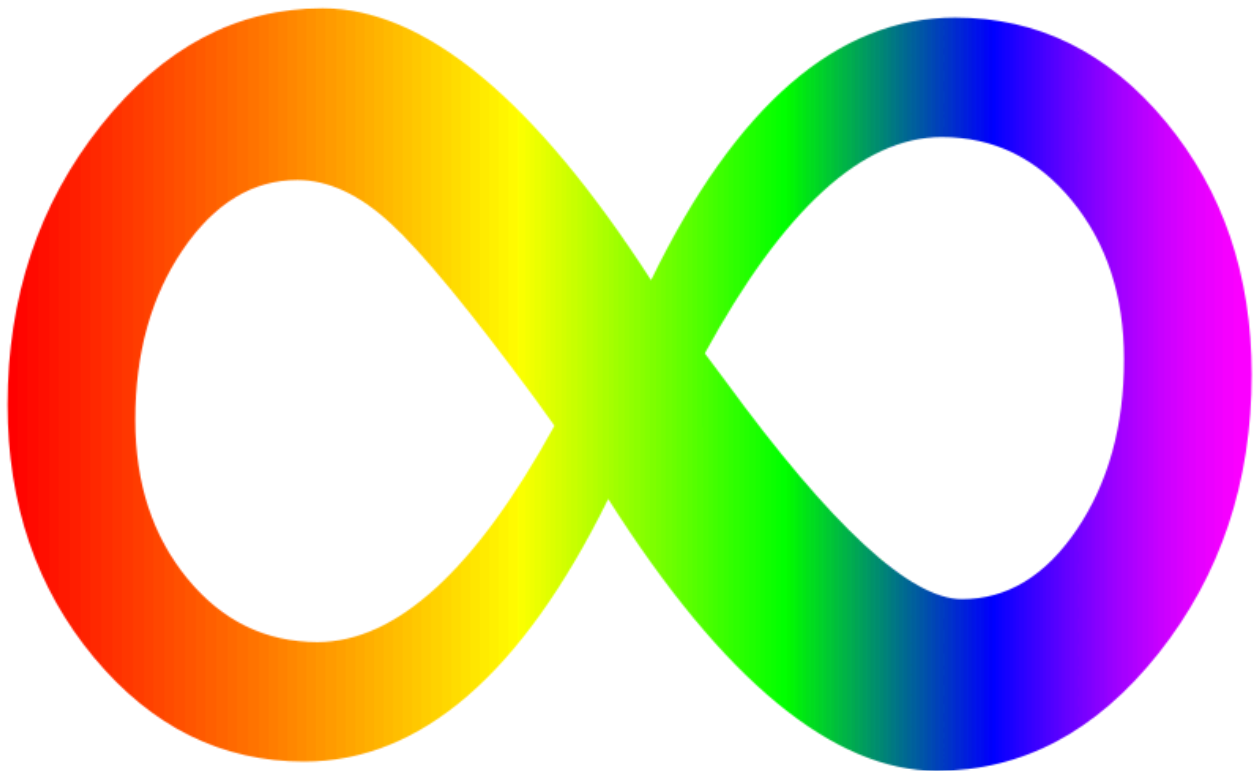


# The Peaceful Hug

*A multi-sensory jacket*



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# Vision

My vision is a world where every child, regardless of their sensory needs, has access to the tools and support they need to reach their full potential. I envision a future where sensory challenges are understood, accepted and accommodated. I aim to create partnerships with educators, therapists and organisations to promote awareness and accessibility of sensory-friendly products in schools and communities.

In classrooms worldwide, children with additional learning needs face countless challenges due to sensory sensitivities. Study shows that 76% of autistic children and 61% of children with ADHD have differences in their sensory patterns (Dean *et al*, 2022).

Sensory difficulties can affect all senses and it is essential to understand the impact and intensity of these sensory issues.

