

# Sensory well-being workshops

Cindy Toloza and Victoria Holetic  
*SLAM National Eating Disorder Outpatient and Day Services*

7<sup>th</sup> September 2022

# Outline

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Introduction to sensory well being workshops

Background research

Workshop protocol & how it's evolved

Data from workshops & takeaways

Clinical adaptations & reflections

# What are sensory well-being workshops?

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*One-off workshops which offer both psychoeducational content and experiential activities to support patients by creating a soothing and helpful sensory toolkit.*

## Aims:

- Increase awareness about the sensory system
- Explore how the sensory system can help with self-regulation
- Identify strategies that enhance sensory wellbeing
- Provide participants with the language and tools to communicate their sensory needs.

# What research has found...

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- ❑ People with eating disorders with and without ASC comorbidity are hypersensitive to smells, touch and noise.
- ❑ People with anorexia nervosa report a lack of confidence, and therefore possibly insight, in their interoceptive abilities. This could result in reliance on other cues and predictions.
- ❑ There is also indication that people with eating disorders, with or without ASC comorbidity, avoid new sensory experiences. These experiences are also associated with an increased feeling of self-disgust and possibly difficulties with self-regulation.
- ❑ Both groups of people with an eating disorder and no autistic traits or high autistic traits benefitted from sensory changes made in dining rooms within treatment settings.

# Workshop protocol

## Before the workshop

- Eventbrite invitation to the workshop, includes a list of sensory items to prepare (for online workshop)
- Pre-workshop evaluation to fill out

## During the workshop

- Psychoeducation (sensory system, individual differences to sensitivities, self-regulation)
- Discussion (sensory motor check list, sensory strategies)
- DIY (creating their own sensory well-being tool box)
- Takeaways

## After the workshop

- Communication passport
- Sensory wellbeing booklet
- Post-workshop questionnaire

# How has it evolved over time?

2020

- Started with in person workshops for inpatient (IP) and day services (DS)
- Adapted for online delivery via TEAMS during COVID for DS, continued in person for IP
- Added menti-meter to make it more interactive

2021

- Added proprioception and interoception as part of the psychoeducation
- Hybrid workshop- ran online (psychoeducation) and in person (discussion) for multiple services

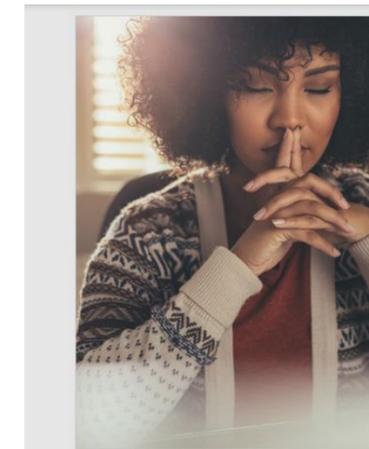
2022

- Online workshop open to both DS and outpatients
- Added grounding exercise
- Back to in person for day services

1. Please fill in the pre-workshop questionnaire (link in the [chatbox](#))

2. Please scan the QR code to go to the [Mentimeter](#) voting page

Or: go to [www.menti.com/](http://www.menti.com/) and enter the code 34 85 02



## Interoception

the '7th sense'

The body's ability to sense itself from inside

feel how deep the breath is  
feel muscle tension  
feel heart rate  
feel hunger, fullness

## 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.

 **What are 5 things you can see?** Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.

 **What are 4 things you can feel?** Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.

 **What are 3 things you can hear?** Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.

 **What are 2 things you can smell?** Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.

 **What is 1 thing you can taste?** Carry gum, candy, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors.

# AWARENESS

## What are the 5 senses...

Our senses refer to the way in which we process and perceive the world around us in our brains.



We all process our senses slightly differently.

Some people are **hypersensitive**, meaning they are highly sensitive, and some people are **hyposensitive**, meaning they have lowered sensitivity.

