

Paediatric Occupational Therapy Sensory Advice Pack



Sensory Advice Pack

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Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet Sensory Guidelines for Home

Sensory processing relates to the body's ability to take in information from the senses, organise the information within the brain and respond appropriately within the environment. Some children have difficulties in the way in which they process sensory information. For example, some children's systems can take in too much information so they become overwhelmed by their environment. Some children's systems need more information to register sensory feedback so they might seek out different experiences in their environment. The ability to regulate the amount of sensory feedback our body needs is called '*modulation*'.



Possible difficulties children may experience:

- Difficulties concentrating within certain environments e.g. noisy classroom
- Dislike having their hands or body messy
- Particular dislike of self-care activities such as hair washing / tooth brushing
- May appear always 'on the go'
- Difficulty in calming after certain activities
- Dislike of certain textures e.g. labels in clothes / socks
- May be a 'picky' eater
- May appear clumsy in movements / not notice when they have injured themselves

Strategies to support development of this skill:

Sensory strategies can be used to support children in modulating their arousal levels. It might be helpful to consider different arousal levels as the characters of Winnie the Pooh.

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<p>Eeyore Zone – low energy, unable to focus on activity, low motivation, fatigued.</p>	<p>‘Winnie’ Zone – ‘Just right’, able to concentrate on activities, motivated, able to learn.</p>	<p>Tigger Zone – high energy, distractible, moving around often, can be agitated.</p>
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Children will move between each zone at various points throughout the day, however we want to try and keep them in the ‘Winnie’ zone as often as possible so that they are able to remain focused on their activities and learn new skills.



Activities to support the ‘Tigger’ child – when in this zone, children need activities that will be calming to their system.

- **Slow, rhythmical, linear (forward and back / side to side) movement:**
 - Swinging slowly on a swing
 - Rolling slowly back and forward on an exercise ball or gentle bouncing– try using music with a slow rhythmical beat to steady the child’s movement
 - Slowly playing row, row, row your boat
- **Deep touch pressure:**
 - Wrapping them up, or supporting them to wrap themselves up in a blanket
 - Providing a firm hug or massage over their body, it is especially helpful to provide pressure by pushing down gently on the shoulders
 - Providing gentle but firm strokes across the body. Start from close to their body then work away e.g. from the shoulder down to the wrist. You can try using different material such as soft brushes for this
 - ‘Squishing’ them between cushions or bean bags
 - Using weighted equipment such as a weighted lap pad or shoulder snake (see sensory equipment list)
 - Wearing clothing that provides deep touch to the skin such as a lycra vest

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- **Heavy muscle activities:**
 - Any activity that requires whole body movements: yoga, swimming, climbing, obstacle courses
 - Pulling resistance bands
 - Mini exercise circuits including wall push ups, squats, chair dips, animal walks
 - Carrying heavy items e.g. helping carry a laundry basket, moving bean bags or cushions around the room or making a den, gardening
 - Weighted equipment whilst moving such as a weighted vest (see sensory equipment list) or wearing a weighted rucksack. Item must weigh no more than 5% of the child's body weight
- **Creating a 'sensory space':**
 - Identify an area within the home (preferably not the child's bedroom) that has minimal sensory input e.g. soft lighting, minimal noise or use of calming sounds, smells they find relaxing (try lavender, camomile, vanilla) and access to blankets/cushions that they can get under
 - Encourage the child to use this space after accessing stimulating environments e.g. on return from school / after going food shopping when they are likely to be in the Tigger zone to help them regulate



Activities to support the 'Eeyore' child – When in this zone, children will require activities that are alerting to their system. It is important not to 'over-alert' the system, so the following activities should often be followed by more calming activities.

- **Movement breaks** – provide little but often periods of movement around times that the child is expected to concentrate
 - Mini exercise circuits including wall push ups, squats, chair dips, animal walks
 - Running 'errands' such as taking items from one room to another or delivering a message to a family member in another room
 - Standing up and stretching – try different yoga activities designed for children such as <https://www.kidsyogastories.com/zoo-animals-yoga/>

