

# Sensory Difficulties in the School Environment

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Hedda Gjesti Tjäder

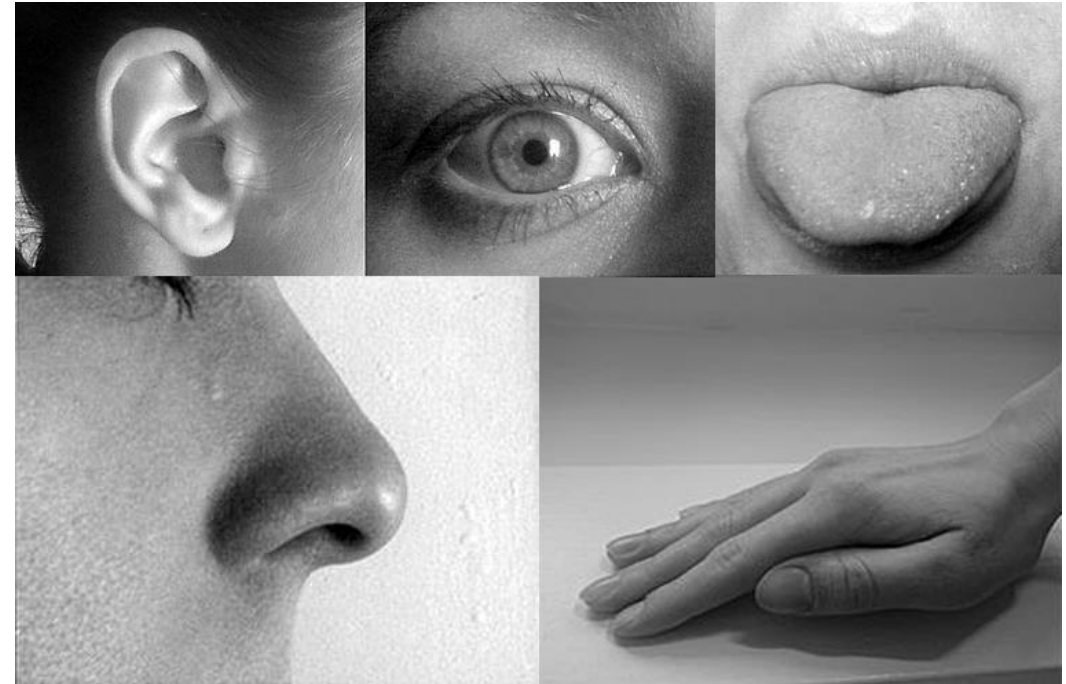


# Background

- ▶ Many students are referred to Statped with school non-attendance and neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs)
  - ▶ Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
  - ▶ ADHD
  - ▶ Tourette Syndrome (TS)
- ▶ Non-attendance includes more than physical non-presence
  - ▶ At home
  - ▶ Segregated from classroom activities
  - ▶ Group room
  - ▶ Hallway
  - ▶ Library
  - ▶ Back of the classroom – headphones on, hood down, phone up.
- ▶ Project in Statped: School non-attendance amongst students with neurodevelopmental disorders.
  - ▶ VR-movie

# Sensory difficulties

- ▶ Many with NDDs have different sensory experiences
- ▶ (Dawson & Watling, 2000, Howe and Stagg, 2016, Fernández-Andrés et al., 2015)
- ▶ There can be different reasons for this
  - ▶ Difficult to sort through input
  - ▶ Focus on details
  - ▶ Can not pick out the “important” information
- ▶ Easily distracted, uncomfortable, painful
- ▶ Senses:
  - ▶ Auditory
  - ▶ Visual
  - ▶ Somatosensory (touch)
  - ▶ Smell
  - ▶ Taste
  - ▶ (Proprioception (body position))
  - ▶ (Vestibular (movement))



# Conversations

## Spørsmål om sensoriske opplevelser på skolen

Disse spørsmålene handler om hvordan det er å komme inn i en skolebygning eller et klasserom når man har autisme eller Asperger syndrom. Mange med autisme eller Asperger syndrom har andre sensoriske opplevelser enn de nevrotypiske. Dette kan gjøre det ubehagelig, stressende eller noen ganger vondt å komme inn i rom, eller andre steder som ikke er tilpasset. Sensoriske opplevelser er det man kjenner gjennom sansene: syn, hørsel, lukt, berøring, smak.

Hvis du har hatt noen sånne opplevelser ønsker jeg å få vite om dem. Det er for at jeg skal kunne hjelpe lærere og andre som jobber med mennesker med autisme og Asperger syndrom, til å tilpasse sine skoler og klasserom.

