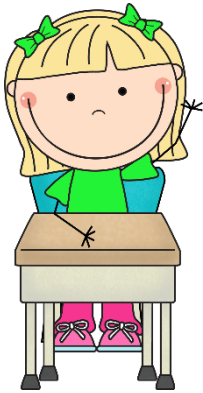

SENSORY ACTIVITY IDEAS



1. WHEN SHOULD I USE SENSORY ACTIVITIES



- Children need to move in order to focus. The old saying, ‘sit still and pay attention’ is not true. Many children need activity breaks frequently in order to attend to school tasks. Building in regular movement breaks helps children to get out extra energy and when they are learning a difficult task, they may often need to fidget with the hands and/or feet.
- Never take recess or physical activity away as a punishment. Often, those children who misbehave are demonstrating the need for movement. Anytime a child seems restless or wiggly, a sensory or movement break is in order.
- Build movement breaks into your regular classroom schedule.
- At the beginning and end of class, complete a warm-up or cool-down activity for the entire class.
- Slow, controlled movement encourages children to take their time and work muscles in a more efficient way than moving quickly. This is difficult for children but effective when they learn to control muscle movements.
- Always have a cool down area of the classroom for children who get overwhelmed.
- When adding a sensory activity diet, make sure to complete an activity every two hours. Push, Pull, Lift, and Carry are the best ‘heavy work’ tasks. Make them fun and functional by adding chores such as vacuuming, setting the table, carrying laundry basket, and yard work.

2. BRAIN BREAKS FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Lean on the wall to complete worksheets. Writing on a vertical surface encourages great hand/wrist position and standing is a great alternative to seat work.
- Place hands under bum on the seat. Use arm muscles to push the body up and off of the chair.
- Lean over to touch toes slowly and then reach arms up to the sky. Repeat to slow music and encourage breathing out while leaning down toward the ground and inhaling when reaching arms up high.

- Ask students to draw a certain item with their non-dominant hand. It's a great way to break up the monotony of the day.
- Divide the class into small groups or pairs. Play a short game of charades or draw an item in the air and ask the students to take turns guessing what the others draw.
- Practice breathing exercises. Think of a color such as blue as you inhale and red as you exhale. Imagine the colors moving and swirling with the movement of your breath.
- When working on breathing, exhale twice as long as you inhale. Think of a rectangle shape....the longer sides are exhales and the shorter sides are inhales.

3. SENSORY AREA/CORNER IN HOME AND SCHOOL



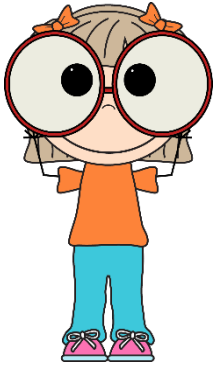
- Fidget toys can be fabricated with materials such as fleece, beads, nuts and bolts, foam, plastic bottles, among many others.
- Noise cancelling headphones allow for a silent few moments to rest the auditory system. Playing calming or classical music can help children to relax.
- Offer weighted lap pads made of poly-pellets, a rocking chair, or bean bag for comfortable seating that calms children.
- The trick is to use the sensory area BEFORE a meltdown occurs. Offer 'I need a break' cards to students who frequently experience difficulty with sensory overload. Encourage them to use their card when in the 'yellow' or at risk for a meltdown.
- Never 'teach' a skill during a meltdown. The goal is to keep the child safe until she is calm and then review what went wrong.

4. MOUTH (ORAL) CONSIDERATIONS



- When children place non-food items in the mouth, they may need more 'oral input' or heavy work and sensory stimulation to the mouth.
 Massage the cheeks and 'exercise' the tongue by using a mirror and moving it in slow circles. This is a fun activity to do with your child!
- Consider non-food items such as Chewelry, Chewigems, Chewy Tubes, and other wearable jewelry (or chewable dog tags for boys) that can be safely placed in the mouth.
- Use dehydrated fruit, beef jerky, crunchy snacks, fruit, and other food items that cause the mouth muscles to work harder.
- Try a vibrating or electric toothbrush.

- Spicy foods and flavors tend to 'wake up' the mouth.
- Drink liquids through smaller straws such as coffee stirrers or cocktail straws. Try drinking applesauce or pudding through a straw.



5. VISUAL CONCERNS

- Often children line objects up or look at things out of the corners of their eyes.
- Never 'force' children to make eye contact. Sometimes, they are unable to both see and hear what someone is saying and eye contact can be extremely intense and uncomfortable.
- If white paper is too bright and/or reading and homework are difficult, try to copy work onto pastel paper. Show the child different colors and see if he has a preference. This is a 'cheap' way to help students and sometimes the results are remarkable!

6. BEDTIME AND SLEEPING DIFFICULTIES

- Routine is critical for bedtime.
- Bathe or shower with a scented soap such as vanilla or lavender.
- Listen to classical or relaxing music during bath time or before bed.
- Massage tired arms and legs with warm lotion.
- Fluff the covers or a comforter in the dryer for a few minutes (being careful it's not too hot).

7. HOMEWORK TIME

- Allow children to play outside or complete physical activity for at least 30 minutes prior to homework time to get the 'wiggles' out.
- Be consistent with homework area. Make sure your child's feet are flat on the floor and not 'swimming' because the chair is too high off of the ground. If the chair is high, prop your child's feet up on a phone book.
- Ensure there are no distractions near the homework area such as TV, other children playing, or radio.

8. TRY MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES

Mindfulness is a wonderful and FREE way to help children (and adults) to work on strengthening relaxation and calming pathways in the brain. There's been more and more research on INTEROCEPTION ~our eighth sense. Our new book, *Interoception: the World Through My Eyes* discusses what it is and includes activity sheets for the whole family!

- Ask your child to sit quietly and 'feel' her heart beating.
- Try to wiggle toes or fingers to practice paying attention to each body part.
- See if your child can breathe fast and then S-L-O-W-L-Y. This is a great way to teach breath control!
- Close your eyes and ask your child to lightly touch your arm with a feather. Now, try it with other objects in your home such as a pencil eraser, spoon, or toothbrush. See if you can identify the object with your eyes closed! This works on the tactile sense and 'listening' to the information your body gives you.
- Dance to the rhythm or beat of different songs. Move your body along with the music and stop when the music does.

All of these tips and more are available in my *Parent's Guide to Occupational Therapy for Autism* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers) and *Special Needs & The Special Needs SCHOOL Survival Guide book* (Future Horizons).

Visit www.PocketOT.com for more information or to schedule a consult or life coaching session.

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