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- Sitting or bouncing on a therapy/exercise ball during everyday activities such as watching TV
- Encourage alternative positions for activities such as lying on their tummy to play Lego, sitting on a beanbag, high kneeling to catch a ball
- Dancing games like musical statues / stop and go games such as 'tig'
- Jumping on a trampoline
- **Different tactile input:**
 - Mix up different textures into activities to keep the child's system guessing e.g. using sensory bins with different touch sensations, messy play, baking
 - Use vibration to 'wake' the system – you can purchase vibrating stuffed animals/vibrating cushions from online retailers and use a vibrating toothbrush in the morning
 - Having a cold drink or an ice lolly – try using homemade ice lolly moulds to make healthy options and have the child join in when making them
 - Crunchy snacks such as carrot sticks
- **Use sound:**
 - Use different kinds of music and sounds with different beats
 - Encourage sing-song games during activities
 - Play with musical instruments
- **Use vision:**
 - Introduce bright colours into activities such as arts and crafts
 - Use bright/contrasting plates and cutlery during mealtimes
 - Use light up toys or sensory lighting within the environment
 - Play games that require movement and following moving objects with their vision e.g. throwing and catching a ball
 - Use a bright coloured table cloth during table top activities

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How to keep the child in the ‘Winnie’ zone - It is important that children are in a calm, well regulated state so that they can attend to and engage in their daily activities. Some children need more or less feedback than others to keep them calm and alert during the day. This is called *modulation*. The kind of feedback a child needs will be different for each sensory system. It is important to provide a daily plan of strategies and activities that provide the regular feedback a child needs to their sensory system to allow them to stay calm, alert and engaged in their daily routine. You might have heard this referred to as a ‘*sensory diet*’.

- **Developing a ‘sensory diet’ for your child:**

- Consider what ‘zone’ your child is most often in. Do they move into different zones at specific times of the day? E.g. Tigger when they arrive home from school
- Use strategies from the lists above, incorporating them throughout the child’s daily routine to ensure they get the feedback they need
- If you notice your child’s arousal levels changing, consider introducing a new strategy to help them stay regulated
- It is easier to keep a child in the ‘Winnie’ zone than try to get them out of the ‘Tigger’ zone – make sure they use the strategies every day even if they appear to be regulated
- Teaching the child about their own sensory needs and arousal levels can help them develop independence in self-regulation. Here are some useful resources to support children’s understanding:
 - The ALERT® Programme – supports parents to understand a child’s sensory needs and teach self-regulation by discussing their sensory systems as an ‘engine’ <https://www.alertprogram.com/parents/>
 - The Kids' Guide to Staying Awesome and In Control: Simple Stuff to Help Children Regulate their Emotions and Senses
 - Sensitive Sam: Sam's Sensory Adventure Has a Happy Ending – both available from www.amazon.co.uk

Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet Sensory Guidelines for School

Sensory processing relates to the body's ability to take in information from the senses, organise the information within the brain and respond appropriately within the environment. Some children have differences in the way in which they process sensory information. For example, some children's systems can take in too much information so they become overwhelmed by their environment. Some children's systems need more information to register sensory feedback so they might seek out different experiences in their environment. The ability to regulate the amount of sensory feedback our body needs is called '*modulation*'.



It is particularly important to identify sensory differences children are experiencing within the classroom as being dysregulated can have a huge impact on their ability to learn.

Possible difficulties children may experience in the classroom:

- Unable to tolerate noises within the classroom – this can be as much as a loud lesson or just the sound of chairs moving across the floor or pencils moving over paper
- Dislike having their hands or body messy – dislike of art
- Poor body awareness during activities such as P.E
- May appear always 'on the go' – unable to sit still during their lesson / constant fidgeting
- Difficulty in calming after certain activities
- Chewing on their pencil / clothing
- Difficulty in copying work from a board
- Appearing distractible or as though they are not paying attention

Strategies to support development of this skill:

Sensory strategies can be used to support children in modulating their arousal levels. It might be helpful to consider different arousal levels as the characters of Winnie the Pooh.

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<p>Eeyore Zone – low energy, unable to focus on activity, low motivation, fatigued.</p>	<p>‘Winnie’ Zone – ‘Just right’, able to concentrate on activities, motivated, able to learn.</p>	<p>Tigger Zone – high energy, distractible, moving around often, can be agitated.</p>
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Children will move between each zone at various points throughout the day, however we want to try and keep them in the ‘Winnie’ zone as often as possible so that they are able to remain focused on their activities and learn new skills.



Activities to support the ‘Tigger’ child – when in this zone, children need activities that will be calming to their system.