# PRACTICAL TOOLS

### Sensory box

A box of your favourite sensory items

### Sensory jars filled with glitter

Make your own: jar, glitter, glue, and water

### Stress balls

Balloons filled with flour/rice/beans

### Voice recordings

Recording family members/friends/yourself saying things you know you like to hear when you are feeling anxious or upset

### Creating an essential oil spray

Essential oils are mixed with water in a spray bottle for a calming mix

## DIY



# EXPLORE

**TOUCH (TACTILE INPUT):**

- Twist own hair
- Move keys or coins in pocket with your hand
- Cool shower
- Warm bath
- Receive a massage
- Pet a dog or cat
- Drum fingers or pencil on table
- Rub gently on skin or clothes

Fidget with the following:

- a straw
- paper clips
- cuticle or nails
- pencil or pen
- earring or necklace
- keys while talking
- put fingers near mouth, eye, nose

**LOOK (VISUAL INPUT):**  
How do you react to:

- Open window
- Watch a fire in fireplace
- Watch a fish tank
- Watch a sunset or sunrise
- a rose colored room
- dim lighting
- fluorescent lighting
- sunlight through bedroom window
- Watch "oil and water" toys when sleeping
- a cluttered desk or room when needing to concentrate

**LISTEN (AUDITORY INPUT):**  
How do you react to:

- Listen to classical music
- Listen to Hard Rock
- Listen to others "hum"
- work in "quiet room"
- work in "noisy room"
- sing or talk to self
- scratch on a chalkboard
- "squeak" of a mechanical pencil
- fire siren
- waking to an unusual noise
- trying to sleep with noise outside
- dog barking (almost constantly)

## The Sensory-Motor Preference Checklist

Review the Sensory-Motor Preference Checklist.

Which types of sensory input are comforting?

Which types of sensory input bother your nervous system?

# STRATEGIES

## Discussion

Your sensory strategies:  
What are small things you can do to change your sensory inputs?

Time to take out your sensory items!  
If you don't have any at hand, we've prepared the next few slides to help →