## What does it look like?

Children who face sensory challenges experience difficulties in processing and responding to sensory information from their environment. Sensory challenges can affect various senses, including sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, and can manifest in a wide range of behaviours and responses (Critz, Blake, Nogueira 2015).

Common sensory challenges:

- Auditory challenges: sensitivity to loud noises, difficulty filtering background noise.
- Visual challenges: sensitivity to bright lights, discomfort with visual clutter.
- Tactile challenges: sensitivity to textures, aversion to certain clothing materials.
- Gustatory challenges: sensitivity to tastes and textures of food.
- Olfactory challenges: sensitivity to strong smells or aversion to certain scents.
- Proprioceptive challenges: difficulty with body awareness and coordination.
- Vestibular challenges: sensitivity to movement and balance (Holland, 2022).

Children with sensory issues find it difficult to concentrate and often get overwhelmed and distressed in classrooms. These issues may trigger emotional responses such as anxiety, frustration or even aggression. Some children may also develop avoidance behaviours, steering clear of certain activities or environments that trigger sensory discomfort. This avoidance can impact their participation in educational experiences. The classroom, intended as a safe space for learning, now becomes a source of stress and confusion. Studies suggest that sensory impairments negatively influence academic outcomes in children (Butera *et al*, 2021).

## What is The Peaceful Hug?

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The Peaceful Hug is a multi-sensory jacket that integrates every sensory aspect children need for comfort and focus. The Peaceful Hug recognises the importance of sensory experiences in shaping a child's growth and well-being. Just as infants and toddlers explore the world through their senses in the early years, The Peaceful Hug provides children with a safe and supportive environment to navigate sensory input effectively.

Key features:

- Removable weights that provide calming deep pressure. This is included due to the ongoing evidence that weighted blankets and jackets help reduce anxiety and stress, give improved routines and help children relax throughout the day. Particularly for children with autism and adhd, the use of pressure therapy improves attention and reduces hyperactive movements (Lockett, 2023). Keeping them removable ensures children can use the jacket as much as they would like as It is only recommended to wear weighted jackets for 20 minutes at a time (NHS, 2022).
- A noise cancelling hood that is made from specialised material that blocks 10-30 decibels of sound.
- An eye mask that can be pulled down or folded up.
- Sensory and fidget customizable attachments that allow the child to engage their sense of touch and movement. Including velcro strips allow for easy attachment of fidget tools, meeting each child's unique preferences.
- Sensory friendly seams and tags that are flat made with soft materials to minimise discomfort.

- Discreet pockets for visual stim tools like glitter tubes or textured visual aids.
- Easy to manage closures like magnetic or velcro fastenings instead of buttons or zippers. Making it easier for children with fine motor challenges to dress independently.
- Temperature regulation. The use of breathable and moisture wicking materials to help regulate body temperature
- There will also be reflective elements to enhance visibility and safety, particularly useful for individuals who may wonder or have difficulty with spatial awareness.

## Why is it better than traditional solutions?

Unlike traditional solutions such as weighted blankets, noise cancelling headphones, loose fidget toys and visual aids and eye masks. This jacket is an all-in-one solution designed with the specific needs of these children in mind.

While weighted blankets offer pressure, they lack the portability of the jacket, limiting its effectiveness outside the home.

Noise cancelling headphones, although effective, can break in distressing times or easily get lost. Carrying these around can be an inconvenience for children. When needing noise and sight reduction, the child can simply put up their hood and pull down the eyemask.

