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Website: www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk

Code No: 0216 - May 2018 (V2)
Date of Production: May 2018
Date of Review: May 2021

Children's Occupational Therapy Services

Sensory Strategies - Calming and Alerting



Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust: delivering excellence
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Sensory Strategies for Alerting, Calming and Organising Children in the Classroom

This is a list of some exercises and strategies that can be performed in the classroom to regulate (calm or alert) sensory systems and improve attention.

These techniques will ensure best possible alertness for best academic performance.

The activities listed below may be considered generally alerting or calming, but will have different effects on different children at different times.

Not only do we each have our own sensory preferences and tolerances, but our responses can change depending on our energy levels, mood, blood sugar levels and other factors in the environment.

- Strobe light effect, and computer, video and TV games can be very alerting
- Brightly lit, visually active room is alerting, dimly lit sparsely decorated room with 'cool' colours is calming

5. Listen

- Alternate learning centre (library, quiet room)
- Ear protectors, listening centre, CDs
- Music (rhythmic for calming, arrhythmic for alerting)



2. Move continued



- Hand/chair//wall push-ups
- Push/pull/lift/carry = heavy work
- Push heavy object
- Wear back pack with heavy books to calm



- Pull each other on carpet, sheet, blanket, "magic carpet"
- Any type of aerobic exercise

3. Touch

- Fidget objects (string or paper clips, spiny ball, fabric swatches, thera-putty)
- Stress or squeeze ball



4. Look

- Reduce visual clutter on walls
- Create sensory hide out or cave with room dividers, tents

Activities that are typically alerting are in general:

- rapidly changing/irregular inputs
- quick tempos
- music -- lower frequencies will elicit movement (drums), while higher frequencies can engage attention (flutes, singing, cymbals)
- cold temperatures (including foods)
- light, brushing touch
- fast movement, especially spinning/rotational
- sour or spicy flavours
- fast-moving, bright, unpredictable visuals
- being outdoors
- using muscles for "heavy work" of pushing, pulling, against resistance (tends to be both alerting and organizing)



Activities that are typically organising are in general:

- rhythmic
- using muscles for “heavy work” of pushing, pulling, against resistance
- activities that require motor sensory processing and balance activities that require the child to organise their body, plan their approach and do more than one thing at a time in a sequential order.

Activities that are typically calming are in general:

- slow, steady, rhythmic, repeated, predictable input
- slow and rhythmic music
- firm, steady, pressure touch or squeezing (think massage or a big hug)
- using muscles for ‘heavy work’
- bland or sweet-tasting flavours
- slow-moving, dim, long distance views, deep colours for visuals
- neutral warmth
- chewing and blowing or breathing out
- slow linear movements forward-and-back or head-to-toe

Classroom Strategies:

1. Mouth

- Suck-type water bottles on desks or through a straw
- Chews, T chews, thera-tubing on pencil end
- Chew on straws
- Blowing bubbles
- Ice lollies, crunchy food (alerting) chewy food (calming)
- Blow football and similar games



2. Move

- Wiggle time: chair push ups,
- Alternate work positions (e.g. chair, floor, sit, lie, desktop, window sill)
- Stretch “up and long and wide” and breathe
- Squeeze arms to body, legs together, make a funny face
- Move-n-sit cushion, therapy balls, mini-trampoline, exercise bike, stationary weights

