



## Sensodyne's Sensory Inclusion Initiative

As the experts in tooth sensitivity, we're on a mission to build sensory inclusion in oral care, connecting patients with dentists who understand their needs.

### SMALL CHANGES, BIG WINS: EASY WAYS TO CREATE A MORE SENSORY ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE OFFICE

The dentist's office is inherently a high-sensory environment – with bright lights, abrasive textures, harsh sounds, and distinct smells – and it can quickly become overwhelming for patients with sensory sensitivities.

#### What are sensory sensitivities?

Sensory sensitivity occurs when everyday life is affected or limited by how a person experiences the world around them through their senses. While sensory sensitivity looks different for everyone, it can make even daily activities extremely difficult, let alone something as high-sensory as a dental appointment. This is true for many people and can be especially pronounced for many neurodivergent individuals or for those with certain disabilities or other conditions that may impact sensory processing.



However, with a few small adjustments, you can make a big difference in creating a more supportive and accommodating environment for your patients.

Here are a few small ways you can update your patient's experience – from pre-appointment to the in-office experience.

#### PRE-APPOINTMENT

**Create a welcoming office space.** Long before you invite patients in, consider the space and how it may or may not be inclusive to all. Small adjustments to your office can help ensure that upon arrival, patients feel safe and welcome. Below are some things to keep in mind:

- Avoid air fresheners or strong smells, including using non-scented cleaners
- Use natural light versus strong overhead lights whenever possible
- Limit loud noises, and keep the sounds of drills and other dental instruments to a minimum; where possible separate treatments areas from open areas.

**Prepare patients for what to expect.** Knowing that the dentist's office is inherently a high-sensory environment, it's important to communicate early with patients about what to expect. For example, share with patients the steps of a dental cleaning, what sort of sensory experiences they may encounter, and if there will be other required medical tests or procedures (for example, oral x-rays).

**Open the conversation:** Proactively give your patients the opportunity to share about their sensory needs during intake. Having you start the conversation about sensory needs early will help patients feel welcome to share. Phrasing the question as broad and not specific to a unique condition is also important for people who may have sensory needs, but do not necessarily identify as neurodivergent or have a formal diagnosis.

**Below are questions you can add to a patient intake form:**

- Which of the following amenities would you like to have available during your appointment?
  - Noise-canceling headphones or earplugs.
  - Sunglasses or dimmed lighting.
  - Unscented or mild-scented products.
  - Blankets, neck pillow, or cushions.
  - Mild-flavored dental products.
  - Other.
- We understand that visiting the dentist can cause anxiety for many patients. To help us provide the best possible care, please indicate which of the following statements apply to you.
  - Strong gag reflex
  - Prefer minimal conversation
  - Fearful of lacking control
  - Fearful of not breathing
  - Enjoy explanations during care
  - Bright lights bother me
  - Fearful of pain
  - Background noise bothers me
  - Cold sensations bother me
  - Close proximity to another person's face bothers me
  - Not fearful of dentistry
  - Other (please explain):
- To help us understand your dental history, please tell us about your last dental experience or your overall feeling about recent treatment.
  - Great
  - Average
  - Terrible
  - NEVER AGAIN
  - Other (please specify)
- Is there anything else you'd like us to know that would help us prepare for your visit?
  - Leave open for comments



## IN-OFFICE

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**Be prepared to accommodate different communication styles:** Individuals with sensory processing needs may use various communication methods, especially if they start to experience stress or overwhelm. For example, autistic individuals are often sensory sensitive and may also not read into tone or directness, so it's important to acknowledge and adapt to different communication styles. You can leverage tools like Koji, an AI-generated communication tool and talker from our partner KultureCity. To access the tool, download KultureCity App and select Koji on the bottom right of the home page. This will open to the AI Talker and a variety of other communication tools beneficial for those who do not use verbal speech as their primary mode of communication.

**Offer resources that can help manage sensory overload:** An important way to help people experiencing sensory sensitivity is to provide tools to help regulate their emotions and provide a sense of safety and calm. You can keep tools on hand to help manage sensory experiences, such as:

- Noise canceling headphones and/or ear plugs
- Weighted blanket and/or lap pad
- Fidget tools
- Sunglasses and/or strobe reduction glasses

**If you have the space, provide a quiet room:** While we know that not all office spaces can accommodate a small sitting room but, if possible, it is ideal to have a place where a patient can step away should they experience sensory overload. A room should be low light, quiet, with a variety of tactile experiences that help soothe and comfort patients. If a separate room is not an option, you can also offer to step away for a few minutes if the patient is experiencing sensory overload.

## POST-APPOINTMENT

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**Follow up via phone or email:** To continue improving accessible care, it is also important to create an open dialogue with patients. Be sure to follow up after an appointment to ensure the patient's needs were met, gather feedback about what could have been done differently the next time, and to gather any other questions or comments.

If you haven't already, we encourage you to enroll in the **American Dental Association's (ADA) CERP-certified continuing education course** on neurodiversity, sensory inclusion, and oral health. The course provides 6-hours of essential information, from how to manage patient needs, to common medications, to billing and coding. Learn more about the ADA and the training available by visiting [engage.ada.org/courses/541/view](https://engage.ada.org/courses/541/view)

Once you've completed the ADA training, you can register with KultureCity to receive additional supports, including:

- Inclusion in the searchable **KultureCity App** to let patients know you're prioritizing sensory sensitive care
- **Sensodyne x KultureCity Sensory Inclusive™ Certified** signage and window cling
- Sensory bags inclusive of tools to help support people during the in-office experience

To learn more about **KultureCity** and the **Sensodyne x KultureCity Sensory Inclusive™ Certification**, please visit [kulturecity.org/sensodyne-sensory-inclusion-initiative](https://kulturecity.org/sensodyne-sensory-inclusion-initiative)