

Mandy's story

A parent's experience of supporting sensory needs

My children

My son is now almost 14 and my daughter is 12. They were both diagnosed aged 5 and 4 with Asperger syndrome.

My son loves football and sports and plays weekly at a badminton club (football clubs were too busy/stressful).

My daughter loves all animals/science and goes to a climbing club.

Both love our family dog and spending time on their computers playing online with their friends.

First signs

My little boy would scream much of the time when we were out as a baby, we were unable to stay anywhere long which was very different to my friends from antenatal group and other mums at the local playgroups (we always had to leave after a short time!)

He was much happier at home where it was quiet and calm.

My daughter was less affected at a very young age but became much more sensitive to sensory stimulation from age 2, she was then much more upset with noises and lights and was extremely sensitive to clothing.

As she was only one year younger than my son, and we had started seeing specialists by then, her environment was much better as I knew what worked well for my son.

Support & therapy

We received help from the Autism team at Ipswich hospital both in clinic and at home as by this time (age 5 in year 1) my son was being home-schooled. My daughter was unable to start school as she would not let anyone near.

We had help from the Autism spectrum team in Stowmarket and paid for private sensory therapy for through the SenSi clinic. We accessed the Sensory Pool and sensory room with sensory, brushing and joint therapy and we were taught to use some techniques at home, we still use these techniques at times of high anxiety.

We now use a movement therapy mat and programme to keep things suitable for their teenage years, along with many other sensory therapy techniques which can be used in everyday life (iced water through a straw and heat and weighted therapy after school etc.).

What changed?

The difference sensory therapy made was unbelievable, from the first week those around us remarked they were like different children...we did commit 100% though and with the brushing/joint technique we were spending 15 minutes on each child every two hours for 3 months! It meant that the children could slowly start school and make friends and go out (basically we all got our lives back!)

I would say that if you commit to making sensory therapy part of your everyday lives then it can have a profound effect on Autism.

Parent to parent

I would recommend go to a professional to get good advice, expect to need at least 10 sessions. It is very expensive, we paid around £60 a session. They set 'homework' so you learn the skills to do everything at home which can make the difference between coping and not coping.

You can make or ask someone to make some of the equipment as it can be expensive to buy online. Some things are worth the investment and some available at shops (squishy toys and stress balls, gym balls, shaving foam, stress putty etc.). Weighted toys are fantastic and available online quite cheaply as we found just as effective as very expensive weighted lap mats etc.

Also buy second hand things to try to see what works before shelling out for new items.

Find sensory friendly clothing (underwear that is seamless and soft cotton tops, especially ones that provide a 'hug') and allow the child to be comfortable even if that isn't fashionable.

Uncomfortable clothes will make very miserable children, if they like to live in leggings or soft tracksuit bottoms then that will help behaviour and mood.

Make sensory therapy part of your family's everyday routine and help the child to understand why it helps them and make it fun, not a chore.

You will get back from sensory therapy just what you put into it, but in our opinion it is the one thing (and we tried an awful lot of things!) that really works. Good luck!!

Mandy, a Suffolk parent