

Reduce overload and sensory challenges

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Design learning for all' from the Guide:

[Behaviour and learning](#)

Includes:

Understand and manage sensory differences

Find out about sensory challenges and preferences

Prepare your learning spaces

Design specific supports

Design the day to meet the student's unique needs

Minimise distractions

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From

Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

Strategy: [Design learning for all](#)

Suggestion: [Reduce overload and sensory challenges](#)

Date

18 June 2026

Link

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/reduce-overload-and-sensory-challenges

Understand and manage sensory differences

Work with students and whānau to understand sensory differences, minimise sensory triggers, and create a positive learning environment.

- ✓ Understand how the student is affected by different types of sensory input.
- ✓ Understand how students react to different sensory experiences such as sounds, lighting, tastes, colours, smells, textures or fabrics.
- ✓ Develop the student's awareness of their sensory challenges and strategies to cope with overload and anxiety.
- ✓ Develop and share systems to identify and manage the early stages of sensory overload.

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Find out about sensory challenges and preferences

Find out about sensitivities and preferences so that you can design your learning environment to work for your students.



Video hosted on Youtube http://youtu.be/veQKDDE9C_w

Closed Captions

Source:

[Organization for Autism Research](#)

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Prepare your learning spaces

Organise the learning spaces or Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) to minimise sensory challenges and maximise learning.

- ✓ Allocate the student a dedicated, quiet, low traffic seating area so they can concentrate.
- ✓ Create a quiet, low sensory space in your room where the student can go at any time.
- ✓ Design the furniture and use room dividers such as bookcases and cabinets to create zones that reduce sensory challenges.
- ✓ Consider sensitivities, for example, seat a child who is light sensitive away from windows.
- ✓ Offer the student a breakout area for when the classroom is overwhelming, for example, an outdoor area, breakout room or home base.
- ✓ Keep the classroom consistently organised in terms of furniture and spaces. Signal and prepare the student for reorganisation of spaces.
- ✓ Consider specialised furniture such as a rocking chair or bean bag to help with calming
- ✓ Provide earphones or ear plugs to block out disturbing sounds for students with auditory sensitivity.

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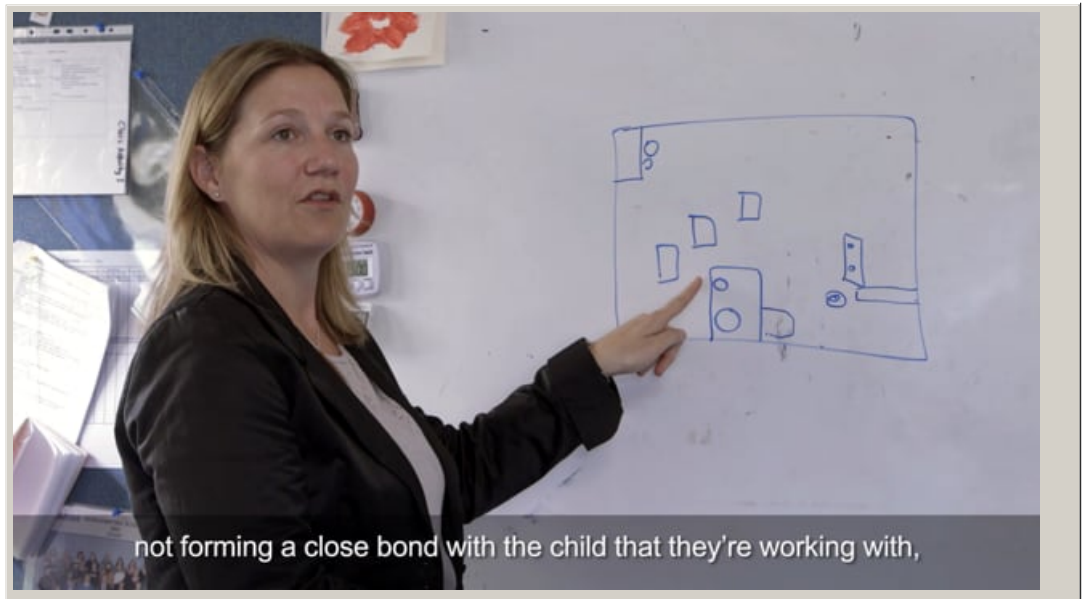
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Design specific supports

Parents and whānau know their tamariki and can pre-empt situations that could cause distress. This video shows examples of how teaching teams can respond and plan specific support for tamariki.



Video hosted on Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/159138467>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Ministry of Education](#)

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Design the day to meet the student's unique needs

Careful programme design can help students to be successful, regardless of whether they are in a single classroom, an open plan space or other environment.

Each student will have different needs so collaborate with the ākonga, whānau and the school team.

- Reduce daily choices and decisions by creating a predictable personalised timetable.
- Design a timetable to suit the learner, with regular quiet or low sensory times during the day. For example, use breakout spaces, a walk outside or additional quiet play period.
- Limit the number of different people the student needs to interact with and the time they spend with larger or noisy groups of students.
- Use [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) principles to provide flexible learning options to suit your students.
- Design transition signals and consider personalised systems. For example, timers, music, traffic light systems.

See our [Planning innovative learning environments \(ILEs\)](#) guide for more information.

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Minimise distractions

Minimise auditory and visual distractions to help diminish the confusion and frustration some students experience, and maximise their ability to focus on the task at hand.

Reduce visual distractions

- Strategically place the student's seat away from distractions, such as doorways and windows.
- Clear the student's desk of everything, except the lesson at hand.
- Put away (or out of view) teacher's equipment and books competing for a student's attention.

Reduce auditory distractions

- Seat student closest to where you present information.
- Seat student next to students who do not distract others.
- Provide nonverbal cues that are familiar to the student to help them stay focused and working quietly, for example: use hand signals, move close to student.
- Create quiet spots in your classroom.

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