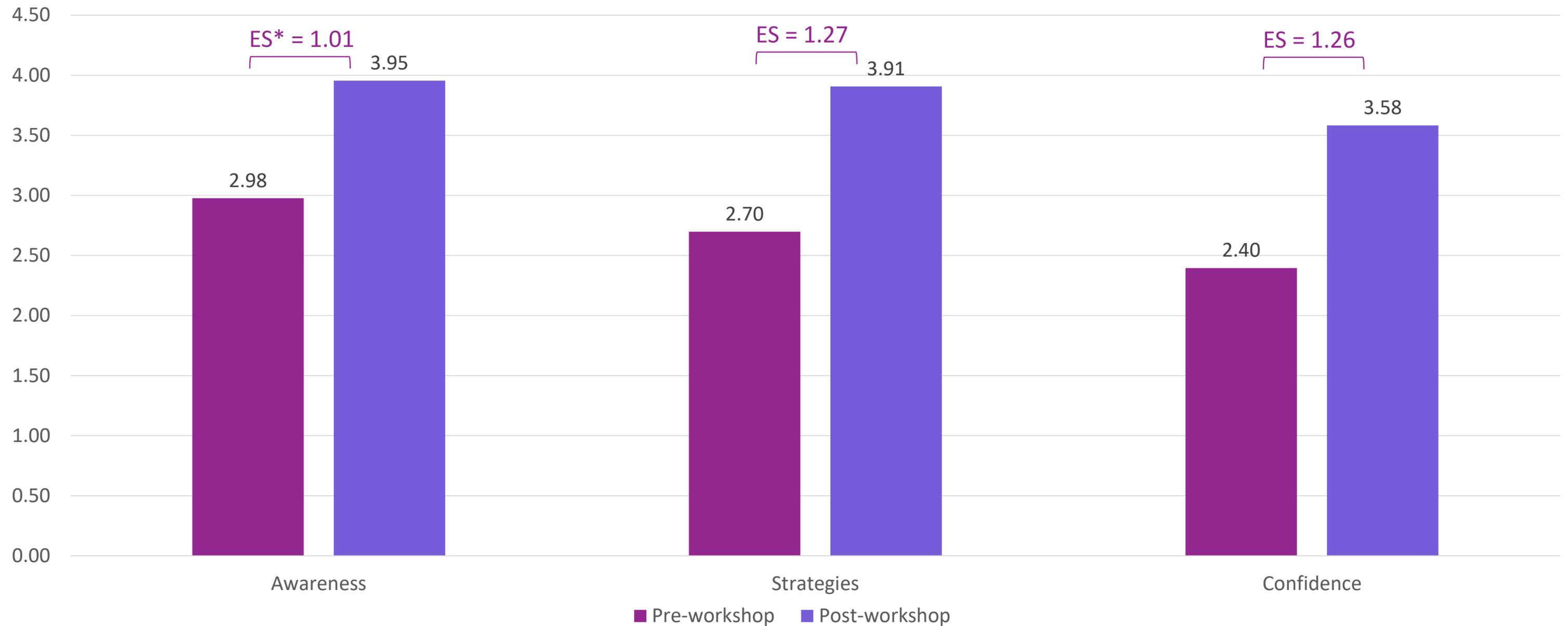


# Data gathering

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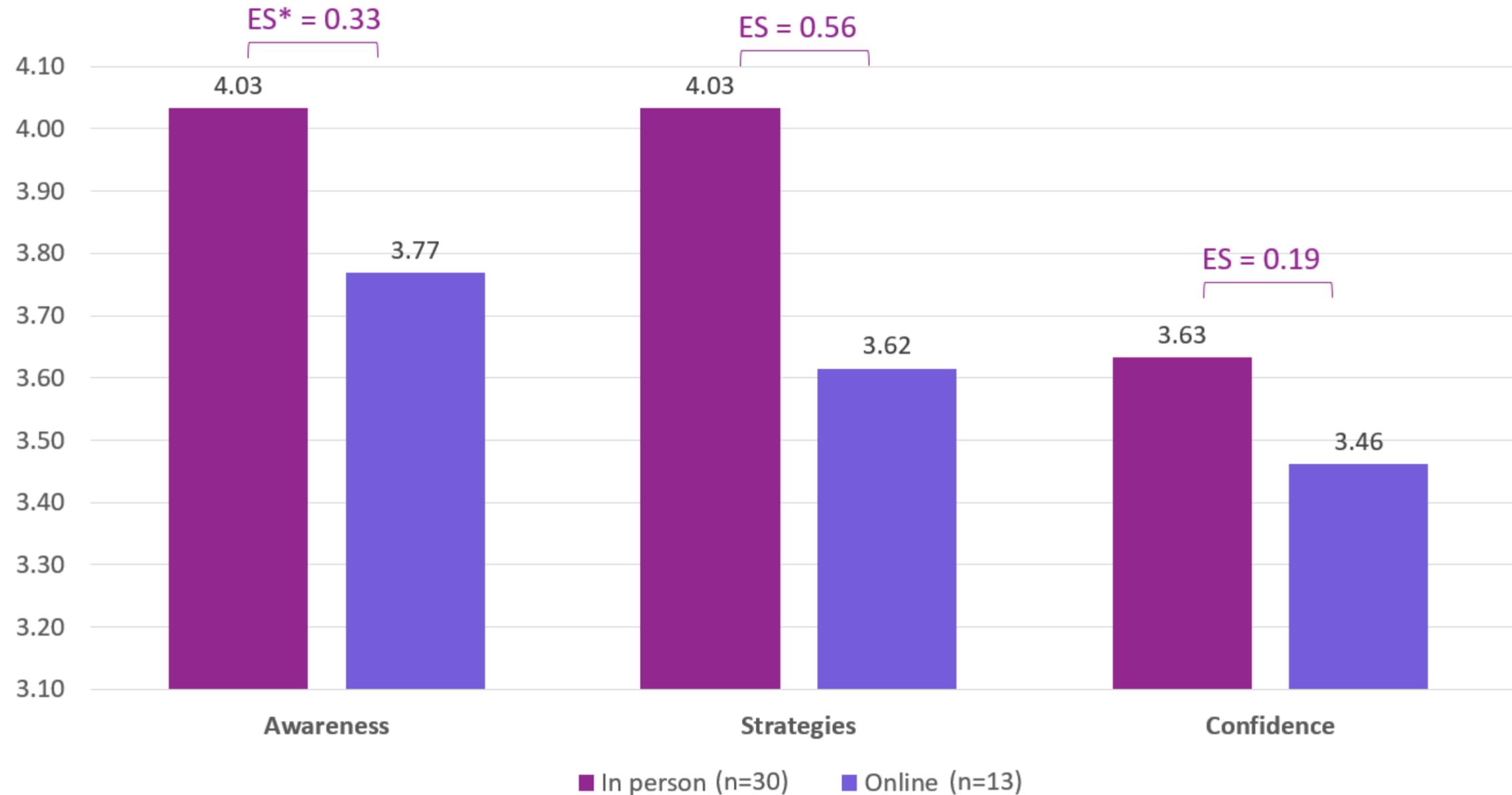
<b>January 2020 – February 2021</b>	<b>August 2021 – August 2022</b>
Six workshops	Five more workshops
Four in person, two online	Three in person, two online
27 participants with 26 completed measures	28 participants with 17 completed measures

# Post-workshop Measures (n=43)



\*Cohen's  $d$  used for effect sizes; **0.2 = Small effect size. 0.5 = Medium effect size. 0.8 = Large effect size**

