

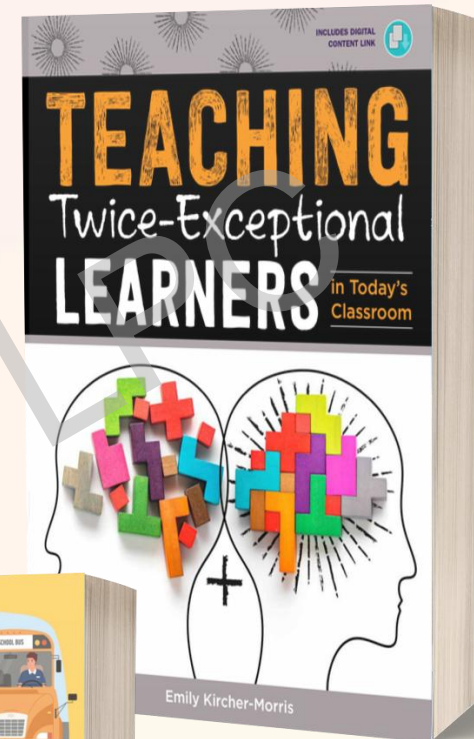
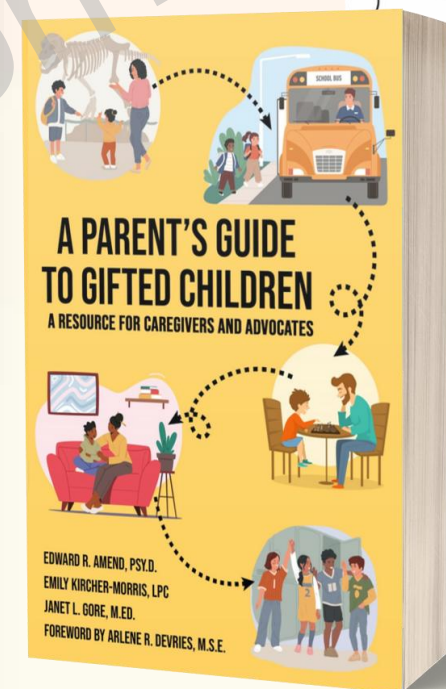
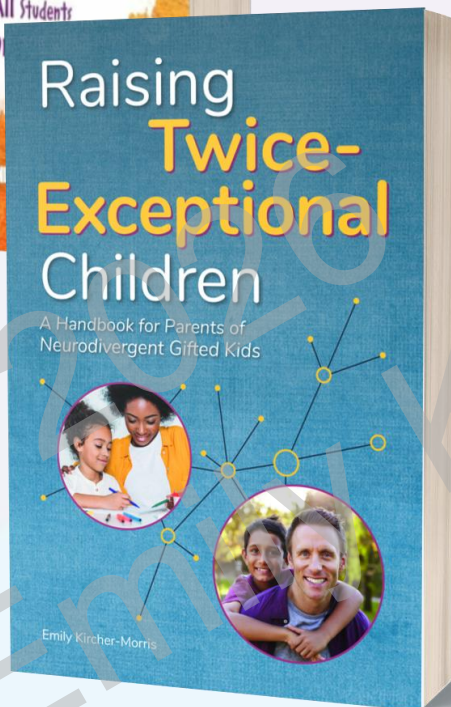
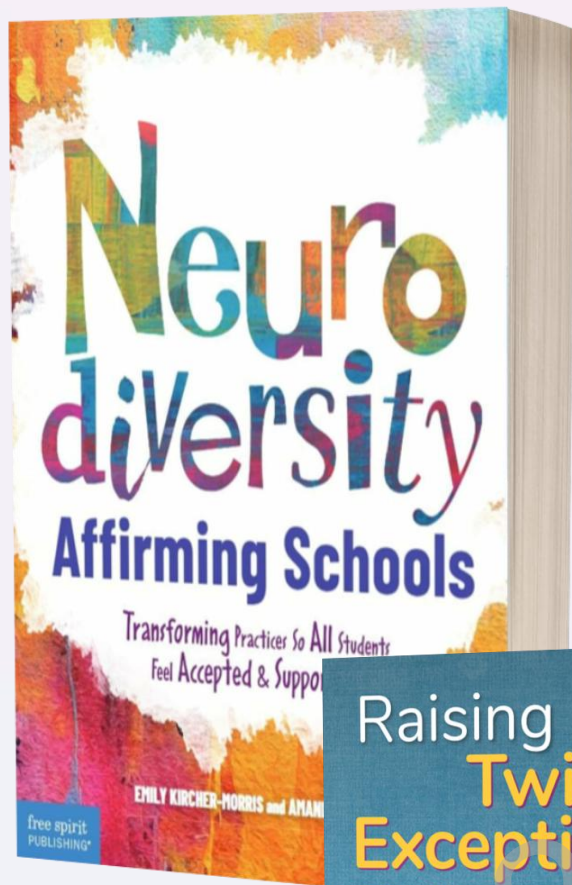
From Textures to Temperatures: Support Sensory Needs in Gifted and Twice-Exceptional Learners

