



Sensory Reset Guide

How to reduce sensory overwhelm at home, work, or in public spaces.

By Neal Glendenning

Contact: info@theneuroinclusionproject.co.uk

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Important note

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

A calm orientation

This is not a resilience test.
It's not a "desensitisation" plan.
It's not about learning to tolerate more.

This guide exists to help you **reduce sensory load** when your nervous system is overloaded... and to do so **without self-blame, urgency, or force**.

You don't need to use every section.
You don't need to apply this in real time.
Noticing patterns *after* the fact still counts.

A sensory reset is about **restoring capacity**, not pushing through.

1. Sensory overwhelm is not sensitivity... it's load

Sensory overwhelm isn't about being "too sensitive."

It's about **how much input your nervous system is processing at once**, and whether it has enough capacity to integrate it.

Overwhelm is more likely when:

- multiple senses are stimulated simultaneously
- input is unpredictable or uncontrollable
- you're already emotionally or cognitively taxed
- there's pressure to stay engaged or perform

Your nervous system doesn't evaluate input morally.
It simply tracks **load versus capacity**.

When load exceeds capacity, it moves to protect you.

2. What sensory overwhelm actually feels like

Sensory overload doesn't always look dramatic.

It can show up as:

- irritability or sudden anger
- brain fog or confusion
- fatigue that arrives quickly
- urge to escape or withdraw
- emotional flooding

- dissociation or shutdown
- loss of speech or coordination

These are not “overreactions.”

They are **signals that the system needs less input... now.**

3. Why ND nervous systems overload faster

Many neurodivergent nervous systems:

- process sensory information in high detail
- struggle to filter background input
- rely on predictability for regulation
- are already managing cognitive or emotional load

So while others may unconsciously tune things out, ND systems often **keep processing everything.**

This isn't a flaw.

It's a different operating style... one that requires **environmental support.**

4. Early signals (often missed)

A sensory reset is most effective **before** overload peaks.

Early signs might include:

- tightening in jaw, shoulders, or chest
- increased startle response
- rising irritability
- difficulty concentrating
- urge to fidget or escape
- sounds or lights feeling “sharp”

These are not problems to override.

They are **requests for load reduction.**

5. The goal of a sensory reset

A reset is not about:

- becoming calm
- staying present at all costs
- tolerating discomfort

A reset *is* about:

- lowering input
- restoring boundaries
- helping your body feel safer
- preventing escalation or shutdown

Sometimes a reset only:

- stops things getting worse

That still counts.

6. Sensory resets by sense

(use what fits... ignore the rest)

Sound

Helpful when noise feels intrusive or overwhelming.

You might try:

- noise-cancelling or dampening headphones
- predictable background sound (brown or pink noise)
- familiar music on repeat
- moving to a quieter space
- covering ears briefly

Silence isn't always regulating.

Predictable sound often is.

Light & visual input

Helpful when visual clutter or brightness feels exhausting.

You might try:

- dimming lights
- closing one eye briefly
- reducing screen brightness

- narrowing visual focus to one object
- turning away from movement

Visual containment reduces processing demand.

Touch & pressure

Helpful when you feel porous, scattered, or unsafe.

You might try:

- weighted items
- firm self-hug
- compression clothing
- leaning into a wall or chair
- holding something solid

Pressure provides **clear physical boundaries**.

Movement & body position

Helpful when activation is high or energy feels stuck.

You might try:

- slow pacing
- rocking or swaying
- stretching one limb
- sitting or lying on the floor
- changing posture

Movement doesn't need a goal.
It just needs permission.

Temperature

Helpful when sensations feel sharp or overwhelming.

You might try:

- wrapping in warmth
- holding a warm drink
- splashing cool water on wrists

- stepping outside briefly

Small temperature shifts can reset attention.

7. Reducing sensory load in different environments

At home

Home resets are often about **control and predictability**.

You might:

- create one low-sensory zone
- limit background noise
- use consistent lighting
- keep familiar objects nearby
- allow retreat without explanation

Your home doesn't need to be perfect.
It just needs one place your system recognises as safer.

At work

Work environments often overload through:

- constant noise
- social monitoring
- visual clutter
- interruptions

Helpful options might include:

- noise-dampening tools
- clear start/stop times
- written communication instead of verbal
- permission to step away
- predictable routines

Needing adjustments is not weakness.
It's **access**.

In public spaces

Public spaces remove control... which increases load.

You might:

- plan exits in advance
- arrive early or off-peak
- wear grounding clothing
- limit time intentionally
- take brief sensory breaks

Leaving early is not failure.

It's **accurate self-reading**.

8. What often makes sensory overload worse

(not your fault)

Overload often escalates when:

- you ignore early signals
- you feel trapped or observed
- you're pressured to stay engaged
- others minimise your experience
- you shame yourself for needing a break

The nervous system responds to **perceived safety**, not logic.

9. Sensory reset ≠ isolation

Reducing sensory input doesn't always mean being alone.

Sometimes it looks like:

- sitting quietly near someone
- predictable, low-demand company
- shared silence
- being present without interaction

Connection can be regulating when it's **non-intrusive**.

10. When sensory overwhelm keeps repeating

Frequent overwhelm often points to:

- chronic sensory mismatch
- insufficient recovery time
- environments that demand constant alertness
- masking or self-monitoring
- lack of control over input

This is not about becoming tougher.

It's about **changing the conditions.**

11. Building a personal sensory reset menu

Instead of a plan, it can help to slowly notice:

- 2–3 things that help early
- 1–2 things that help when overloaded
- 1 thing that feels grounding even on neutral days

These supports will change over time.

That's normal.

12. A simple reset prompt (use or ignore)

You can copy this if helpful:

- **Right now, the hardest input is:**
- **One way I could reduce it is:**
- **I'm allowed to step away for:**
- **This reset doesn't have to fix everything.**

Even answering one line is enough.

A closing permission

Needing a sensory reset does not mean you are fragile.

It means your nervous system is:

- perceptive
 - responsive
-

- doing its job

You are allowed to:

- reduce input
- leave early
- wear what helps
- ask for adjustments
- protect your capacity

This guide isn't here to make you tolerate more.

It's here to help you **live with less friction...**
in a body that notices more.

Use what fits.
Leave the rest.