## What are the benefits of using The Peaceful Hug?

- Acts as a shield - providing a controlled, comfortable space for children who begin to feel overwhelming sensations.
- Aid with daily transitions - Daily transitions, whether from home to school or one activity to another, can be a source of immense stress for children with additional learning needs (Martinelli, 2024). The Peaceful Hug is a companion through these transitions. It becomes a comforting constant in a world that may feel chaotic and unpredictable.
- Helps manage emotional responses - As we know sensory difficulties can evoke powerful emotional responses, from anxiety to frustration (Neff, 2023). These emotional hurdles not only impact a child's well-being but also reduce their ability to participate in classroom activities. The peaceful hug should soothe children and help them to manage their emotional responses, reduce stress and promote emotional well-being.
- Helps maintain focus - The Peaceful Hug will act as a tool to help children regain focus during activities, fostering a beneficial learning environment.
- Social Interactions - Sensory challenges can impact a child's ability to engage in social interactions and develop peer relationships (Kojovic *et al*, 2019). The Peaceful Hug should promote social inclusion and provide strategies for managing sensory issues in social settings.
- Support for Caregivers: The Peaceful Hug can provide relief and support for caregivers by offering a practical solution to manage their child's sensory challenges. It may reduce

stress and anxiety for caregivers and enable them to better support their child's needs.

- Empowers independence - With customizable features and sensory tools, children can learn to self-regulate and advocate for their sensory needs, fostering independence and confidence.
- Raises awareness - The development of the sensory jacket raises awareness about the importance of sensory processing in children's development and learning.

## Potential challenges

- The peaceful hug is not a discreet solution - some children may not want to wear it in public or in the classroom due to this.
- Children may grow out of it quickly and so repurchasing often may get expensive for parents or caregivers.
- There is a risk that children may become overly reliant on the sensory jacket as a coping mechanism, potentially affecting their ability to develop self-regulation skills and adapt to sensory stimuli independently.
- Potential overstimulation - While the sensory jacket aims to provide comfort and regulation, there's a risk of overstimulation if the jacket is not used appropriately.
- With multiple adjustments, the sensory jacket may be inconvenient to clean.
- Personal Preferences: Children's preferences and comfort are paramount, and some children may simply not like the sensation or feel of wearing the sensory jacket, leading to reluctance or refusal to use it.

## Stakeholders

The key stakeholders of the Peaceful Hug are children and families who play a central role in the development and utilisation of the product.

Educators and therapists are also involved in supporting children with sensory challenges in educational and therapeutic settings. Their collaboration and expertise are essential for successful integration and implementation of the jacket. This includes healthcare professionals such as paediatricians, occupational therapists and speech therapists who may provide recommendations and guidance regarding the use of the Peaceful Hug as a part of a treatment plan for children with sensory challenges.

## An Empathy-driven design

As the creator of the Peaceful Hug, I bring a combination of personal experience, professional expertise, and a passion for supporting children with additional learning needs. As a parent to two amazing children with autism and ADHD, I intimately understand the daily struggles faced by families dealing with sensory challenges and through my own experience, I am committed to developing innovative solutions that help children with additional learning needs.

## Marketing and Promotion

Strategies for promotion:

- Online platforms; Facebook, Instagram
- Dedicated website
- Collaboration with schools, therapy centres, organisations and support groups

A combination of strategies should be used to effectively promote the sensory jacket.

Funding:

- National Lottery
- Children In Need
- Swansea Stadium
- Lloyds Bank
- WCVA

All of which fund projects in the health, education and environmental sectors.

Since Sensory processing disorder (SPD) was first theorised in the 1970s by occupational therapist and psychologist Anna Jean Ayres, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of addressing sensory challenges in young children to support their overall development and well-being (McArthur, 2022). In response to this need, innovative solutions such as the Peaceful Hug have been created, offering a holistic approach to supporting children with sensory difficulties. This essay critically analyses the potential impact of the Peaceful Hug on the development of young children, comparing its strengths and limitations to existing options available.

The Peaceful hug offers several strengths for supporting children with challenges. Firstly, It offers a controlled and comfortable space for children who begin to feel overwhelming sensations. This benefit is crucial for children's development as it provides a safe place children can use when sensory stimuli become too intense. Renowned theorists such as Jean Piaget state that children access their environment through their senses (Reynolds, 2024). Consequently, when a child's sensory stimuli become too intense, their environment feels chaotic and unsafe. Research has shown that providing a sensory-friendly environment can significantly reduce stress and anxiety (Lindberg *et al*, 2019). By offering a soothing and regulated space, the jacket helps children regulate their sensory experiences and give them the opportunity to learn and develop in the classroom.