Presented by Emily Kircher-Morris, LPC

The Neurodiversity Podcast

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Goals

- How does sensory processing affect gifted and twice-exceptional students' daily lives?
- How do sensory needs interact with emotional regulation and executive functioning?
- How can educators effectively accommodate sensory sensitivities in the classroom?

Why does sensory integration matter?

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Sensory Differences: Gifted

Gifted individuals often exhibit heightened sensory processing sensitivity (SPS), related to:

- deeper cognitive processing of sensory input,
- increased emotional reactivity,
- and higher empathy.

Research indicates that gifted people tend to score higher on SPS measures, suggesting a distinct sensory processing experience compared to the general population.

Rinn, A. N., Mullet, D. R., Jett, N., & Nyikos, T. (2018). Sensory Processing Sensitivity Among High-Ability Individuals: A Psychometric Evaluation of the Highly Sensitive Person Scale. Roeper Review.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2018.1466840>

Sensory Difference: ADHD

ADHD is best described as a difficulty with **regulating attention** (as opposed to an attention *deficit*).

- Hyperactivity can lead to sensory seeking behaviors.
- Inattention can be connected to difficulty filtering sensory input.
- Difficulties in regulating attention can lead to sensory overload.

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Sensory Differences: Autism

Hyposensitivity and hypersensitivity to sensory input is one of the diagnostic criteria included in the DSM-5 for autism.

- Too much sensory input can lead to sensory avoidance or overwhelm.
- Sensory seeking behaviors can be used to calm or regulate emotions.
- Predictability is key to prevent sensory challenges.

Hypersensitivity (Over-Responsiveness)

Hyposensitivity (Under-Responsiveness)

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Accommodating Sensory Differences

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Whole Body Listening!

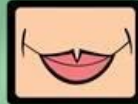
Larry wants to remind you to
listen with your entire body



Eyes = Look at the
person talking to you



Ears = Both ears
ready to hear



Mouth = Quiet- no
talking, humming
or making sounds



Hands = Quiet in
lap, pockets or by
your side



Feet = Quiet on
the floor



Body = Faces
the speaker



Brain = Thinking about
what is being said



Heart = Caring about
what the other person
is saying

WHOLE BODY LISTENING

How Does Your Body
Help You Listen?



My eyes help me
listen when...



My body helps me
listen when it can...



My feet help me
listen when they...



My brain can help
me listen by...



My hands help me
listen when they...



My heart can help
me listen when...



My ears listen when...



When I am listening
my mouth is...



