Individuals with autism and sensory integration differences often have difficulty with season changes. Season changes may mean changing clothing, changing routines, changing times, and even a change in seasonal allergies.

There are some strategies that you can use to make the transition into a new season more bearable. This week, we will look at the strategies related to Changing to seasonal clothing.

Changing clothing with changing seasons may impact individuals who are rigid with routines and also those who have difficulty with being sensitive to touch.

Individuals who are distracted or distressed by their clothing may benefit from wearing clothing that is broken in, seamless, tagless, and made of soft and non-itchy fabrics. It may also help to layer clothing so that it is an option to remove longer sleeves or bulky items when indoors. Changing from summer shoes (open) to fall and winter shoes (closed) can also be a challenge because of the sensory input that comes from socks and shoes. Choose soft and seamless socks, whenever possible. Monitor the fit of socks and shoes to avoid rubbing and distress. Use of strategies below for preparing sensitive skin, such as brushing, lotion, and providing tactile input may help prepare the feet for socks and shoes.
Wearing alternative outerwear:
If coats are overwhelming, choose alternatives, such as vests or heavy sweatshirts. This may help if individuals are distressed by bulky winter coats. Vests and sweatshirts can also provide warm spaces for hands that cannot tolerate gloves. Itchy sweaters, heavy and bulky coats, and turtlenecks are not a good match for sensory sensitive individuals. Wearing layered long sleeved-tee under a sweater is also an option.

Bath Time & Preparing Sensitive Skin:
After a bath or shower, it may also help to rub the skin with a towel. Children, particularly, may enjoy a hooded towel as a sensory strategy. Teens and adults may choose a robe or large soft towel to wrap in or dry with. Applying lotion before getting dressed, prepares the body for the sensory input of clothing. Choose sensitive skin formulas for oils and lotions that meet the needs of the individual. Remember other tactile sensory strategies, such as weighted blankets, vibration, brushing protocols, and work with your OT to determine specific strategies.

Visual Transition
It may be helpful to prepare for seasonal changes with social narratives. You can write these yourself, or look on sites like Teachers Pay Teachers or Boardmakerachieve for ideas. Teaching individuals to discriminate seasonal clothing or ways to transition by adding layers and changing shoes is important.

Visual Systems
Creating visual systems for clothing helps individuals to plan for the day ahead so they know what to expect. These systems can take the form of daily bins, hanging systems, lists, a designated spot for the next day’s clothing, or photos of clothing options to make choices. Involve individuals in the process of choosing clothing through choice making, i.e. the black shirt or the blue shirt.

Fine Motor Skills
The challenges some individuals may have with fine motor skills and dyspraxia impact their ability to manage more challenging clothing as the season changes. They may be able to adapt more easily to pull over clothing in the summer and slip-on shoes. Providing practice opportunities and exercises to develop fine motor skills may help prepare them for the challenges related to managing fasteners. It may also be important to accommodate for those challenges by choosing seasonal clothing without additional fasteners, such as slip-on shoes and shirts without buttons. Dressing boards are a way to introduce and practice the skill without the frustration of managing clothing in a rush.