# The olfactory sense

There are some odours that most of us find unpleasant and try to avoid. For some children on the autism spectrum, there are specific smells that are so overwhelming that they cause distress and create an inability to focus on anything else.

We cannot eradicate all odours from our schools. We can, however, be sensitive to children who find some of them distracting and highly offensive. By observing the child, you may become aware of olfactory sensitivity even when the child may not have the skills to let you know. For example:

* a fascination with sniffing specific objects, materials or people
* smelling fingers after touching objects, materials or people
* the avoidance of some foods.

Careful consideration must be given to the appropriateness of the observed behaviour. You may take it in your stride if a child sniffs your hair but if this is a routine that is taken into public situations and with strangers, the behaviour may be quite alarming and create concern. Ensuring that you have a plan to reduce/eliminate the behaviour may be necessary.

Consider the things you CAN change:

* If the hand soap in the school toilets is causing a reaction, can it be exchanged for something acceptable?
* If the cleaning products used on the surfaces or floor are offensive and used in the morning prior to the start of the day, can the cleaning be done at the end of the day?
* If the hall is used for dinner and PE and the residual smells of dinner are overwhelming, can your pupil with these issues have his/her class at the beginning or end of the day when the odour is reduced?

**Looking for ways to identify the issues and then make life less of a challenge for the pupil is both possible and manageable.**

  