- **Slow, rhythmical, linear (forward and back / side to side) movement:**
 - Swinging slowly on a swing
 - Adaptive classroom seating such as a wobble cushion can provide subtle feedback to the vestibular system whilst engaging in a lesson
<https://www.sensorydirect.com/sensory-wobble-cushion.html>
- **Deep touch pressure:**
 - Wrapping them up or supporting them to wrap themselves up in a blanket
 - ‘Squishing’ them between cushions or bean bags
 - Using weighted equipment such as a weighted lap pad or shoulder snake (see sensory equipment list)
 - Wearing clothing that provides deep touch to the skin such as a lycra vest
- **Heavy muscle activities:**
 - Any activity that requires whole body movements e.g. playing on outdoor playground equipment
 - Asking them to hang up coats and bags on pegs
 - Stacking and un-stacking chairs

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- Pulling resistance bands
- Mini exercise circuits including wall push ups, squats, chair dips, animal walks
- Carrying heavy items e.g. carrying books to another classroom or running an 'errand' by taking a heavy item to another teacher
- Weighted equipment whilst moving such as a weighted vest (see sensory equipment list) or wearing a weighted rucksack. Item must weigh no more than 5% of the child's body weight
- Wiping down tables after lunch time or desks after art
- Chewy items for the top of pencils
- **Creating a 'sensory space':**
 - Identify an area within the school that has minimal sensory input e.g. soft lighting, minimal noise or use of calming sounds, smells they find relaxing (try lavender, camomile, vanilla) and access to blankets/cushions that they can get under
 - Encourage the child to use this space after accessing stimulating environments e.g. after playtime or music/P.E lessons when they are likely to be in the Tigger zone to help them regulate



Activities to support the 'Eeyore' child – When in this zone, children will require activities that are alerting to their system. It is important not to 'over-alert' the system, so the following activities should often be followed by more calming activities.

- **Movement breaks** – provide little but often periods of movement around times that the child is expected to concentrate
 - Mini exercise circuits including wall push ups, squats, chair dips, animal walks
 - Running 'errands' such as taking items from one room to another or delivering a message to a teacher in another room
 - Standing up and stretching – try different yoga activities designed for children in the classroom such as <https://www.kidsyogastories.com/yoga-in-the-classroom/>

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- Sitting or bouncing on a therapy/exercise ball during lessons or in between lessons (the use of a wobble cushion will also help in this zone)
- Encourage alternative positions for activities such as lying on their tummy for circle time, sitting on a beanbag, high kneeling to catch a ball
- Dancing games like musical statues / stop and go games such as 'tig'
- Access to outdoor space and play equipment
- **Different tactile input:**
 - Mix up different textures into activities to keep the child's system guessing e.g. using sensory bins with different touch sensations, messy play, baking – use multisensory approaches for teaching new skills such as practice forming letters in foam
 - Use vibration to 'wake' the system – you can purchase vibrating stuffed animals/vibrating cushions from online retailers and use a vibrating toothbrush in the morning
 - Having a cold drink
 - Crunchy snacks such as carrot sticks during break times
- **Use sound:**
 - Use different kinds of music and sounds with different beats – try upbeat music as they enter the classroom
 - Encourage sing-song games during activities
 - Play with musical instruments
- **Use vision:**
 - Introduce bright colours into lesson materials
 - Use bright/contrasting pages or tools like pencils and scissors
 - Use light up toys or sensory lighting within the environment
 - Play games that require movement and following moving objects with their vision e.g. throwing and catching a ball
 - Use a bright coloured table cloth during table top activities

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How to keep the child in the 'Winnie' zone - It is important that children are in a calm, well regulated state so that they can attend to and engage in their daily activities. Some children need more or less feedback than others to keep them calm and alert during the day. This is called *modulation*. The kind of feedback a child needs will be different for each sensory system. It is important to provide a daily plan of strategies and activities that provide the regular feedback a child needs to their sensory system to allow them to stay calm, alert and engaged in their daily routine. You might have heard this referred to as a '*sensory diet*'.

- **Developing a 'sensory diet' for the classroom:**
 - Consider what 'zone' the child is most often in. Do they move into different zones at specific times of the day? E.g. Tigger when they arrive at school
 - Use strategies from the lists above, incorporating them throughout the child's daily routine to ensure they get the feedback they need
 - If you notice the child's arousal levels changing, consider introducing a new strategy to help them stay regulated
 - It is easier to keep a child in the 'Winnie' zone than try to get them out of the 'Tigger' zone – make sure they use the strategies every day even if they appear to be regulated
 - Teaching the child about their own sensory needs and arousal levels can help them develop independence in self-regulation. Here are some useful resources to support children's understanding:
 - The Zones of Regulation ® is a sensory based curriculum designed by Occupational Therapists that can be delivered by teaching staff to support children in developing skills in self-regulation and emotional control
<http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>
 - The Kids' Guide to Staying Awesome and In Control: Simple Stuff to Help Children Regulate their Emotions and Senses
 - Sensitive Sam: Sam's Sensory Adventure Has a Happy Ending
– both available from www.amazon.co.uk

