



sensory
integration
education

This is a UK-based guide to
accessing a sensory integration
practitioner.

Accessing a Sensory Integration Practitioner

What is Sensory Integration?

Sensory integration (SI), sometimes called sensory processing, refers to the processes in the brain that make sense of the information coming in from our senses, giving us information about what is happening outside and inside our body.

Difficulties with sensory integration or sensory processing can cause under or over reactions to sensory signals and contribute to challenges with motor skills, and with more complex planning and organisation tasks. Sensory integration difficulties can co-occur with other diagnoses including autism, ADHD, OCD, developmental delays and others.





What is Sensory Integration Therapy?

Sensory integration therapy (or SI interventions) includes structured exposure to sensory input; movement therapy; balance treatments; carefully designed and customised physical activities; and accommodations (eg, changes to the environment or routine). You may sometimes see it referred to as Ayres Sensory Integration® or ASI after the pioneer of sensory integration theory and therapy: Dr A Jean Ayres.

An SI Practitioner may work with the client, their family, carers, school, other allied health professionals or employer (as appropriate) to create a 'sensory diet' for that specific client. A sensory diet is a recommended suite of activities and accommodations (that can be carried out both in therapy sessions and at home or school) to help give that individual the sensory input they need.

You can find out more about the [evidence base for sensory integration therapy here](#).

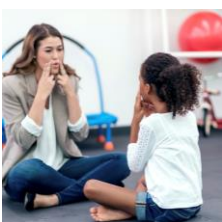
SI Practitioners

Sensory integration therapy should only be carried out by a qualified SI Practitioner: this is a qualified occupational therapist, speech and language therapist or physiotherapist who has undertaken additional, rigorous postgraduate training in SI. This training involves developing a detailed understanding of the neuroscience and evidence base underpinning sensory integration as well as developing expertise in assessing and providing intervention for people with sensory integration or sensory processing problems.

In the UK, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy are all [allied health professions](#) and are all regulated by the [Health and Care Professions Council](#) (HCPC):



Occupational therapists (OTs) support people of all ages with a range of interventions to enable them to return to or optimise participation in all the activities (occupations) that people do; for example, caring for themselves and others, working, learning, playing and interacting with others.



Speech and language therapists (SLTs) in the UK provide treatment, support and care for children and adults who have difficulties with communication, or with eating, drinking and swallowing.



Physiotherapists address problems of impairment, activity and participation and manage recovering, stable and deteriorating conditions – particularly those associated with the neuro-muscular, musculo-skeletal, cardio-vascular and respiratory systems – through advice, treatment, rehabilitation, health promotion and supporting behavioural change.

As Allied Health Practitioners, all SI Practitioners should be registered with [Health and Care Professions Council](#) and independent therapists should have professional indemnity insurance.



SI Qualifications

Therapists trained under Sensory Integration Education, have successfully completed rigorous postgraduate qualifications accredited by Sheffield Hallam University - one of the largest allied health professions education providers in the UK. To qualify as an SI Practitioner, a practising OT, SLT or physiotherapist will have completed a [Postgraduate Certificate in Sensory Integration](#) and completed a set number of clinical practice hours under the supervision of an Advanced SI Practitioner. An Advanced Practitioner will hold a [Postgraduate Diploma in Sensory Integration](#) or possibly an [MSc in Sensory Integration](#).

Accessing an SI Practitioner

Please note that access to therapists with sensory integration training via NHS routes varies greatly and can be extremely limited. For example, NHS provision may be limited to specific services or may be only available to individuals who have specific diagnoses (eg, autism) or who attend certain schools.

With this caveat in mind, it is still worth checking NHS provision in your area.

Referral from GP: This is the first route to try. Speak with your GP about your concerns and ask if a referral to a relevant Allied Health Professional is appropriate. If your concerns are about sensory integration or sensory processing difficulties, at this stage ask if you or your child be referred to a therapist with SI training.

Referral From Health or Social Services Professionals: If you or your child regularly see a social worker, health visitor, district nurse or other healthcare professional, you can ask them if they can refer you to an NHS-based or voluntary sector therapist.

Referral from School or Nursery: If your child attends nursery or school, you can explore if they are able to refer your child for an assessment with a sensory integration trained therapist. The provision varies greatly across the country, but some schools have access to an OT and/or SLT.