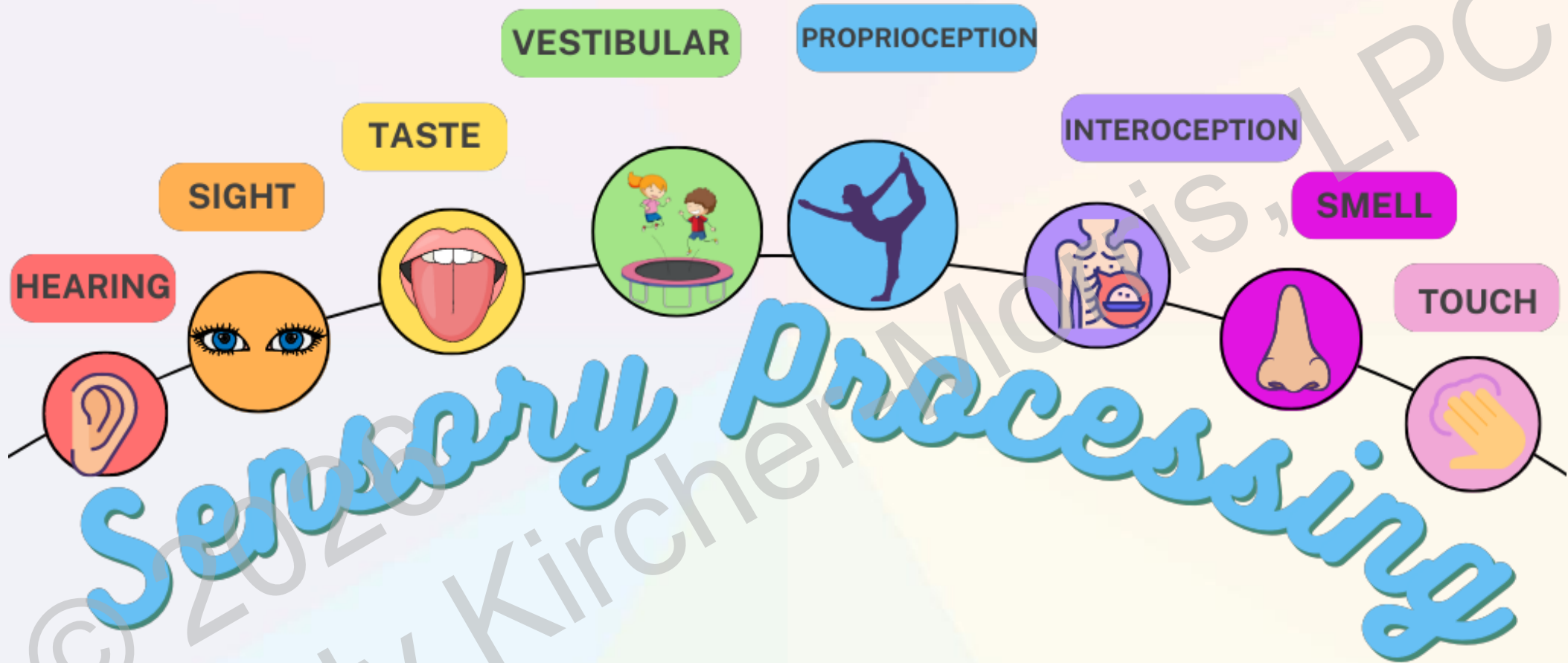
All brains and bodies listen and learn differently.
It is important to know what works for YOU!

What is stimming?

- The repetitive performance of certain physical movements or vocalizations
- “Self-stimulation”
- Used as a coping strategy, frequently for emotional regulation

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Visual System



This system allows us to perceive light and color, enabling us to interpret and navigate the environment. It affects how students perceive visual stimuli like text, graphics, and light intensity.

Auditory System



This system allows us to detect and interpret sounds. It affects how students process verbal instructions, background noises, and sudden loud noises.

Tactile System



This system gives us the ability to feel physical contact and perceive texture.



