



TATF
THEY ARE THE FUTURE



What Is Sensory Processing?

Unlocking the Link Between
Everyday Struggles and
Your Child's Sensory World



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You're Not Alone - Let's Explore This Together

Welcome to this parent guide to understanding your child's sensory world.

If you've ever found yourself wondering "Why is everything such a struggle right now?", you're in the right place.

This workbook will help you explore one possible - and often overlooked - reason: sensory processing.

Some parents know that neurodivergent children process the world differently.

But many haven't yet made the connection between sensory differences and challenges like anxiety, big emotions, tricky behaviour, or school stress.

Through bite-sized information, practical ideas, and gentle reflection, this workbook will help you uncover what's going on beneath the surface.

Every child is unique. There's no one-size-fits-all solution. But the more you understand your child's sensory needs, the easier it becomes to support them with confidence.

Take what resonates. Leave the rest.
Use this guide at your own pace.



What Is Sensory Processing... And Why Does It Matter So Much?

Sensory processing is the way your child takes in information from the world and from their own body, sorts it, and makes sense of it.

We're all processing sensory input constantly – even if we don't realise it.

Imagine hearing a noise behind you.

Your brain works quickly to notice it, recognize what it is, decide if it's important, and work out how to respond.

For some children, this process is smooth and automatic.

For others, it's more complicated. Their brain may interpret sensory information in unexpected ways – or become overwhelmed by it.

When sensory processing is challenging, it can affect everything: mood, movement, behaviour, focus, social life, and emotional wellbeing.

Understanding this can be a turning point.

There's More Than Five: Discovering the Hidden Senses



Sight



Hearing



Smell



Taste



Touch

There are actually eight senses - three hidden ones beyond the five we know about (above). Knowing about these hidden senses is especially important when it comes to your child's behaviour and wellbeing.

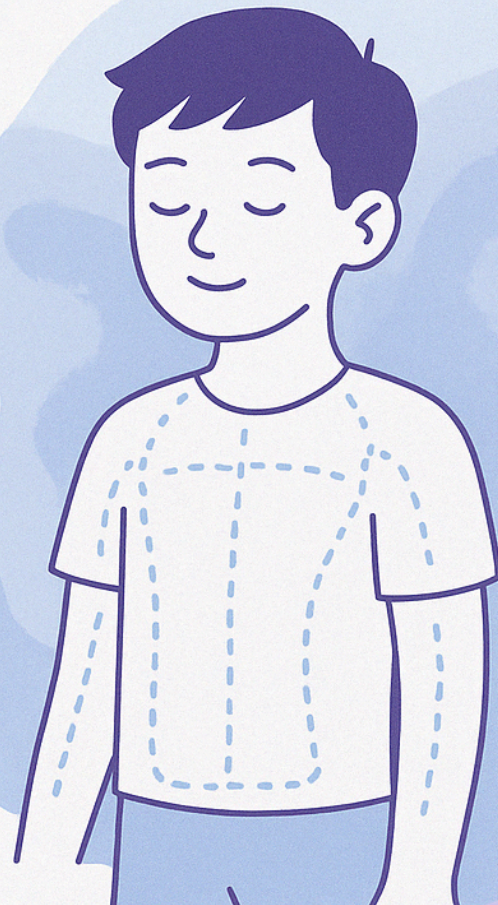
1. Proprioception

Your child's body map and sense of pressure.

Proprioception helps your child know where their body is and how much force to use.

Children with challenges in this area might:

- Seem clumsy or constantly bump into things
- Struggle to sit still or stay upright
- Push, grab, or hug too hard without meaning to
- Seek out crashing, jumping, or rough play to "feel" their body better





2. Vestibular Sense

Balance, movement, and spatial awareness.

The vestibular system helps your child understand movement and balance.

Children who are over- or under-sensitive in this area might:

- Fear swings, climbing, or escalators
- Get dizzy easily, or not seem to notice movement at all
- Crave fast spinning or upside-down play
- Struggle with coordination and balance



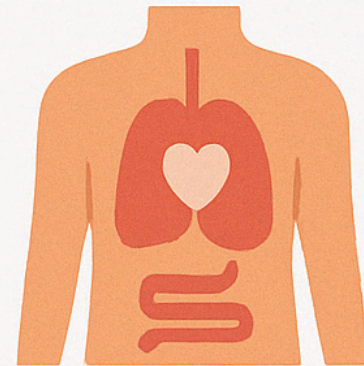
3. Interoception

Your child's inner body signals

Interoception tells your child what's going on inside—hunger, thirst, pain, tiredness, needing the toilet, and even emotions.