# In person vs Online workshops



\*Hedge's  $g$  used for effect sizes due to the difference in group sizes; **0.2 = Small effect size. 0.5 = Medium effect size. 0.8 = Large effect size**

# In person workshops' qualitative data

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## Theme one: Raises awareness about the senses

- *“Recognising what is helpful and unhelpful”*
- *“The interaction of the workshop and how informative it was all together”*

## Theme two: A space for discussion and connecting with others

- *“Ability to express yourself and share your opinion, practice different senses (smell, touch, visual)”*
- *“Getting understanding of other people's experiences of senses, e.g. how different we are or how we relate.”*

## Theme 3: Provides practical tools to explore senses and build sensory tool box

- *“Making my own hand cream was a highlight and I loved trying the weighted blanket”*
- *“Earbuds will be very useful to have on ward”*
- *“It was lovely to have a few other soothing items to take away, too, as well as the snowman and the hand-creams (e.g. squishy man, tinsel, pompoms).”*

## Theme 4: Suggestions for future improvements

- *“Harder plastic fidget toys, more space in room during presentation- better layout”*
- *“Could include sound/music and responses to that”*
- *“It might have been good to have slightly more time for the workshop”*

# Online workshops' qualitative data

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## Theme one: Raises awareness about the senses

- *"I liked learning about the senses as I had little knowledge before"*
- *"I learned about interoception and also feel more able to differentiate between physical (sensory) induced distress and emotional distress"*

## Theme two: A space for discussion and connecting with others

- *"Sharing ideas about how to manage the senses"*
- *"Hearing others experiences"*

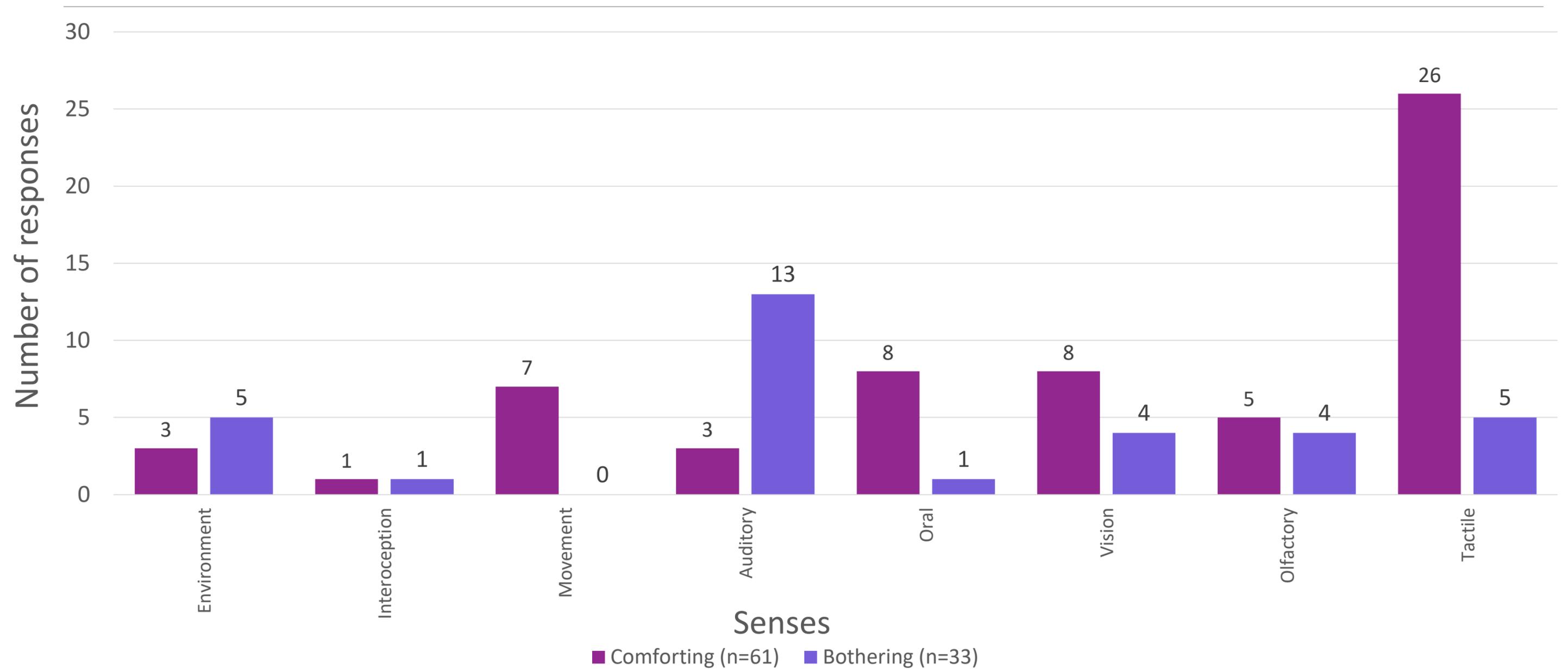
## Theme 3: Provides ideas to create own sensory tool box