Olfactory System



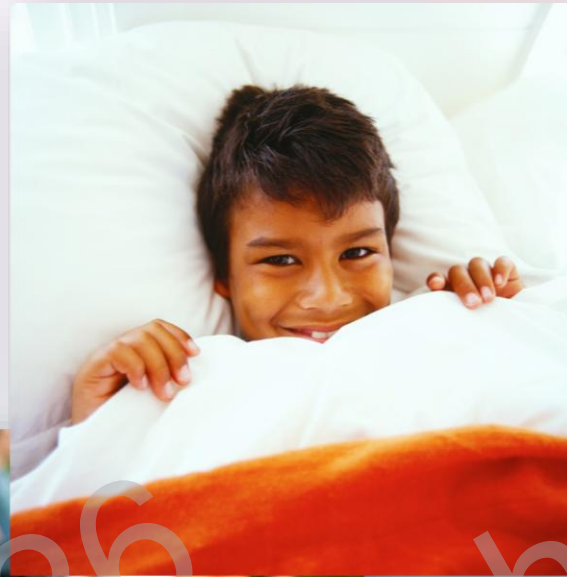
Responsible for detecting odors and scents, it plays a role in our emotional and memory responses.

Gustatory System



This system helps us detect flavors—bitter, sweet, salty, sour, and umami. While not commonly engaged in class, taste can play a role during snack or lunchtimes.

Proprioceptive System



This system provides feedback on the position of our body parts in relation to one another, aiding in coordinated movement.

Vestibular System



Located in the inner ear, this system provides a sense of balance and awareness of bodily position in space.

Interoceptive System



Responsible for detecting internal sensations such as hunger, thirst, and digestive discomfort.

Sensory Needs & Emotional Regulation



Alexithymia

- Subclinical phenomenon characterized by cognitive-affective functioning impairments
 - Affects as many as 10% of the general population
- Difficulties include:
 - Recognizing and labeling their internal emotional states
 - Discriminating between different emotions of the same affective valence
 - Describing and communicating their emotional states to others.

Sensory Needs & Executive Functioning

- Working Memory:
 - Sensory overload can reduce information retention
 - Competing sensory input may interfere with processing
- Attention Control
 - Sensory seeking behaviors may appear as inattention
 - Filtering relevant vs. irrelevant sensory input
- Task Initiation
 - Sensory overwhelm can delay starting tasks
 - Environmental adjustments may improve initiation

Sensory Needs & E.F. Support Strategies

- Environmental
 - Designated quiet spaces for focus
 - Flexible seating options
 - Lighting and sound modifications
- Organizational
 - Visual schedules and timers
 - Clear routines and transitions
 - Structured workspaces
- Self-Regulation
 - Sensory breaks between tasks
 - Access to regulation tools
 - Self-monitoring strategies



Creating Neurodiversity-Affirming Classrooms Crash Course

Neurodiversity Audit of Classroom Environment Checklist

1. Lighting:

- ☐ Assess the type and intensity of classroom lighting.
- ☐ Determine if there are options to dim or adjust lighting for various activities.
- ☐ Offer light filtering options such as curtains, blinds, or shades.
- ☐ Other: _____

2. Visual Environment:

- ☐ Examine walls and surfaces for overstimulation (too many posters, decorations, etc.).
- ☐ Ensure visual aids are clear, relevant, and organized.
- ☐ Note any reflective surfaces that could cause distractions.
- ☐ Other: _____

3. Auditory Environment:

- ☐ Identify any consistent or loud noises that might be distracting or unsettling (e.g., from nearby rooms, hallways, or outside sources).
- ☐ Gauge the acoustics: Does sound echo? Is it too quiet?
- ☐ Other: _____

4. Tactile and Physical Comfort:

- ☐ Check if there are seating options.
- ☐ Ensure there are spaces for movement and physical activity if needed.
- ☐ Incorporate materials that cater to a range of tactile needs, such as rough, smooth, squishy, or hard.
- ☐ Make available sensory kits that students can use when feeling overwhelmed.
- ☐ Other: _____

5. Sensory-Regulation Spaces:

- ☐ Ensure there are designated quiet or "chill-out" areas.
- ☐ Create spaces where students can be alone or with fewer peers, if needed.
- ☐ Consider sensory tools or toys like fidget spinners, stress balls, or weighted blankets.
- ☐ Provide options for tactile sensory experiences, such as soft rugs or textured materials.
- ☐ Other: _____

