

Tool: Positive Learning Environment Checklist

This checklist has been created to include some common environmental factors in a classroom setting that may significantly affect the learning of students with disabilities and those without disabilities. The checklist includes considerations for sensory sensitivities, physical access issues, executive functioning, social interaction, predictability, and autonomy.

This checklist is designed to assess a learning environment for all students who may use a particular space rather than for one particular student. It would be best to use this checklist in collaboration with students in the classroom to assess the environment.

Besides teachers, this checklist can also be used by parents and other professionals supporting students with disabilities to help assess a learning environment.

References:

- [*Guidelines for Creating Autistic Inclusive Environments*](#) by Olivia Gatfield, Gabrielle Hall, Kathy Isaacs, and Joanne Mahony (2018)
- [*Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms*](#) by Ian Attfield, Amy Fowler, and Val Jones (n.d.).



How to Use the Positive Environment Checklist

Take a copy of the checklist and walk through the spaces where learning takes place for your students to **identify** aspects that may hinder optimal learning, e.g., classroom, playroom or playground, school hall, and locations of planned outings when these are organised.

Note your observations by marking the corresponding item or writing short descriptions in the space provided. Then, discuss and write down possible strategies to address the identified issues. Support strategies are discussed in further detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Out of all the barriers/issues that have been identified, rank them according to urgency and importance. Although it would be best to address all identified barriers to learning, it may not be possible to do so in reality. Hence, it would be wiser to prioritise, and tackle identified issues one at a time.

Conduct this exercise regularly (e.g., quarterly, half-yearly) with other teachers, supporting professionals, parents, or disability advocates. As much as possible, involve your students in this exercise.

Aspects to consider	Strategies to address the issue
<p>Physical environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are there barriers for a student with a physical disability? Can you identify where the student may find it difficult to move around or participate in an activity? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the room have highly patterned décor that can distract or cause sensory overload? E.g., curtains, walls, artwork, carpet, ceiling. <input type="checkbox"/> Can students easily find things they need? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are shelves and storage boxes labelled clearly with visuals and big letters? ○ Are they labelled in Braille if there are students with blindness and visual impairment? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there tools and equipment to support physical/mobility and sensory needs? E.g., bouncy cushion, step stool, adapted chair, noise-cancelling headphones, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Are there quiet corners to retreat to for respite and rest? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there places for working with less distractions or without sensory overload? <input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____ 	
<p>Lighting that may cause stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is the room well-lit? <input type="checkbox"/> Do the lights flicker or cast shadows? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there shiny or reflecting surfaces? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there students who may be sensitive to fluorescent lighting? 	

Aspects to consider	Strategies to address the issue
<p>Sounds that may cause stress or distract</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Loud noises. <input type="checkbox"/> Sudden noises from within the school compound or neighbouring places. <input type="checkbox"/> Background noise, such as a wall clock's ticking sound, operating vacuum cleaner from the next room, noise from outside the room, traffic. <input type="checkbox"/> PA system for announcements. 	
<p>Smells that may cause stress or distract</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Smell of perfume or fragrance. <input type="checkbox"/> Unexpected smell from inside and outside of the room or outdoor activity area. E.g., food, cleaning detergents, bad smell from garbage or toilet. 	
<p>Physical contact that may cause stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Likelihood of receiving unpredictable touch from another person. For example, limited space, activities with unpredictable movement of people or objects such as ball play. <input type="checkbox"/> Instances or situations that may require touching things that are soft, slimy, sticky, coarse, spiky, furry, cold, etc. 	
<p>Predictable environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do items in the classroom or school frequently change location? <input type="checkbox"/> How often does the timetable or class routine change? <input type="checkbox"/> Are students given prior notice or visual explainers if things or routines change? 	

Aspects to consider	Strategies to address the issue
<p>Time and transitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is the class schedule displayed using visuals and words that all students can understand? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there strategies in place to help students understand the beginning and ending of an activity? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there effective strategies to support students during transitions between activities or locations? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there provision for breaks within the daily schedule? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there tools or strategies to help students manage their time? E.g., visual cues or auditory reminders. <input type="checkbox"/> Are there opportunities for students to revisit unfinished tasks or activities at a later time? 	
<p>Social environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is the classroom crowded with a large number of students? <input type="checkbox"/> Can students choose who they wish to interact with? Alone, with a peer, in a small group or with the whole class? <input type="checkbox"/> Are social and behavioural expectations clearly communicated to students? E.g., visuals, reminders, demonstration, clear instructions. <input type="checkbox"/> Do unfamiliar individuals frequently visit the classroom? If yes, are students provided with prior notice and information if visitors or unfamiliar individuals are expected to come to the classroom? 	

Aspects to consider	Strategies to address the issue
<p>Emotional support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are students' emotions validated and respected? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there a variety of strategies available to guide students in conflict resolution and emotional regulation? <input type="checkbox"/> Are students' efforts and achievements recognised and acknowledged? 	
<p>Choice and control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are opportunities provided for students to take breaks when needed? Is it clearly communicated to them that breaks are available and allowed? <input type="checkbox"/> Can students choose their preferred activity for rest time or to calm down? <input type="checkbox"/> Do students have opportunities throughout the day to make decisions that are important to them, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How and what they want to learn. ○ How they can self-regulate or co-regulate when they are dysregulated. ○ Where they would like to sit. ○ Whether they prefer to work independently, in small/large groups, or with peer/teacher assistance. 	

Aspects to consider	Strategies to address the issue
<p>Positive sensory input</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How long are students expected to remain seated? Are they allowed to move freely when they need to, especially for students who may struggle with hyperactivity or sustaining attention? <input type="checkbox"/> Are students allowed to engage in stimming behaviours? Is stimming understood, accepted, and respected? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there strategies in place to support students' attention? E.g., providing fidget toys, fidget chair bands, allowing movement instead of sitting still. <input type="checkbox"/> Do students have access to preferred sensory inputs or enjoyable activities? <input type="checkbox"/> Is it clearly communicated to students that they can access the aforementioned sensory inputs? 	
<p>Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are different modes of communication, besides speech, encouraged and respected for all students? For example, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems, communication applications/boards, typing, spelling, and sign language. <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a wide range of learning materials in terms of types of material and level of challenge? <input type="checkbox"/> Are support tools and strategies readily available to students to help them learn? <input type="checkbox"/> Is information presented using multiple formats? E.g., visuals (photos, infographics, illustrations), tactile materials, Braille, audio, and videos with captions. 	

Aspects to consider	Strategies to address the issue
Celebrating diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Is there general acceptance and respect for differences in appearance, behaviour, and learning styles/abilities?<input type="checkbox"/> Are the activities, lessons, and learning materials responsive to the cultural and linguistic background of all students?	