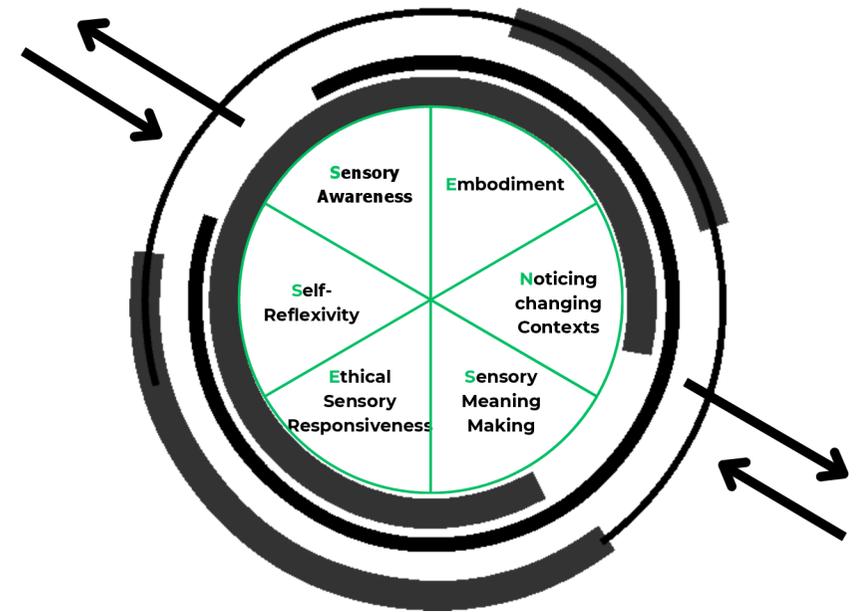


SENSES



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Relational Reflexivity	S	Sensory Awareness	Past experience influencing Present Moment Attunement & future anticipatory sensing
	E	Embodiment	How the Body Experiences, engages with and emerges from relational experiences
	N	Noticing Changing Contexts	Internal & External Factors Influencing Sensory Engagement, Expression and Emerging
	S	Sensory Meaning-Making	Exploring, Co-Constructing and Re-Making Meaning
	E	Ethical Sensory Responsiveness	Ethical & Cultural Considerations (Client-Focused and Professional Responsiveness)
	S	Self-Reflexivity	Therapist Focus on Sensory, Embodiment and relational reflexivity

SENSES invites therapists to consider their own and clients' bodily and sensory relational experiences, senses of smell, taste, touch, sight, sound and affective energy. (Affective energy includes energy in the body, within a relationship, in the room and in the telling of an expression or narrative).

A Visceral (embodied) experience is not just noticed or unnoticed, it is fully lived and felt through the body, within one's relational contexts and relationships.

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Expanded SENSES Paradigm can be found here:

www.systemic-psychotherapy.co.uk

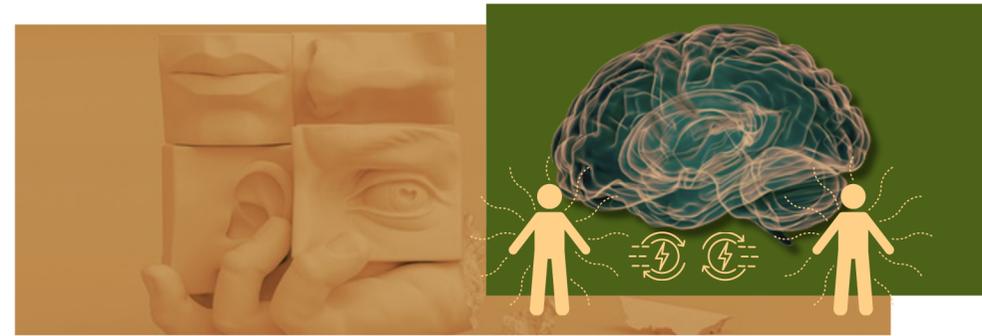
SENSES in Practice

By integrating the SENSES framework into practice, we open richer, more nuanced ways of working therapeutically that honour the complexity of cultural lived experiences. SENSES acknowledge the interconnectedness of bodily, sensory, relational, and systemic influences.

The black circles of the SENSES framework represent the movement you might take and re-take, as you explore and take a relational reflexive position to each section of SENSES. The arrows depict the contextual factors influencing SENSES.

What questions might you therefore ask using the SENSES framework?