If this sense is underdeveloped or confusing, children might:

- Miss important signals like needing a drink or a break
- Struggle to describe how they're feeling
- Seem "fine" all day but collapse at home
- React strongly to small discomforts (or barely notice big ones)



These hidden senses are often the key to understanding behaviour. They can explain why your child seems off-balance, easily overwhelmed, constantly on the move, or slow to respond to needs. Understanding them gives you a new way to connect with your child- with empathy.



Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right?

Understanding Sensory Responses

Some children are hypersensitive.

They notice everything.

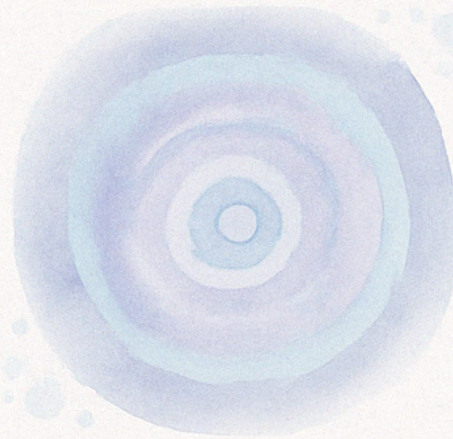
A tag in their clothing, a buzzing light, a strong smell or sudden noise might feel unbearable.

Other children are hyposensitive.

They don't register things the way others do.

They may seem to ignore pain, need constant movement, or love loud music and deep pressure.

And some children are a mix of both. It depends on the sense, the moment, or how regulated they feel.



→ **Sensory responses are not fixed.**

Your child might cope one day and struggle the next. That's completely normal.



Getting to Know Your Child's Sensory Blueprint

Every child has their own pattern of sensory strengths and sensitivities. This is sometimes called their sensory profile.

Getting to know your child's profile helps you:

- Reduce unnecessary stress
- Respond in ways that truly help
- Advocate for what they need in different settings



Start Here: Simple Observation

You don't need a diagnosis or formal assessment to begin understanding your child's sensory world.

Try this free checklist for parents:



[Beacon School Support
Sensory Checklist](#)

Then take a few minutes to reflect:

When does your child seem most calm, happy and focused?

When do they seem most overwhelmed or 'on edge'?

What types of sensations do they avoid - or seek out?



Case Study 1: Ava, Age 6

Sensory-sensitive and emotionally reactive

Ava is in Year 1 at a small village primary school. She is bright, curious and imaginative, but finds the school environment exhausting.

At home, mornings are a daily challenge. Ava often cries when getting dressed and refuses her school jumper. She becomes overwhelmed by tight clothes, seams, and scratchy materials. Brushing her hair can lead to a meltdown.

In the classroom, she holds it together, but the noise, smells and unpredictability are hard. She often appears withdrawn or overly cautious. By the end of the day, she's emotionally flooded. At home she hits her younger brother and sobs for what seems like no reason.

She dislikes messy play, noisy group activities and PE. Her teacher says Ava is "anxious and overreacts", especially when routines change.

Ava's parents describe her as incredibly loving and tuned into others' emotions. But her own emotions often come out as huge, stormy reactions they don't understand.

- Does your child avoid textures, clothes or noisy places?**
- Do they hold it together at school but unravel at home?**
- Do small changes in routine create big reactions?**



Take a moment to jot down anything this brings up for you...



Case Study 2: Yusuf, Age 10

Sensory-seeking and misunderstood in the classroom

Yusuf is in Year 5 at a lively mainstream school.

He is sporty, energetic, and creative - always on the move.

Yusuf finds sitting still in class nearly impossible. He leans on his chair, taps his feet, and fiddles constantly. He gets up without permission and sometimes bumps into other children.

He loves crashing into soft furniture, climbing, wrestling, and being outside at breaktime. He's always the one doing handstands or racing around the field.

He's been told off for 'not listening', 'being silly,' and annoying others.

But when he gets a movement break or access to fidget tools, he's calmer and more able to focus.

