopping centres have quiet hours that are less busy, less noisy and less bright – maybe check out your local shops to see if this is something they can offer

Soft Play/ Trampoline Park/ Playground etc. –

- Noise - Can you try ear defenders or noise cancelling headphones? Can you get there early so noise builds around them – sometimes children tolerate this better
- Light – If the fluorescent lights are too bright – trying wearing a cap and/or sunglasses
- Movement – If your child is under responsive to proprioception, then it is likely that they will want to climb, jump, run etc. and parks/ soft play can be a great time to enable them to have some free play on their terms. You can play with them by copying what they are doing and do the activities with them, letting them lead. You may need to support with some calming activities when it is time to leave the play area.
- Often indoor soft play areas will have SEN sessions for children with additional needs – these are often quieter, less bright and less busy. You can enquire at your local soft play areas for this information.

Café/ restaurants

- Noise - Can you try ear defenders or noise cancelling headphones? Can you build up your child's experience of the supermarket by going in at a quiet time
- Movement – Can you try some calm and alert activities prior to going into the cafe? Can you break up the amount of time spent sitting by doing some jumping on the spot, star jumps etc. before carrying in. Can you give them a big hug to help calm them
- Can you take a 'wobble' cushion with you for them sit on to give feedback as they are sat there. Is there a way of supporting their feet so that they feel grounded?
- Light – If the fluorescent lights are too bright – trying wearing a cap and/or sunglasses
- Ensure there is something available that your child will eat. Don't add any pressure to try new things – they will already be working really hard to regulate themselves in a new environment.
- You could try eating 'family style' by ordering for the table and everyone helps themselves, including your child. Again, make sure there is something that they will definitely eat and if this is the only thing they choose to eat – this is fine! You have given them the opportunity – just remember not to pressure them into trying something new.

Public Transport

- Noise - Can you try ear defenders or noise cancelling headphones? Can you build up your child's experience of the supermarket by going in at a quiet time
- Light – If the fluorescent lights are too bright – trying wearing a cap and/or sunglasses
- Movement – Can you try some calm and alert activities prior to going on public transport? Can you give them a big hug to help calm them, or encourage them to press the palms of their hands firmly together, or sit on their hands to give proprioceptive feedback which can be calming
- Can you discuss the journey with them first? Can you show them the route on a map? Are they able to be involved in planning the journey so that you can point out the stops, landmarks, stations etc. as you pass them
- Can you take fidget toys or toys/ games of interest that will keep their attention and enable them to regulate by engaging in something familiar
- Can you use social stories to inform them of what is going to happen on your journey and when you get to your destination?