



# Neurodivergence in pre-schoolers

Do you think your young child may be neurodivergent? Perhaps they are not meeting their developmental milestones, or there may be some sensory processing difficulties. Do you feel that you need support with what steps to take? It can feel daunting, but there is a lot of help out there to guide you through this process.

## I think my child is neurodivergent—what now?

It may be worth speaking to the SENCO or a staff member about your concerns and ask whether they are noticing similar behaviours. It may put your mind at ease to talk it through with them. It is worth asking them what strategies they can put in place to support your child.

If you would like to proceed in seeking a diagnosis, you could ask the pre-school or nursery if they would be willing to complete a referral.

### My child masks and doesn't show the same behaviours at pre-school or nursery - what should I do?



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Some neurodivergent children will **mask** at a different setting other than their safe space of home, and therefore will not display the same behaviours. **Masking** may include suppressing their stimming behaviours and feelings, and copying others' behaviours. This can be exhausting for a child, and you may find that they experience an overload of emotions when they get home. For more information on this, you can scan the QR code on the final page to access our "After School Overload" information sheet.

If your child does appear to be masking, it may be useful to keep a diary of their behaviours: when they occur, if something has triggered it. This could include making notes of their eating habits, sleeping habits and general mood. You can then take this to your GP and ask for a referral based upon your parental observations.

### My child or young person doesn't attend pre-school or nursery — so what do I do?

Is your child under any other healthcare professionals, such as a health visitor, a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist? It may be worth talking to them and asking if any of them would be willing to support a referral.

The contacts and links given via this SNAP information sheet have been shared as a starting point for your own research. We believe the information to be genuine and correct at the time of publishing, however no responsibility for loss occasioned by any person acting or refraining from acting as a result of the material contained herein can be accepted by SNAP.



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## Sensory

There are 5 basic senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, hearing. They help us to make sense of different stimuli. For neurodivergent children and young people, some sensory inputs can be too overwhelming.



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- Does your child put their hands over their ears when in a loud environment?
- Does your child not always respond to their name or questions, but will react to other forms of stimuli such as the television or music on the radio?
- Does your child have an aversion to particular tastes and textures?
- Does your child dislike the feel of certain objects or tags in their clothes?

There are strategies and tips that you can try to address these difficulties with your child, and these are on the final page of this information sheet.

There are also 3 other senses: vestibular, proprioception and interoception.

Our **vestibular** sense is responsible for controlling our muscles through balance and movement, and for most of our reflexes.



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Does your child like to spin, jump, hang upside down? They may be seeking **increased** vestibular activities that provide sensory feedback to help them feel grounded.

Does your child prefer to use a weighted blanket or cushion, listen to calm music, sit in a darkened, quiet room? They may need **reduced** vestibular activities that provide sensory feedback to help them feel comfortably grounded.



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Our **proprioceptive** sense helps us to coordinate our movements and know where our body is in space.



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Activities that can help with proprioception awareness include:

Crawling through a tunnel, rolling, jumping, pulling, pushing, ball rolling.

Our **interoceptive** sense helps us know what is going on inside our bodies, including feelings of hunger, thirst, anxiety or the need to use the toilet. Some children may miss these body signals and need support recognising them. There are resources and strategies to support your child with all of these senses on the final page of this information sheet.

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## Speech

Have you noticed that your child isn't starting to talk as you would expect?

Children develop at different rates and language development is no different. Some may have delayed speech, while others may be non-verbal. It can also be common for autistic children to communicate by **echolalia**, which is the repeating of phrases or sentences without fully understanding their meaning.

If you are concerned about your child's speech and language development, there are resources and strategies to support your child on the final page of this information sheet.



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Your child may benefit from seeing a speech and language therapist, which you can be referred to by your child's health visitor or another healthcare professional. Alternatively, if you wanted to seek an assessment privately, you can scan the QR code on the final page to access our "Independent Speech and Language Therapists" information sheet.

## Eating

Neurodivergent children may experience difficulties around eating, from sensitivities to smells, sights and sounds at mealtimes, to the need for a mealtime routine, including sitting in a certain place using particular cutlery/plates, to eating a limited diet. Some neurodivergent children will only eat "beige, safe foods" such as crisps, biscuits, toast or chicken nuggets. These are predictable as they always look and taste the same. This can extend to preferring particular food brands, and due to their high sensitivities, they may notice and refuse close alternatives. An example of an unpredictable food is a banana – they may be ripe, unripe, bruised, mushy – you may not get the same taste twice.



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There are resources and strategies to support your child with eating on the final page of this information sheet, and you can also scan the QR code to access our "Eating" information sheet.



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## Online support

SNAP is here to support you. We offer pre-school sessions on Mondays, Thursdays and alternate Fridays for children aged 0-5. No diagnosis or referral is needed to access our services.

We have a variety of information resources that have been gathered by our family support advisers that we can share with you, as well as other organisations who may be able to offer support.

### Sensory resources:

Essex County Council Special Educational Needs and Disabilities- Supporting sensory development in a child's early years [Supporting sensory development in a child's early years](#)

North East London NHS Foundation Trust - Understanding Sensory Processing - <https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/childrens-occupational-therapy-understanding-sensory-processing/>

Autism Central - Sensory Processing resources including a podcast on "Being a sensory supporter for your child" - <https://www.autismcentral.org.uk/guidance/sensory-differences>

Sensory Advice Pack - <https://www.bhamcommunity.nhs.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jjm4n670.pdf&ver=1016>

Sensory Strategies for Parents - <https://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/cyp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/08/Sensory-strategies-for-parents-.pdf>

Video Resources to support your neurodivergent child- <https://shortbreaks.essex.gov.uk/short-breaks-resources/>

Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service- [Early Years Sensory Processing - Essex Child and Family](#)

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## Eating resources:

Autism Central Eating page - <https://www.autismcentral.org.uk/guidance/eating>

SNAP information sheet - [Eating.pdf](#)

Autism Spectrum Disorders and Eating Difficulties - [https://policyonline.nhslothian.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ASD\\_and\\_Eating\\_Difficulties.pdf](https://policyonline.nhslothian.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ASD_and_Eating_Difficulties.pdf)

## Communication resources:

Communication for neurodivergent children and young people - <https://www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/neurodiversity-support/a-whole-person-approach/communication-for-neurodivergent-children-and-young-people/>

Speech and Language Link - <https://speechandlanguage.link/parent-portal/development/>

Language focused play - <https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/essex-salt-resources-language-focussed-play/>

Talk. Listen. Cuddle - <https://www.tlc-essex.info/>

Afasic - <https://www.afasic.org.uk/about-talking/>

Please scan QR code or click on the link to access this and our other information sheets

[Downloadable Survival Guides, Information and Resources from SNAP](#)