- *"Discovering other types of sensory toys to help calm me down"*
- *"Identifying which sensory strategies were most applicable to me."*

## Theme 4: Content/structure of the workshop

- *"It was very chilled and informal with lots of different information"*
- *"The way it was structured with a slideshow"*
- *"The mentimeter"*

# Mentimeter results



# Ideas for future workshops

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- ❑ Allow for more time to reflect on service users' learning from the workshops and how this is translated to everyday life in the form of shorter follow-up groups (approx. 30 mins)
- ❑ Making the language more accessible e.g. from hyposensitivity -> low sensitivity
- ❑ We are planning to implement a practical element throughout the workshop to keep engagement up rather than having this at the end
- ❑ Include more focus on emotion regulation as this is linked to sensory differences.  
Such as:
  - ❑ Alexithymia
  - ❑ How low sensory awareness impacts ability to recognise emotions
  - ❑ How recognising emotions correctly is the first step to emotion regulation

# Clinical adaptations

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- ❑ Case example in day services of a patient with ASD and struggling to remain alert and engaged in groups:
  - ❑ Staff implemented sensory strategies learned in the workshop of using a fidget toy, drinking cold water, sucking on sour sweets, and movement of toes and fingers to support them in the programme.
- ❑ Other examples of adaptations in group and individual therapy:
  - ❑ Having less "clutter" in the room
  - ❑ Minimising noise levels
  - ❑ Offering sensory toys or cushions
  - ❑ Calibrating the seating arrangement in therapy sessions
  - ❑ Adjusting the lighting if possible
  - ❑ Having a sensory room available in the service
- ❑ Use of communication passport and sensory well being booklet (post-workshop)
  - ❑ Service user and staff team has a new way of communicating through written form, and both are aware of the service users' sensory sensitivities
  - ❑ Future clinicians working with service user will also benefit from this

# Reflections

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- ❑ Facilitators valued being part of the experiential process. It was an opportunity to explore their own sensory sensitivities, discover strategies we already use and learn new ones. It was helpful to raise own awareness of this.
- ❑ Getting involved in the workshop as facilitators helps to break down power dynamics present between the clinician and service users
- ❑ Sensations are something everyone experiences and can be easily taken for granted. Both clinicians and service users found it helpful to name things we experience as soothing or bothering.
- ❑ As shown in qualitative and quantitative analysis, our service users really enjoyed the experience of the workshops – it was a fun way to get to know ourselves and each other.

# Further reading and resources

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- ❑ Kinnaird, E., Dandil, Y., Li, Z., Smith, K., Pimblett, C., Agbalaya, R., Stewart, C., & Tchanturia, K. (2020). Pragmatic Sensory Screening in Anorexia Nervosa and Associations with Autistic Traits. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 9(1182)
- ❑ Kinnaird, E., Stewart, C., & Tchanturia, K. (2020), Interoception in Anorexia Nervosa: Exploring Associations with Alexithymia and Autistic Traits. *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11(64)
- ❑ Tchanturia, K., Baillie, C., Biggs, C., Carr, A., Harrison, A., Li, Z., McFie, C., Oyeleye, O., & Toloza, C. (2021). Sensory wellbeing workshops for inpatient and day-care patients with anorexia nervosa. *Neuropsychiatry*, 36, 51-59.
- ❑ Tchanturia, K. (Ed.). (2021). *Supporting autistic people with eating disorders: A guide to adapting treatment and supporting recovery*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- ❑ PEACE pathway website: <https://www.peacepathway.org/>
  - ❑ Sensory Communication Passport: <https://www.peacepathway.org/download/35>
  - ❑ Sensory Wellbeing Booklet: <https://www.peacepathway.org/download/8>
- ❑ Book: [Living Sensationally by Winnie Dunn](#)
- ❑ TED talk: [Virginia Spielmann TED talk: Your sensory health matters. Here's why](#)

# Thank you for listening!

Q&A coming up...