

break

OVERVIEW OF SENSORY BREAKS FOR HOME & SCHOOL

Learning and attention

Learning requires attention. Traditional learning methods focussed on sitting still and listening. It was felt that movement, and variation in perspective hampered attention, and hence learning. There is growing acceptance of the fact that simply sitting still and listening no longer engages the child's attention.

Why do children need sensory breaks?

- They get anxious and need to calm their nervous system down (yellow zone/red zone)
- They cannot filter out irrelevant sensory information and gets overwhelmed by all the sensory input from his environment (yellow zone/red zone)
- They have low alertness because they are not getting enough sensory input/ feedback when sitting (Blue Zone).
- They have reduced body awareness and postural stability and this affects their ability to sit upright and concentrate (Blue Zone).
- They are seeking sensory input in a mal-adaptive or disruptive way and would benefit obtaining sensory input via more appropriate means.
- The zones of regulation can be used to support children in understanding and recognizing their states of alertness to children (See further information on the Zones of Regulation at www.zonesofregulation.com)

What is a sensory break?

- ✓ An opportunity to escape or attain sensory stimulation
- ✓ Sensory activities usually focus on the three core sensory systems: vestibular, proprioceptive & tactile
- ✓ Provide enhanced sensory input
- ✓ May include a combination of sensory input
- ✓ Sensory break may happen outside or inside the classroom.

In general, any activity or action which stimulates or removes sensory input from a sensory system is a sensory break

- Deep Pressure - Tends to be calming and can dampen down sensations in other sensory systems.
- Light touch and messy play tend to be alerting
- Vibration - Tends to be alerting
- Vestibular- Tends to be alerting

- Proprioception - Tends to support the child to pay attention and to focus (calming and alerting)

Note:

It is very difficult to isolate one type of sensory input in an activity alone - usually an exercise combines a number of different types of sensory input (e.g. Trampoline = Proprioceptive + Vestibular).

What isn't a sensory break?

- A 'get out of work'
- Reward (positive or negative): A break shouldn't be **given** as a consequence of what the child did or did not do.
- Punishment: (positive or negative): A break shouldn't be **taken away** as a consequence of what the child did or did not do.
- Free play: e.g. reading, lego, etc
- A sensory break is proactive not reactive

How to provide sensory breaks

- The use of Visual supports can be a useful strategy to show the child what's expected, help child to focus on activity, how to assume positions (motor planning), increase understanding, reduce language, consistent, opportunity for choice. (E.g. pictures, stickid images, videos, modelling etc.)
- Provide *enhanced sensory input*: vestibular (movement), proprioceptive (heavy muscle work) tactile (deep pressure touch).
- Provide a *range of activities* to sustain interest.
- *Instructions* to help the child to plan and sequence the activity

When introducing sensory breaks a visual is always used to indicate such. The blue break card indicates a sensory break



break

When and where to provide sensory breaks?

- Breaks can be **scheduled** or **unscheduled**.
- A child can ask for a break or the teacher or SNA can prompt the child to take a break - it is important for the child's learning that they are given a reason as to why they should take a break.
- A child can have sensory material at their desk at all times
- Sensory breaks can be **whole class** or **individualised** depending on the needs of the child.
- It is recommended that **whole class breaks at the desk** (which will mainly incorporate vestibular or proprioceptive input) are done at least between subject

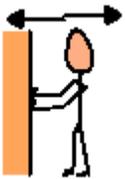
transitions and are **scheduled** into the class timetable. E.g. jumping jacks, running in one spot, weight bearing on hands (Busy Breaks)

- **Whole class Breaks at the desk** can be **unscheduled**, if the class teacher sees that the class are becoming restless, lethargic or losing concentration - use of the **zones of regulation visuals (or some other similar system, e.g. alert programme, 5-Point Scale etc)** may be useful to indicate to the class why they are taking a sensory break
- Sensory Breaks can be set up for individual children at the child's desk that they can access **at all times** (fidgets, theraband on arm of chair, theraband on the leg of the chair teaching the child weight bearing on hands). The child can then do them **independently** or the teacher /SNA can **prompt** the child - trying to encourage independence. The teacher/SNA may need to demonstrate initially
- An **individual child** may need sensory breaks **away from their desk** if they need extra input. Examples of this are as follows:
 - A child needs a quiet area as they are overwhelmed by too much sound i.e. outside the classroom or ear defenders etc
 - A child may need deep pressure to support them to be calm in situations, this can be after an event or before (e.g. an incident that occurred or in preparation for a test etc.)
 - A child may need additional tactile input - e.g. tactile boxes etc.)
 - A child may need additional proprioceptive input that they cannot obtain at the desk (e.g. trampoline)
 - A child may be visually overwhelmed (have an area that has minimal visual distractions - tent, divider in room).