Self-Referral: In some areas of the country, you can also self-refer to a physiotherapist, OT or SLT service. The reception staff of your GP or local NHS hospital should be able to advise you on how to do this and whom to contact.

Independent Therapists: The waiting list to see an independent (or private) sensory integration trained OT, SLT or physiotherapist is likely to be much shorter than an NHS based service but you will of course be charged for this service. If contacting independent therapists, try to contact more than one therapist and compare the information given. You could also have a free initial telephone conversation to gauge if you can get on with them.

You can search the [SIE SI Practitioners Register](#) for therapists with the SIE university-accredited qualifications in SI. Or you can search for independent therapists via:



[RCOT Find an Occupational Therapist](#)



[Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice \(ASLTIP\)](#)



[CSP Find a Physiotherapist](#)

...and then look for SI trained practitioners.

What Happens Next?

This varies across the UK because services are organised in different ways. In some places, demand for services is very high. For NHS therapists or those working in the voluntary sector, there may be a long waiting list: you can ask how long you may be expected to wait for an initial appointment.

If you are in contact with an independent therapist, you can arrange your initial consultation with them as soon as you both have availability.

SI Practitioners will conduct an initial consultation to assess the underlying causes to your or your child's sensory integration or sensory processing difficulties. They will discuss these findings with you and explain any changes you can make at home, school or work and, if appropriate, set an individualised plan of therapy.

Initial Questions to Ask Your Therapist



Are you registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)? You can check their registration on the [HCPC website](#). For private practitioners, you can ask them to confirm that they have professional indemnity insurance.



Please can you explain your training in managing sensory integration difficulties?



What is your experience of working with these kinds of issues? (Therapists may specialise in addressing specific problems or working with particular age-groups.)



For independent therapists: Please tell me your fees including any additional costs, for example, providing a report to school/workplace/my GP.



Tell me about our initial consultation. Will there be a charge for this? Will it be in person or via telephone or video call? What exactly will happen during the initial consultation? Where will the sessions take place?



Will you liaise with any other professionals involved in my or my child's care? (If under an independent practitioner, ask if there will be a charge for this.)

What Should You Expect From an Initial Consultation?



The initial consultation will greatly vary depending on the difficulties that you want addressing; the setting of the consultation (eg, clinic, school or home) and on the primary profession of your SI Practitioner (eg, OT, SLT or physiotherapist).



During the initial consultation, you can expect a detailed discussion of your or your child's difficulties, daily activities, medical history and hopes for improvement. Depending on the primary profession of your SI therapist, you or your child may be physically examined and asked to attempt physical tasks as part of the assessment. ASI is a therapeutic intervention delivered through play, and so part of the assessment for children might look like the therapist is just playing with the child but the therapist is actively assessing all the time.

The therapist should also explain how they work, if and how they will liaise with other health, education or social services professionals and what they will ask you or your child to do outside of the sessions.

You should be prepared to discuss:

- What do you observe as sensory needs or sensory challenges?
- What impact are the SI difficulties having on your or your child's life?
- What activities/environments make the symptoms better or worse?
- Have you had any treatment already for the difficulties? If so, what was the outcome?
- Your or your child's medical history and any medication.
- What are you hoping to achieve from sensory integration therapy?

Following your consultation, your SI Practitioner will discuss their findings with you and, if appropriate, an individual plan of intervention which aims to improve your or your child's sensory integration. The therapy is highly individualised to the sensory profile of the child or adult and involves using structured activities to expose the individual to specific sensory input to encourage the brain and body to process and react to sensations more efficiently.

Useful Resources

[Sensory Integration Education SI Practitioners Register](#)

[Health and Care Professions Council](#)

[Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice \(ASLTIP\)](#)

[Royal College for Speech & Language Therapists \(RCSLT\)](#)

[Royal College of Occupational Therapists \(RCOT\)](#)

[Chartered Society of Physiotherapy](#)



We are a world-class, international training provider of sensory integration courses.

Established in 1994, Sensory Integration Education is a not-for-profit organisation working with allied health professionals, education and health experts, academic researchers and families to improve awareness, understanding and the treatment of sensory integration and sensory processing difficulties.