6. Olfactory Environment:

- ☐ Check for strong or distracting smells, like cleaning products or food.
- ☐ Promote a fragrance-free classroom policy to cater to sensitivities.
- ☐ Other: _____

7. Spatial Orientation and Navigation:

- ☐ Make sure paths and walking areas are clear and easily navigable.
- ☐ Check that all areas are accessible for those with mobility challenges.
- ☐ Clearly mark different areas/zones (e.g., reading corner, group work table).
- ☐ Other: _____

8. Technology and Tools:

- ☐ Assess the use and volume of electronic devices (computers, smartboards).
- ☐ Ensure headphones or ear defenders are available for those sensitive to noise.
- ☐ Evaluate if screen glare or brightness levels are appropriate and adjustable.
- ☐ Provide training or resources on how to adjust the accessibility features on devices.
- ☐ Other: _____

9. Flexibility:

- ☐ Ensure that the environment can be easily adapted for different activities or needs.
- ☐ Maintain a clear and consistent routine, but with provisions for adjustments when necessary.
- ☐ Other: _____

11. Executive Functioning:

- ☐ Structured Routines: Are daily schedules visibly posted and followed consistently?
- ☐ Task Breakdown: Are complex tasks segmented into smaller, achievable steps?
- ☐ Visual Aids: Are there tools available like calendars, charts, or visual timers to assist in time management and task completion?
- ☐ Physical Organizers: Are there designated spaces, shelves, or containers for students to keep their materials organized?
- ☐ Flexible Deadlines: Are there options for students who might need extended time or prefer to start tasks early?
- ☐ Feedback Systems: Is there a clear system in place for constructive feedback, allowing students to understand and learn from errors?
- ☐ Transition Signals: Are there cues, like bells or visual timers, to indicate the end/start of activities?
- ☐ Other: _____

Sensory Processing Self-Assessment

How often is each of the sensory stimuli a concern/issue for you?

	1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes	4 Often	5 Always
Fluorescent/bright lighting					
Screen glare					
Visual clutter/busy environments					
Reading for extended periods					
Visual tracking during notetaking (looking back and forth from the front of the room to your notes)					
Movement in your peripheral vision					
Background noise					
Multiple conversations					
Sudden loud noises					
Complex or multi-step verbal instructions					
Sound echoes in large spaces					
Certain clothing or other textures					
Physical proximity to others (needing extra space)					
Sitting still for long periods					
Temperature sensitivity					
Different textural surfaces					
Filtering out distractions					
Transitioning between tasks					
Maintaining focus during lectures					
Working in groups					
Organizing materials/work space					
What self-regulation strategies do you currently use?					
What are your environmental preferences (Lighting? Sound? Seating?)					
What else should I know?					

My Sensory Detective Sheet

How Do Things Feel Today?

MY EYES:			
• The lights in my classroom feel:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
• Looking at the board/screen feels:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
• The decorations on the wall make me feel:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
MY EARS:			
• The sounds in my classroom feel:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
• When people are talking, it feels:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
• During quiet work time, I feel:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
MY BODY:			
• When I need to pay attention, I feel:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
• When I'm working on tasks, I feel:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
• During group work, I feel:	Just Right	Could be better	Too much!
Draw or write 3 things that help you feel calm:			
Draw or write 3 things places where you feel most comfortable:			
Draw or write what your perfect learning space looks like:			

SENSORY AWARENESS GAME

8-sided dice = Sensory System

1. Visual
2. Auditory
3. Tactile
4. Olfactory
5. Gustatory
6. Vestibular (sense of balance/bodily position)
7. Proprioceptive (where body is in relation to other objects)
8. Interoceptive (internal body signals)

4-sided dice = What to share

1. Sensory trigger (What sensory experience might cause it?)
2. Appearance (What does it look like when a student is impacted by it in the classroom?)
3. Accommodation (How can we accommodate a student?)
4. Choice!



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