General strategies for the child who needs more movement:

- Give the student an opportunity to move as much as possible, e.g. allowing for bathroom breaks, or asking the student to do jobs such as fetching things, being a messenger, cleaning the whiteboard, etc.
- Alternate "thinking activities" with movement activities
 - Thinking activities for 10-20 minutes, followed by
 - Movement such as a "Body Break" session of 2-5 minutes of physical movement, e.g. jumping jacks, squeezing a stress ball, push-ups against a wall.
- Consider the use of special seating which gives students an opportunity to move and thus receive sufficient stimulation so that they can stay focused, without having to wiggle in a standard seat. Suggestions include:

Breaks at my desk - can be Whole Class activities

<p>Wall push ups</p> 	<p>Desk pushes: feet on floor, hands on desk Chair pushes : feet on floor, hands on sides of chair Wall pushes: feet on spot, hands on wall, ensure elbows are straight.</p>
 	<p>Foot stomps: With hands holding the arm rests of chair, raise legs up and down with bent knees to stomp feet. Hand hugs: Clasp hands together, without interlocking fingers and squeeze Leg Rises: With hands holding the sides of the chair, lift legs off the floor straight and hold for 5-10 seconds. Reach and stretch: Stand up beside the desk and reach out both hands towards the ceiling. Rhythmic hand claps: Clap hands, clap hands on knees Jumping Jacks/ Running on the spot</p>
 	<p>Disc-O-Sit Junior</p> <p>Wedge cushion ("Move 'n and Sit") - these are easily portable, and can be taken to school more easily</p>

Things I can do myself



Fidget Toys

Fidgets are anything that can be explored with the hands; squeezed, pulled, pinched, rubbed, etc. They provide input to aid attention and concentration, and decrease anxiety. Examples of everyday fidgets include:

- Blu tak
- Pot scrubbers
- Hard Velcro (stuck to the underside of the desk)
- Stretchy snakes.

Theraputty is another material that can be used for fidgeting. It is also helpful for strengthening the muscles in child's hands and fingers to support fine motor skills. As a fidget toy, encourage the child to use it under

balls, straws, stir sticks, strings of beads, rubber bands, blue tac or even key chains that have small toys attached to them. Quiet Time with Play dough / therapy putty of a preferred texture

Activities away from my desk: Things I can do with SNA or and adult (can involve equipment)



Steam roller

A blanket is not required for this activity. Do the same as the picture. Lay face down, with clear airways, on a comfortable area (a mat, etc.) Ask for a roll or squish. *Ensure that the child's vital signs are visible at all time and frequently ask the child is he/she is ok during this activity*

Push 5

Stand up and touch your partner's hand, bend your elbows, keep your feet in the same position (use a spot/hoop) Push hard but stay in the same position (feet on the spot, elbows bent) Count to 5. Now start again with both hands



Trampoline

Generally alerting, individual parental reports vary

Belly on the ball

Roll over on your hands, roll back onto your knees, Do 5 rolls, Roll onto your hands and place the pegs into the basket while you balance using your hands

Movement breaks as errands/Things I can go outside and do

Heavy Work/Pressure:
Classroom



Stacking Chairs



Wall Push Ups



Take out Trash



Weighted Backpack



Carry Heavy Books



Pull Cart



Wipe Tables



Wipe Board

Handing out piles of notebooks, rubbing a chalkboard,
pushing a trolley of notebooks

(Take general environmental considerations into account
such as lighting, noises, etc.)

N.B. It is very important to note that children may respond aversively to sensory input and it is always important to monitor their responses. It is important to be cautious around the use of vestibular input, in particular, with children (examples of equipment which provide vestibular input are swings, scooter boards, etc.) If using therapy equipment, it is advised that it only be used under the advice and guidance of an Occupational Therapy