This is specifically seen in the eye mask attachment, removable weights and noise-cancelling feature of the Peaceful Hug. The eye mask attachment offers visual sensory support, helping children regulate visual input and reducing visual overload. Visual sensitivity is another common challenge for children with sensory processing difficulties and can impact their ability to focus and engage in activities (Jung *et al*, 2014). By providing a barrier to excessive visual stimuli, the eyemask promotes comfort and relaxation. Similarly, the noise-cancelling feature of the peaceful hug reduces

auditory distractions and promotes focus and concentration. Noise sensitivity is common in children with sensory processing difficulties and can impact their concentration (NHS, 2017). Finally, the removable weights offer pressure therapy, a well-established technique for calming the nervous system and promoting relaxation. Deep pressure stimulation has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety as well as improve academic performance (Bestbier and Williams, 2017).

Additionally, the Peaceful Hug aids in daily transitions, another essential aspect of children's development. Transitioning between activities or environments can be challenging for children with sensory sensitivities, often leading to meltdowns or resistance (National Council for Special Education, 2020). The predictable nature of the Peaceful Hug helps children navigate transitions more smoothly by providing a familiar and comforting tool during change. (Fuller, 2023) demonstrates that supporting children during transitions can enhance their adaptive skills, encourage them to adapt to change, follow routines and develop a sense of time management. All of which are vital for their development. This is further supported by Smith *et al* (2012), who states that there are benefits of transitions and change including new opportunities and increased self-confidence.

Moreover, the Peaceful hug helps children manage their emotional responses. When children feel overwhelmed or distressed, the Peaceful Hug acts as a coping mechanism to help regulate their emotions. A study by Djambazova-Popordanoska (2016), highlights the importance of effective emotional regulation for a child's emotional, social and cognitive development. The Peaceful Hug also helps children regain focus during activities, contributing to their cognitive development. By minimising distractions and providing sensory input that supports attention and concentration, the jacket enhances children's ability to engage in learning tasks and participate in classroom activities. According to Garland (2014), sensory interventions can improve attention and academic

performance. (Lawlor, 2019) further emphasises this and states that when children can control their sensory processes, they demonstrate enhanced classroom performance.

Furthermore, the Peaceful hug promotes independence by encouraging children to recognize their sensory needs and advocate for themselves. The jacket will also be easily integrated into education settings. Educators can incorporate the jacket into classroom activities creating a supporting learning environment for all children. The inclusivity of the Peaceful Hug aligns with the principles of early childhood education, which emphasises creating environments that support the diverse needs of all children (Welsh Government, 2016). The Peaceful Hug promotes equity and access to sensory support for all children, regardless of their sensory challenges.

However, despite its numerous strengths, the Peaceful Hug has limitations. One of the most significant concerns is its accessibility for many families. While the jacket offers a solution for supporting children with sensory challenges, the price may be too high for families with limited financial resources. According to Disability Rights Uk (2024), nearly half of all families that have at least one disabled child, were living in poverty from the years of 2021-2022. Consequently, the cost barriers may prevent some families from accessing the Peaceful Hug. While funding from institutions such as the National Lottery may provide this support, there are specific funding amounts and periods of time for funding (National lottery, No date), making it inaccessible to all families that need it. While a potential solution to this is to apply for funding from several institutions, the funding is still not guaranteed.

Additionally, the effectiveness of the Peaceful Hug may vary depending on individual factors such as the child's specific sensory needs, preferences and response to sensory input. Even though the Peaceful Hug is customizable to accommodate a wide range of preferences, there is no guarantee that it will be equally as effective for each child. Research shows that each child with sensory challenges is different and so sensory

interventions need to be individualised for it to be effective (Pfeiffer *et al*, 2013). This highlights the needs for a personalised approach, which is quite limited with the Peaceful Hug.