S	<p>Sensory Awareness</p> <p>Question Examples:</p> <p>What do notice of your arousal response in relation to what you experience?</p> <p>What does your body experience first before your mind catches up?</p> <p><i>When you feel a heightened sense of alertness or discomfort, how do you think your past experiences might be influencing your body's response right now?</i></p>	<p>How the Body Experiences, engages with and emerges from relational experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising how bodily sensations, smells, sounds, movement, and non-verbal cues shape therapeutic interactions. Past experiences influencing present-moment arousal and attunement, and future anticipatory sensing. Developing attunement to both the client's and therapist's own sensory responses to deepen relational presence. Using sensory cues as a form of communication, particularly when words may be limited (e.g., in trauma work or with neurodivergent clients). Being mindful of vagus nerve activation and its role in stress responses (fight, flight, freeze), where sensory overload or avoidance may occur. This could also occur due to possible heightened sensitivity due to trauma, autism, or cultural differences. Present moment attunement involves being aware of sensory signals (e.g., touch, sounds, smells) in the here and now, but this can be influenced by past sensory experiences, making us more or less sensitive or reactive.
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Embodied senses are not simply mentally processed. They are fully lived through the body within one's relational context. At its core, embodiment involves the experience and expression of sensory and bodily reactions, emotions, thoughts, and perceived identity. These are communicated through bodily sensations, movements, and interactions, which are all shaped by relational experiences. My definition of Embodiment is the integration of the mental, emotional, physical and affective layers of experiences.

E	<p>Embodiment</p> <p>Question Examples:</p> <p>What might these embodied experiences remind you of, in terms of historical experiences?</p> <p>What's the embodied and relational effect* of [smell, touch etc]?</p> <p>(*relational effect - then consider relational effects ie use SENSES - 'N')</p> <p>When you notice your body responding in this way how do you think it reflects your past relational experiences?</p>	<p>How the Body Experiences, engages with and emerges from relational experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring how clients' and therapists' bodies hold personal, cultural, and intergenerational narratives. Recognising embodied emotional regulation strategies that may differ across cultures, which therefore affect embodied attunement. Consideration of exploring cultural grounding techniques and movement-based practices to support clients' capacity for emotional regulation may be helpful. Encouraging therapists to cultivate their own embodied awareness, noticing how they physically respond to client interactions. Embodied Positionality - What is a person's or organisation's interpretation of emotional expression within relationships i.e. whether their own or others' may not always align with the original intention and positional response. This may be due to differences in belief systems, bodily literacy, and influencing contextual factors.
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SENSES in Practice



<p>N Noticing Changing Contexts</p> <p>Question Examples:</p> <p>What factors have shaped the way you experience your body [taste, smell, touch, hear and see) in different environments and relationships?</p> <p>How might the ways you experience [name the sense] continue to shape your sense of self and future interactions?</p>	<p>Internal & External Factors Influencing Sensory Engagement, Expression and Emerging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being attuned to socio-cultural, political, and systemic influences on sensory and embodied experiences. These factors and the intersecting social and relational contexts will influence the creation of safer spaces, connection and disconnection. • Recognising power dynamics that shape how sensory and emotional expressions are perceived (e.g., racialised assumptions about emotional expressiveness). • Exploring how historical and collective trauma shape bodily and sensory experiences in therapy. • Examining how therapy settings themselves (e.g., clinical rooms, virtual spaces) impact the sensory experience of clients.
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<p>S Sensory Meaning-Making</p> <p>Question Examples:</p> <p>What does this sensory experience represent for you?</p> <p>When you experience certain sensations in your body, what relational experiences do you associate with them? How has this changed over time?</p>	<p>Exploring, Co-Constructing and Re-Making Meaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that sensory experiences (e.g., smells, personal space, physical contact) hold unique and deeply cultural meanings. • Engaging in dialogue to explore rather than assume meanings behind sensory and bodily expressions. • Recognising that some sensory memories are preverbal, requiring creative approaches (e.g., storytelling, metaphor, art-based practices). • Using narrative and systemic inquiry to explore how clients construct meaning around sensory experiences.
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<p>E Ethical Sensory Responsiveness</p> <p>Question Examples:</p> <p>How do the sensory experiences and bodily responses of both you and your clients shape the way you understand and respond to each other's needs?</p> <p>How could these sensory and bodily cues be understood differently from a culturally sensitive perspective?</p>	<p>Ethical & Cultural Considerations (Client-Focused and Professional Responsiveness)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrating ethical and culturally responsive practices when working with clients' sensory and embodied experiences. • Practising cultural humility—acknowledging that sensory engagement in therapy (e.g., touch, silence, eye contact, body positioning, breathwork) is culturally influenced. • Critically reflecting on how therapists' interventions (e.g., mindfulness, somatic exercises) may be beneficial or uncomfortable depending on clients' histories. • Challenging Eurocentric models of embodiment and emotional regulation that may not align with clients' lived experiences.
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<p>S Self-Reflexivity</p> <p>Question Examples:</p> <p>How do I think my own background and sensory experiences shape the way I interpret my client's expressions?</p> <p><i>What does my own reaction/attunement of the [type of sense] reveal about my biases, limitations, or relational emotional response?</i></p>	<p>Therapist Focus on Sensory, Embodiment and relational reflexivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in ongoing supervision and self-inquiry about therapists' own sensory and embodied experiences in therapy. • Examining how therapists' bodily responses, cultural positioning, and emotional biases shape the therapeutic process. • Recognising and deconstructing unconscious assumptions about sensory and embodied expressions across different backgrounds and histories. • Using reflexivity to enhance therapeutic presence, nurturing curiosity and cultural humility.
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