Yusuf is kind & funny, but struggles with friendship boundaries. He often uses too much force or misses social cues.



Could this be your child too?

**Does your child seem to need movement or deep pressure?
Are they often labelled as disruptive when they're actually dysregulated?**

Do they struggle with force or boundaries in play?

Note down anything you've noticed...



Case Study 3:

Mia, Age 13

Quiet, overwhelmed and masking

Mia is in Year 8 at a large secondary school. She has no formal diagnosis but her parents have long suspected she is autistic.

Mia excels academically and never causes trouble at school. But she finds the busy corridors, harsh lighting and constant noise extremely stressful. She wears noise-reducing earplugs discreetly and avoids crowded places when she can.



Could this be your child too?

Is your child highly sensitive to noise, light or social overwhelm?

Do they mask or 'hold it in' at school and crash at home?

Are they praised for being 'no trouble' while inside, they're exhausted?



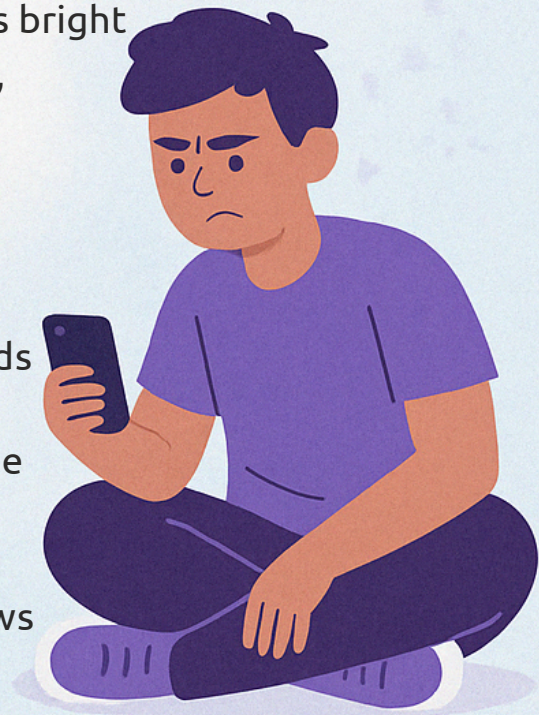
Write down any thoughts or similarities you notice...



Case Study 4: Leo, Age 16 Late-diagnosed and emotionally dysregulated

Leo is in Year 11 and was recently diagnosed as autistic. He has always been described as bright and intense — passionate about gaming, science fiction and programming.

Leo struggles with self-care. He finds showering physically unpleasant and avoids it unless prompted. He hates being touched, even by family, and finds crowds and noise unbearable. He often refuses to go into school. If he does go, he spends the day masking — then explodes with anger at home. He sometimes lashes out verbally or throws things.



Leo says he feels flooded or on edge but doesn't know why. He often forgets to eat or drink and stays up late gaming. His parents are worried. They want to support him but don't know where to start.

Could this be your child too?

- Is your teen burnt out, withdrawn or explosive at home?
- Do they struggle with hygiene, food or emotional regulation?
- Have sensory differences become more obvious with age?



Jot down any ways this resonates for you or your teen...

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Try This: Noticing Patterns

Take a few moments to reflect. Use this space if it helps:

What moments in your day feel hardest right now?

Morning routines? Transitions? Social situations?

What does your child seem to avoid or be overwhelmed by?

Sounds, smells, textures, movement, unpredictability?

What do they seek out or seem to need more of?

Movement, pressure, quiet time, predictability?

When does your child feel most calm, confident or

connected? What's happening in the environment at that time?



What Helps... and What Doesn't?

Gentle Guidance for Supporting Your Child's Sensory Needs

Sensory differences can show up in different –
and sometimes opposite – ways.

Some children are sensitive to sensations. Others
are under-reactive and may not notice
things easily.

Many are a mix of both.

The more you understand how your child
responds to the world, the easier it becomes
to support them.

✓ What Helps Children Who Are Sensitive to Sensory Input (Hypersensitive)



Calming, low-stimulation environments

Reduce background noise, harsh lighting, clutter, and visual distractions.

Offer quiet retreat spaces, like a cosy den or corner with blanket, headphones, or low lighting.



