

Reduce overload and sensory challenges

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Key areas to support' from the Guide: [FASD and learning](#)

Includes:

- Maintain predictable environments
- Design the environment together
- Design the day to meet the student's unique needs
- Offer auditory strategies
- Offer calming spaces
- Provide sensory support

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From

Guide: [Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and learning](#)

Strategy: [Key areas to support](#)

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

Date

11 June 2026

Link

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-and-learning/reduce-overload-and-sensory-challenges

Maintain predictable environments

Students with FASD are more comfortable in predictable environments.

Collaborate with whānau and other teachers to plan coherent approaches.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/LJRBPPw9ej4>

No captions or transcript

Source:

[WrAP Schools \(Canada\)](#)

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChuAycUoRt_HkcbdXnKiV_Q

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Design the environment together

Some students feel bombarded by sensory information. Others seek out intense sensory experiences.

Those who have sensory process difficulties misinterpret everyday sensory information such as touch, sight, sound, movement, and smell.

Discuss things that ākonga and whānau notice in the classroom. Include things they:

- smell
- see
- hear
- feel
- taste.

Use the information to guide your design of the environment.

Select strategies to reduce sensory overload.

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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 to:

- 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 of 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 spent 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 \(ILEs\)](#) for more information.

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Offer auditory strategies



Source:

[Paul Hamilton \(Flickr\)](#)

<https://flic.kr/p/oykm3A>

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Offer calming spaces



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Provide sensory support

Provide students with sensory support to help them focus on learning.

Useful sensory support will vary from student to student. Examples include:

- paper and pencils to draw or doodle
- music or soft soothing sounds to listen to
- a hand-held toy to manipulate or a slow moving oil and water toy to watch
- a weighted blanket or warm fleece blanket
- looking at a book
- a deep back massage or squeezing hands or feet can be soothing for some children.

Talk with your student and ask your occupational therapist for some safe and appropriate suggestions.

Source: [What educators need to know about FASD](#), pp. 38-45, (PDF, 1.8MB)

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