Chemical & fragrance sensitivity

A reference for families, educators, and school health staff

Start with the child's words. Note where they were, what was happening nearby, and whether a change in room or routine helped them take part. If a pattern repeats, use those notes to choose one change with the school team.

PLACE / ACTIVITY	→	WHAT WAS NOTICED	→	SUPPORT GIVEN	→	AFTERWARD

What a child may feel or staff may notice



Headache / dizziness: head hurts or feels dizzy.



Eyes / nose / throat: stinging, soreness, or irritation.



Breathing: cough, wheeze, chest tightness, or difficulty breathing.



Stomach: nausea or feeling sick.



Energy / attention: more tired, restless, or active than usual (hyperactivity).

Let the child point to an icon or use their own words. Ask "What do you notice?" Write down what they say and how it affects class, play, or meals.

School support checklist

Choose one change together. Agree on who will check in and when.

- ☐ Pick a staff contact, a simple help signal, and a supervised place to take a break.
- ☐ Check what's used nearby: perfume, room sprays, plug-ins, or other air deodorizers. At home, include scented candles. Try pausing one optional product.
- ☐ Ask what changed that day: cleaning, painting, nearby construction, or windows kept closed because of cold, dust, or smoke.
- ☐ Check in after a few school days. Ask what felt different and whether class, play, or meals were easier. Note days when the child felt well, too.

If symptoms come up, follow the child's health plan and tell the nurse or designated adult. For breathing difficulty or an immediate safety concern, follow school emergency procedures.

Further reading: American Lung Association on fragrances indoors

What to notice and track

Compare a few ordinary days and bring those notes to the next check-in.

LOOK ACROSS THE DAY

Arrival · Activities · Meals · Later in the day · Away from school

Look for what repeats, what changes, and when the child feels well. Compare the same routine in different rooms, or the same room on different days.

Observation area	Useful details to consider
Time, setting, and activity	Where was the child? What were they doing? Include times when they felt well.
Reported and observed	Write the child's words first. Then add what staff saw, such as leaving class or skipping lunch.
Nearby changes	Note a new product, cleaning, painting, outdoor dust or smoke, or a change in windows or airflow.
Duration and participation	How long did it last? What became harder to do, such as reading, playing, or eating?
Support and afterward	What changed after a break or a move? Check whether the child could rejoin the activity.

Questions to discuss

- How can the child ask for help, and who will respond?
- What can we change first, and who can check what was used or what changed?
- When will we check in, and what would show that the change helped?

Use observations from the child's usual day. If they need a break or a different room, offer support first and write down what happened afterward.

Further reading

American Lung Association: Fragrances and indoor air