**Environmental sensory audit and checklist**

*This sensory audit and checklist is designed to help create an environment that enables the participation of workers with sensory differences associated with complex communication and interaction needs including autism. It gives some ideas on the ways in which a setting might be adjusted when workers experience sensory difficulties.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Visual** | | |
| **Good practice and evidence to look for** | **Current Situation** | **Action required** |
| Workplace illumination is suitable for workers with sensory differences.   * Fluorescent lights are regularly checked and changed. (Flickering lights can be very disturbing.) * The effects of light coming into the room through blinds and creating distracting patterns are minimised * Light reflecting on objects such as metal or shiny surfaces in the workplace is minimised. |  |  |
| The workplace is orderly and not cluttered so that workers can make sense of the environment.   * The impact of wall displays is considered. (Busy and cluttered wall displays can be distracting). * Designated areas for specific activities to give clarity to the workplace organisation. * Workers have the opportunity to work at a workstation to focus their attention if necessary |  |  |
| **Auditory** | | |
| **Good practice and evidence to look for** | **Current Situation** | **Action required** |
| Sounds from workplace equipment are kept to a minimum.   * Televisions, videos, audio systems, lights and computers are switched off when not in use to avoid a mains hum. |  |  |
| There are strategies in place to reduce noise when rooms are in use.   * Consideration is given to the noise created by the movement of people, chairs and desks and adjustments made * The acoustics are checked and modified to lessen echo |  |  |
| Sounds from outside the workplace do not cause problems within workplaces.   * Consideration is given to road noise, building noise, etc. |  |  |
| There are agreed strategies in place when noise becomes too much for individual workers.   * There is a quiet room available which provides a calm place for workers to relax. |  |  |
| Workers are warned if a loud noise or alarm is going to sound.   * Strategies are put in place to support workers who find loud noises or fire alarms very difficult to tolerate. |  |  |
| **Smell** | | |
| **Good practice** | **Current Situation** | **Action required** |
| Smells within the workplace are kept to a minimum.   * The smell of paints, glue, clay and cleaning fluids is minimal. * Managers are aware that the smell of perfumes and deodorants may be distressing. * Managers are aware that workers may react to the smell of others. |  |  |
| Smells from outside the workplace are monitored and reduced, where possible   * Alternative toileting arrangements are allowed (e.g. possible use of managers or disabled toilets). * The smell of cooking from the cafeteria is reduced. |  |  |
| **Tactile** | | |
| **Good practice** | **Current Situation** | **Action required** |
| Uncomfortable clothing (seams, inflexible or itchy fabrics) is avoided, where possible, unless there are safety issues   * Variations of the workplace uniform offer enough flexibility to enable workers to be able to wear clothing they find comfortable. * Willingness of the workplace to adapt the workplace uniform or PPE (e.g. wear a sweatshirt, a necktie loosely or one that pins on). |  |  |
| Alternative arrangements are made for workers who find writing to be physically painful or difficult.   * Willingness of the workplace to allow reports to be typed. * Use of a computer or alternative recording method for written work |  |  |
| Seating is comfortable.   * Cushions may be used |  |  |
| **General sensory issues** | | |
| **Good practice and evidence to look for** | **Current Situation** | **Action required** |
| Workers are encouraged to let others know if they are finding a sensory aspect of the environment distressing.   * Workers know that they can speak to someone about concerns. * Workers have a designated person or mentor to talk to. |  |  |
| Managers are aware of workers’ sensory needs   * Managers are familiar with an individual’s sensory passport. * Managers monitor workers who are unable to communicate or recognise their own sensory needs and take appropriate action. |  |  |
| Cafeterias and queuing systems do not cause distress (due to the noise levels, smells and crowds).   * Workers are allowed to enter the cafeteria before or after peers to avoid queuing and crowds. * An adult or mentor may escort a worker to and within the cafeteria |  |  |
| Workers are relaxed when moving through corridors. (Workers can become anxious in busy corridors due to noise, dislike of crowds and worry about being touched).   * Workers are allowed to leave the workplace slightly earlier or later than peers to avoid noisy corridors/crowds. |  |  |
| Workplace organisation takes into account the individual needs of workers.   * Workplace organisation and individual seating plan takes into consideration individual sensory concerns (e.g. A worker with a fascination with light reflection does not sit by the window). * Workers who become anxious by the close proximity of others are allowed ample space around their seat |  |  |
| A system of support is available for workers experiencing sensory overload.   * Productivity breaks are allowed when necessary * There is a designated place and a clear system/routine for workers to follow if they feel they need to withdraw due to sensory overload to ‘chill out.’ |  |  |

**Workplace Checklist**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **General Workplace Appearance** |  |
| Are the furniture tops clear? |  |
| Are cupboard doors closed? |  |
| Are the blinds closed when the sun shines in? |  |
| Are all cupboards and boxes clearly labelled? |  |
| Are all resources stored in cupboards or lidded boxes? |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Organisation of room** |  |
| Is there a clear area for group work? |  |
| Is there a clear snack area (or a strategy which indicates change of use)? |  |
| Are workers’ work areas clearly organised? |  |
| Are materials/stationary in a good state of repair? |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Computer** |  |
| Are wires hidden? |  |
| Are stop/closed signs in places for when the computer is not in use? |  |
| Is the computer area clean and tidy? |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Sound** |  |
| Are windows closed if people are outside? |  |
| Do chairs have stoppers to minimise noise? |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Managers** |  |
| Do managers consider clothing choices (remembering bright and highly patterned clothing may not be conducive to productivity) |  |
| Are accessories kept to a minimum? |  |
| Do managers avoid wearing strong perfume or hair products? |  |
| Do managers support understanding using symbols? |  |
| Do managers use minimal language where appropriate? |  |
| Are managers conversations kept to essential information only in the presence of workers? |  |

Adapted from the Autism Education Trust