Predictability and preparation

Give warnings before changes, use visual schedules or timers, and keep routines as consistent as possible.



Gentle, validating communication

Acknowledge their experience:

“It makes sense that the hand dryer is too loud,” or “I can see that feels really uncomfortable.”



Tools to reduce overwhelm

Try ear defenders, soft clothing, tinted glasses or fidget toys that offer comfort rather than stimulation.



Escape plans

Let your child know they can leave the room, ask for help or take a break when things get too much



What Helps-Children Who Are Under-Responsive to Sensory Input (Hyposensitive)



Opportunities for movement and impact

Heavy work and high-intensity movement help the body, 'wake up.' Think: trampolining, running, bear crawls, lifting, climbing



Intentional sensory input

Offer chewing gum, crunchy or sour snacks, vibrating toothbrushes, weighted lap pads, or handheld massagers



Interactive environments

Let them explore environments that are dynamic and engaging—obstacle courses, water play, building, throwing, bouncing



Purposeful fidgeting

Allow standing desks, therabands on chair legs, or small fidgets that involve resistance



Frequent sensory breaks

These kids may need regular, scheduled movement breaks throughout the day to stay regulated and focussed



What Doesn't Help

(for Any Sensory Profile):



Dismissing their experience

Saying “It’s not that bad” or “You’re being dramatic” teaches children not to trust their body.



Forcing sensory input

Don’t make them eat foods they dislike, wear uncomfortable clothes, or stay in distressing situations “to get used to it.”



Expecting self-regulation without support

Children need tools, not just instructions. “Calm down” isn’t helpful unless they know how to do that.



Assuming quiet means okay

Some children shut down when overwhelmed. Just because they aren’t “acting out” doesn’t mean they’re coping.



Reflection









Which description fits my child best —
sensory sensitive, sensory seeking, or both?

What's one change I could make in our
environment or routine to better support their
needs?

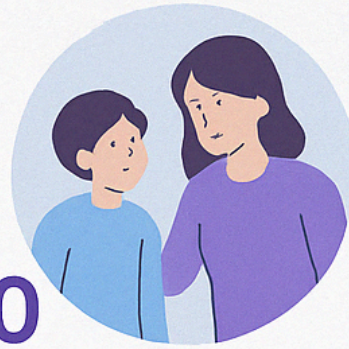
What signs do I see when they are over-stimulated?
What about when they are under-stimulated?

Sensory Support at a Glance

What Helps Children Who Are
Hypersensitive vs Hyposensitive

Sensory Style		Hypersensitive (Over-Responsive)	Hyposensitive (Under-Responsive)
	Sound	Ear defenders, noise cancelling headphones	Music, rhythmic sound, alerting tones
	Touch	Soft, seamless clothing, avoid tags	Weighted blankets, textured fidgets, brushing
	Visual	Soft lighting, reduce visual clutter	Bright colours, motion toys, light-up visuals
	Smell/Taste	Mild or familiar smells, avoid strong perfumes or mixed foods	Strong flavours, scented putty, crunchy or sour snacks
	Movement	Gentle movement like rocking or stretching	Heavy work, climbing, running, bouncing
	Routine	Predictable, slow pace, lots of prep for transitions	Frequent change, sensory "fuel stops" through the day
	Activities	Low-arousal: drawing, puzzles, audio stories	High-input: rough-and-tumble, building, water play
	Regulation Tools	Calming: breathing games, cosy corners, mindfulness cards	Alerting: body wake-ups, big squeezes, chewies, energising games

WHAT CAN I ACTUALLY DO TO HELP MY CHILD TODAY?



Everyday Strategies at Home and School

Supporting your child doesn't have to mean overhauling your whole life. Small, consistent adjustments can reduce overwhelm, increase regulation, and build connection.

This section gives practical ideas across key daily moments - at home and at school.