Another limitation is the potential overreliance on the Peaceful Hug. While the jacket provides support for managing sensory challenges, there is a risk that children may become overly dependent on it as a coping mechanism. Research has shown that overreliance on support tools can affect the development of adaptive coping skills and impact children's ability to self-regulate in the absence of the support tool (Kulawiak, 2021).

In addition, regardless of its temperature regulation features, the Sensory Harmony Jacket may not be useful on hot summer days. Even though the jacket offers options for temperature control, it may still be uncomfortable or impractical to wear in extreme heat. This limitation could restrict the jacket's usage in certain climates or seasons, reducing its effectiveness as a year-round sensory support tool. This brings the concern that the Peaceful hug would not be used as a support mechanism internationally as it would not be ideal for hotter countries.

Furthermore, in today's market, there exists a variety of sensory support products designed to aid children in managing their sensory experiences and promoting their overall development. Among these products are weighted blankets, noise-cancelling headphones, individual fidget toys and sensory jackets that integrate sight and noise support. Weighted blankets have gained popularity for their ability to provide deep pressure stimulation, which can help calm the nervous system and promote relaxation. However, their effectiveness may be limited to certain individuals, and they may not be suitable for use outside of a stationary environment, such as a bed or couch. Additionally, weighted blankets can be bulky and difficult to transport, limiting their

practicality for use in various settings (Royal College of Occupational Therapists, 2023). The Peaceful Hug offers a portable solution.

Similarly, Noise cancelling headphones offer a solution for children who are sensitive to auditory stimuli, providing a barrier against loud noises and distractions (Ikuta *et al*, 2016). Noise cancelling headphones are portable and convenient. Research has shown the positive behavioural and academic outcomes when using noise cancelling headphones (Pfeifer, 2019). It is also worth noting that noise cancelling headphones typically reduce ambient noise levels by up to 45 decibels, significantly diminishing background noise. In contrast, the Peaceful hug only reduces sound by 10-30 decibels. However, while noise-cancelling headphones may offer a larger reduction in decibel levels, the Peaceful Hug provides more sensory support in an all in one solution.

However, one potential weakness of the Sensory Harmony Jacket is its cost, as it may be more expensive to produce than individual sensory support products. Caregivers and educators may need to consider the affordability and accessibility of the jacket compared to other options on the market.

In considering the potential future developments and opportunities for the Peaceful Hug, there are several things to reflect. Firstly, further research could focus on changing the design and functionality of the Peaceful Hug to address specific sensory needs and preferences of children. This may involve adding additional sensory features to enhance the overall sensory experience provided by the jacket.

Additionally, efforts could be made to increase the affordability and accessibility of the Peaceful Hug, making it more affordable for families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This could involve exploring alternative materials to reduce costs without compromising the quality or effectiveness.

Moreover, collaboration with educators, therapists, and other stakeholders in the early years field could help expand the reach of the Peaceful Hug and integrate it into

different educational settings. Training and support programs could be developed to empower educators in effectively implementing the Peaceful Hug as part of their sensory support strategies, this will create a more inclusive learning environment for all children.

In conclusion, the Peaceful Hug presents a promising solution for addressing the sensory challenges faced by children, offering a holistic approach to support their development and well-being. It provides a controlled and comfortable sensory space, aiding in transitions, managing emotional responses, and promoting independence. However, limitations such as affordability, variability in effectiveness, potential overreliance, and climate-related constraints should be considered. Despite these challenges, the Peaceful Hug offers a comprehensive solution that surpasses individual sensory support products. While further research and innovation are needed, the Peaceful Hug stands as a valuable tool in supporting children with sensory difficulties and fostering inclusive learning environments.

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