Sanseinntrykk	Opplevelser
Syn (lys, mønster, refleksjon, farger, kontraster, eller noe annet)	
Hørsel (knitring, susing, spraking, forstyrrende lyder, eller noe annet)	
Lukt (mat, drikke, andre mennesker, eller noe annet)	
Berøring (rår stol, noen som kommer borti, trengsel, eller noe annet)	
Smak (at maten smaker annerledes, vannet på skolen smaker vondt, eller noe annet)	
Mange inntrykk på en gang (mange lyder, mange synsinntrykk, kombinasjon av sanseinntrykk)	
Annet (sult, smerte, temperatur eller noe annet)	

# Sound

## ► What did the students find challenging?

- *“Fans and people”*
- *“Vexing when people talk about uninteresting things, and I can’t go somewhere else”*
- *“The more sound the harder it is to concentrate, especially other people”*
- *“It can’t be completely quiet either. The quiet is so loud. I have to listen to music on my headset”*
- *“The worst is when the class is being “quiet”.*



- Distracting, uncomfortable, painful
- Difficult to extract «important» information
- Hear all sounds equally loud

*“In the classroom it feels like thousands of people are talking at the same time – it’s impossible to hear what anyone are saying. Those who don’t have autism can hear two people talking at the same time and kinda choose who they want to listen to. I don’t have a choice but hear both voices equally loud and that makes it sound like they are talking in a different language.”*

*“Sounds are more distracting than visual input. The sound of writing or drawing can be loud and bothersome. Even when others whisper it can sound like loud wheezing.”*

# Visual

## ► What did the students find challenging?

- *"Bright lights from the outside and flickering lights in the classroom"*
- *"When I'm annoyed I need to close my eyes"*
- *"The lighting in the classroom is especially uncomfortable when I'm stressed"*
- *"Because of the autism I have very good vision. I probably see better than others, but this is tiresome because the light gets lighter and the dark gets darker. All colours are a bit clearer but black and white are especially intense. When I'm in an ordinary classroom it is often too bright and the light is very white – I can still see everything, but it's like it's surrounded by light."*



- Bright lights and reflections
- Contrasts
- Patterns
- Mess
- Many impressions

# Smell

## ► What did the students find challenging?

- *“Food that I don’t like smells disgusting “*
- *“People with bad hygiene smells disgusting”*
- *“All scents get mixed. When people gets out their lunch-packs it’s like someone has put all the food in to a blender and made a smoothie out of it. It’s an insanely strong scent. A sickening and deadly scent. It makes me want to run off.”*



- Overwhelming smells
- Stronger sense of smell than others
- Ordinary things smells bad



# Oral/taste

## ► What did the students find challenging?

- *“The school water tastes like horse poo mixed with boiling water. (....) We should have water dispensers with cold, fresh water. I would also like to contribute in deciding what we are making in cooking classes. We often have to make horrible food. It’s annoying when I don’t get to cook in my own way.”*



- Many have particular preferences when it comes to food
- Things might taste different
- Texture and how it “fits”

# Touch

## ► What did the students find challenging?

- *“Throngs of people are often uncomfortable – people and furniture. It feels like they are growing bigger and closer together, even if they are completely stationary. It’s a bigger risk that someone will bump in to me”*
- *«I don’t like people touching me. It’s especially uncomfortable when it comes as a surprise. It’s horrible to stand in line, or when there is a throng to get in to the classroom. I get a really annoying feeling by being so close to others. Even if they don’t really touch me, it feels like it»*



- Sensitivity
- Responses
- Unpredictability
- Clothes
- Hygiene



# Many impressions at once

- ▶ It is often difficult to extract important information when there is a lot going on.
- ▶ Stress makes it harder to ignore sensory input



## ► What did the students find challenging?

- “Sounds don’t really bother me, but when there is too much of the other stuff sounds get really uncomfortable”
- “Lots of people in the same place makes a lot of noise and it’s distracting”
- “Many impressions at the same time can be annoying but I can handle it”
- “Other people are a constant distraction. Even if they’re sitting down and being quiet. A couple of people are alright, but large groups are difficult. Classes with 30+ people in it is extremely uncomfortable over time.”
- “To be in a mainstream school feels like being in a huge factory with lots of noise all the time. Or a football stadium where everyone are cheering. Or a large pop concert where all the girls are screaming so loudly that you can’t even hear the music you came for.”

# Summary

- ▶ Sensory difficulties differs from person to person.
  - ▶ Distracting, uncomfortable, painful
  - ▶ Stressful and exhausting
  - ▶ Many inputs at once
  - ▶ School environments are seldom adapted
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- ▶ Sensory difficulties are not in itself an ultimate factor of school non-attendance



# Sources

- ▶ Dawson, G and Watling, R (2000) Interventions to facilitate Auditory, Visual and Motor Integration in Autism: A Review of the Evidence. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorder, Volume 30., No5, 2000, p. 415-421
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- ▶ Howe, F. E. J., Stagg, S. D. (2016) How Sensory Experiences Affect Adolescents with an Autistic Spectrum Condition within the Classroom. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 2016 Volume 46 p. 1656–1668

# Contact info

- ▶ [hedda.tjader@statped.no](mailto:hedda.tjader@statped.no)
- ▶ [www.statped.no](http://www.statped.no)



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