At Home

Morning Routines

For sensory-sensitive children:

- Lay out soft, tag free clothes the night before
- Let them get dressed in a warm, quiet space with low light
- Use a visual timetable to reduce verbal instructions
- Offer calming sensory tools first thing (a.g. compression vest, deep pressure cuddle)

For sensory-seeking children:

- Start the day with heavy movement-jumping jacks, bear walks, trampoline
- Use music to energise and get their body "online"
- Allow chewing gum or crunchy snacks while getting ready
- Build a race or game element into the routine for fun and stimulation



Mealtimes



For sensory-sensitive children:

- Keep smells, colours, and textures simple
- Let them eat familiar foods without pressure - low noise and low demand
- Offer alternatives to cutlery (e.g. finger foods, fun utensils)

For sensory-seeking children:

- Let them sit on a wobble cushion or stand while eating
- Offer strong flavours and crunchy textures to meet sensory needs, small and engaging portions e.g. bento boxes, choice boards
- Build in oral sensory input before or after meals (e.g. chewies, water bottles with straws)





Transitions (home to school, activity to activity)

For sensory-sensitive children:

- Use timers or countdowns before changing activities
- Let them bring a comfort item or sensory tool during transitions
- Offer choices when possible (e.g. "coat or hoodie?", "stairs or lift")
- Build in quiet recovery time after busy transitions

For sensory-seeking children:

- Use movement as part of the transition (e.g. hop to the car, carry the school bag)
- Offer a movement break before leaving the house
- Use energising language or songs to make transitions more motivating
- Let them choose something tactile to carry (e.g. a squishy, textured object)



🌙 Evening Wind-Down

For sensory-sensitive children:

- Offer a predictable bedtime routine with dim lighting and quiet activities
- Use weighted blankets, soft bedding, or body brushing
- Avoid screens close to bedtime
- Try guided meditation or visual storybooks with soothing audio



For sensory-seeking children:

- Provide heavy movement play before the bedtime routine (eg. obstacle course, climbing)
- Use resistance-based calming (e.g. squeezes, massage, yoga)
- Use rhythmic routines—same order, same sound cues (music or white noise)



At School



For sensory-sensitive children:

- Seat them away from noise, bright displays, or drafts
- Allow ear defenders or subtle in-ear plugs
- Provide written or visual instructions instead of lots of talking
- Use a calm-down signal or pass for when things feel too much

For sensory-seeking children:

- Offer a movement seat, standing desk or fidget tools
- Use frequent "body breaks" - include walking to the office, pushing a trolley
- Let them chew gum or drink through a straw (if allowed)
- Keep tasks short and active when possible - more doing, less sitting



Breaktimes

For sensory-sensitive children:

- Provide a quiet retreat space away from busy playgrounds
- Let them read, draw, or sit with one friend in a known space
- Offer options that give a sense of safety and predictability
- Avoid forced participation in loud, unpredictable games



For sensory-seeking children:

- Set up heavy movement opportunities - monkey bars, tyres, climbing walls
- Encourage active roles like helping carry, push or build
- Let them lead short physical games or treasure hunts
- Offer options for both stimulation and regulation (e.g, run, then swing, then quiet bench)



Transitions at School

(between lessons, entering/leaving)



For sensory-sensitive children:

- Allow them to leave class a few minutes early to avoid crowds
- Use a predictable locker or storage system
- Let them use the toilet or quiet area during transitions
- Pair with a trusted adult or calm peer

For sensory-seeking children:

- Offer jobs with movement (delivering notes, carrying books)
- Build short movement breaks into timetable changes
- Encourage fidgets or body-based countdowns (e.g, stomp 10 steps to next class)
- Give them a small "mission" between spaces (e.g, "find 3 red things on the way")

Understanding Interoception:

The Hidden Sense

Interoception is our internal sensory system that helps us perceive internal body signals.



Many children with interoception challenges struggle to notice or interpret physical signals like hunger, thirst, temperature, and emotional states.

For children, especially those who are neurodivergent, developing interoceptive awareness is crucial for emotional regulation and overall wellbeing.

Interoceptive difficulties can lead to increased distress, or even explosive behaviour, because they didn't feel the early warning signs in their body.



Helping your child strengthen their interoceptive awareness builds a vital foundation for recognising emotions and managing them with confidence.





Strategies to Enhance Interoceptive Awareness

Here are some practical strategies to help your child develop interoceptive awareness:



Body Talk

Encourage your child to describe how their body feels in different situations. For example, “My heart is beating fast when I’m excited.” This helps them connect physical sensations with emotions.



Mindful Check-Ins

Set aside moments during the day for your child to pause and notice their internal sensations. Ask questions like, “How does your stomach feel right now?” or “Do you feel warm or cold?”



