

Sensory-Friendly Home Toolkit

For Neurodivergent Parents, Carers and Families

Your home should be a place where you can regulate, recharge, and exist comfortably in your own skin. As a neurodivergent parent, you likely have sensory needs that deserve just as much consideration as your children's and neurodivergent adults often have neurodivergent children, meaning multiple sets of sensory needs to navigate.

This toolkit helps you design spaces that support everyone's sensory requirements, including practical strategies for when needs conflict. For example, you might need silence to concentrate while your child needs music to focus, or you might find bright lights overwhelming while your partner needs them to feel alert.

1. Design Your Sensory Retreat Zones

Create at least two quiet spaces where family members can retreat when overwhelmed. These don't need to be entire rooms, a corner with cushions, a reading nook, or even a designated chair works.

For you: Set up a space with items that help you regulate: weighted blanket, fidget tools, noise-cancelling headphones, or whatever soothes your nervous system. Keep a water bottle and snacks nearby.

For children: Include sensory tools they gravitate toward: soft textures, dim lighting, favourite comfort items. Make it clear this space is always available, no questions asked.

Scripts for family: "I need to use my calm space for a bit" or "Would you like to go to your cosy corner?"

2. Manage Household Lighting

Harsh lighting can be overwhelming for many neurodivergent people. Small changes make significant differences to daily comfort levels.

Replace bright overhead bulbs with warmer, dimmer alternatives. Use table lamps, fairy lights, or salt lamps to create gentler ambient lighting. Install dimmer switches where possible, or use plug-in dimmers for lamps.

Consider coloured bulbs for evening routines, red or amber light can be less stimulating before bedtime than white light.

Energy-saving shortcut: Start with one room where you spend the most time, then gradually update others as bulbs need replacing.

3. Create Sound Management Systems

Noise can quickly escalate overwhelm for both parents and children. Building in sound control helps everyone feel more settled.

Identify your family's noise triggers and create solutions: soft furnishings to absorb echo, white noise machines to mask sudden sounds, or designated "quiet hours" when everyone uses headphones.

Keep noise-cancelling headphones accessible in main living areas. Make it family policy that anyone can wear headphones without explanation needed.

Stim-friendly alternative: Some people find certain background sounds (rain, brown noise, instrumental music) actually help them focus and regulate.

4. Organise for Sensory Success

Clutter and chaos can be sensory overload, but rigid organisation systems often don't work for neurodivergent families. Find your middle ground.

Use clear storage containers so you can see contents without opening everything. Label with both words and pictures where helpful. Create designated homes for frequently-used sensory tools.

Keep surfaces mostly clear in main areas, but don't aim for perfection. "Good enough" organisation that you can maintain is better than perfect systems that collapse.

Visual support: Colour-code storage by person or room type to reduce decision-making fatigue.

5. Design Flexible Activity Spaces

Your living spaces should accommodate different sensory needs happening simultaneously, one child may need movement while another needs stillness.

Create zones within rooms: a movement area with space for spinning or bouncing, a quiet corner for reading or detailed tasks, and flexible middle ground for general activities.

Use furniture that serves multiple sensory functions: ottomans that store fidgets, bean bags that provide deep pressure, or low tables that work for floor-sitting.

Sensory accommodation: Keep textured cushions, weighted lap pads, or fidget baskets in main living areas so sensory tools are always within reach.

6. Build Routine-Supporting Environments

Your physical space can reduce the executive function load of daily routines by making necessary items visible and accessible.

Set up stations for common activities: a launching pad near the door with bags, keys, and shoes; a bedtime basket with pyjamas and comfort items; a homework station with all needed supplies.

Use visual schedules or checklists displayed where routines happen. Make it easy to succeed by reducing barriers to daily tasks.

Good enough version: Focus on the routines that cause the most stress first. You don't need to optimise everything simultaneously.

7. Address Temperature and Air Quality

Many neurodivergent people are sensitive to temperature changes and air quality. Small adjustments can significantly impact daily comfort.

Ensure good ventilation and consider air purifiers if scents or dust are triggers. Keep layers of clothing accessible for temperature regulation, hoodies, blankets, or fans within easy reach.

Pay attention to seasonal changes and adjust accordingly. Some families need blackout curtains for better sleep, while others need maximum natural light for mood regulation.

Regulation check-in: Notice if irritability increases on stuffy or very hot/cold days, environmental factors might be contributing.

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Quick Implementation

Today: Identify one spot in your home where you can create a 5-minute retreat space. Gather three items that help you feel calm and place them there.

This week: Walk through your home and notice which sounds, lights, or textures feel jarring. Change one small thing; switch a bulb, move a noisy appliance, or add a soft throw.

When you have energy: Involve your children in designing their own sensory spaces. Ask what helps them feel calm and see what solutions you can create together.

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