Use Visual Supports

Create visual schedules that include reminders for meals, bathroom breaks, and rest times. Visual cues can assist children who struggle to notice these internal signals on their own.



4. Engage in Sensory Activities

Activities like yoga, deep breathing exercises, and sensory play can help children become more attuned to their internal states. For instance, practicing yoga poses can enhance body awareness and promote relaxation.

5. Model Interoceptive Awareness

Demonstrate your own awareness by verbalizing your internal sensations. For example, “I feel a bit tired; I think I’ll rest for a while.” This modeling can encourage your child to do the same.





Reflection Questions

What internal sensations does your child frequently notice or overlook?

How does your child typically respond to feelings of hunger, fatigue, or emotional distress?

What strategies have you found effective in helping your child tune into their internal states?

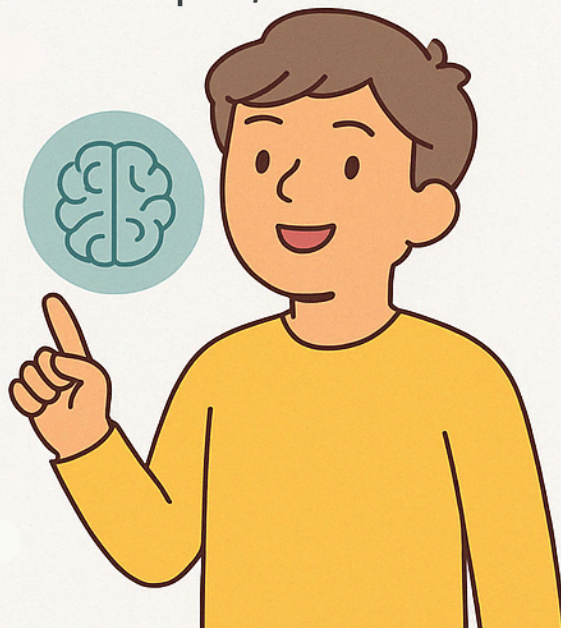


Summary & Key Takeaways

What Is Sensory Processing:

Unlocking the Link Between Everyday Struggles and Your Child's Sensory World

- Sensory processing affects how children experience the world — from sounds and textures to movement and internal body cues.
- Sensory differences can show up as sensitivity (e.g., overwhelmed by noise) or seeking (e.g., craving movement).
- Interoception is the "hidden sense" that helps children notice internal signals like hunger, tiredness, or emotions.
- When interoception is underdeveloped, children may struggle to recognize or respond to their feelings, leading to emotional outbursts or shutdowns.





Bringing It All Together

You've taken the time to understand your child's sensory world - and that matters.

By pausing, noticing, and learning, you've already taken an important step in supporting their wellbeing.

This final page is a gentle space to gather your thoughts, celebrate your insights, and plan your next steps.



What's My Biggest Takeaway From This Workbook?

Maybe it's a lightbulb moment about interoception. Or a new understanding of your child's meltdowns, shutdowns or sensory needs.

Write down what's really stuck with you:









Bringing It All Together

What Are My Next Steps?

You don't have to do everything at *once*. Just *one* small change can make a big difference.

Think about what you might do next:

- Talk to my child and ask how I can support them better
- Share what I've learned with my spouse or partner
- Speak to my child's school or teacher
- Make one small sensory-friendly change at home
- Reflect on whether professional advice or assessment might help

Now, jot down the first step that feels right for you:

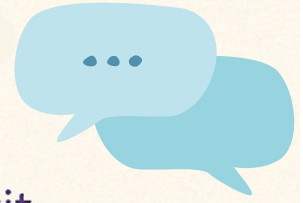








A Message From Lucy



If you've found something helpful in this kit – something that made you breathe a little easier or helped your child feel a little more understood – I want you to know: there's more support where that came from.

If you're in the UK, you're warmly invited to join **Everlief Parent Club** – my membership community where we go even deeper together. Inside, you'll find step-by-step tools, calm guidance, and real conversations about how to support your neurodivergent child's wellbeing – and your own. We'd love to welcome you.

Parents everywhere can also explore my other workbooks and printables designed to support anxious or neurodivergent children in practical, reassuring ways.

Visit: www.theyarethefuture.co.uk/resources

No pressure at all – just an open door.

Dr Lucy Russell
Clinical Psychologist & Parent