Occupational Therapy Equipment Advice

Sensory

Sensory equipment can help to provide a child with the feedback they need or support them to reduce the amount of feedback they receive. Below are a few examples of sensory equipment that may be helpful for each system. A wide variety of sensory equipment is available via online sensory specialist retailers including <https://www.sensorydirect.com/> and <https://www.rompa.com/>

Equipment	Used for	Where to purchase
Vestibular (movement) Equipment		
Therapy Balls 	Therapy balls are available in a variety of shapes, sizes and textures to provide diverse opportunities for movement. They can be used for sitting, bouncing, lying over and rolling.	https://www.sensorydirect.com/balls-cushions/therapy-balls.html
Scooter Board 	By lying on their tummy and pulling themselves along with their arms, the child can gain both movement and heavy muscle feedback. Available in a range of sizes and colours.	https://www.sensorydirect.com/scooter-board-yellow.html
Cushions 	Air filled cushions in a range of shapes and textures can provide subtle movement feedback to support posture and attention whilst sitting.	https://www.sensorydirect.com/balls-cushions/cushions.html
Heavy Muscle Equipment (Proprioception)		
Parachute 	Encouraging large body movements and resistance, games with the parachute will provide heavy muscle feedback.	https://www.sensorydirect.com/multicolour-parachute-1326.html
Body Sock 	Providing resistance against movements whilst inside the body sock, children will receive both heavy muscle and deep touch feedback improving body awareness.	https://www.sensorydirect.com/body-sock-new.html
Resistance bands 	Resistance bands can be used in a variety of ways for both the upper and lower body providing heavy muscle feedback.	https://www.sensorydirect.com/resistance-bands.html
Weighted clothing 	Weighted items provide further feedback to the proprioceptive system during movement. Guidelines of individual equipment should be closely followed during use.	https://www.sensorydirect.com/deep-pressure/weighted-jackets.html

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Deep Touch Pressure and Tactile Equipment

<p>Weighted and compression equipment</p> 	<p>Weighted and compression clothing and other items such as weighted soft toys can provide deep touch pressure to the body. Guidelines of individual equipment should be closely followed during use.</p>	<p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/deep-pressure.html</p>
<p>Tactile toys and balls</p> 	<p>Using a variety of tactile toys including balls, putty and slime will provide the child with a range of opportunity for tactile experiences.</p>	<p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/sense/tactile.html</p>
<p>Massagers</p> 	<p>Vibration is able to travel deeper into the layers of the skin than normal touch therefore providing a more intense tactile feedback for children that are seeking tactile sensation.</p>	<p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/sense/tactile/massage.html</p>

Oral Motor and Chewing

<p>Chewing equipment</p> 	<p>A variety of equipment designed for children that seek chewing is available in the form of 'chewellery', pencil toppers, toys and vibration.</p>	<p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/sense/chewys.html</p>
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Auditory (sound) Equipment

<p>Ear defenders</p> 	<p>Ideal for blocking out every day sounds that may be overwhelming for children such as vacuum cleaners. Can also be easily carried and worn in the community or at school when required.</p>	<p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/ear-defenders-3135.html</p>
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Visual Equipment

<p>Projectors & sensory lighting</p> 	<p>Visual projectors and sensory lighting can provide a calming environment for children that are seeking visual input.</p>	<p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/sense/multi-sensory/mood-night-lights.html</p>
<p>Sensory dens</p> 	<p>Sensory dens provide an opportunity to both reduce the amount of sensory information a child receives and provide them with the input they are seeking by filling the den with their sensory preference items</p>	<p>https://www.sensorydirect.com/sensory-pod-black.html</p> <p>Dens can also be created by using small pop up tents, available via a range of online and high street retailers.</p>

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General sensory equipment ideas for the home:

- Outdoor trampolines with safety netting
- Indoor mini exercise trampolines
- Access to bikes, scooters, roller skates
- Weighted cutlery
- Weighted school equipment e.g. pens/pencils
- Dimmer switches for main lights or lamps to reduce visual feedback when needed
- Large cushions and bean bags to be used for 'squishing' or 'crashing' activities
- Hammock for gentle rocking
- Swing sets and other outdoor garden equipment
- Opportunities for sensory play including messy play and large open spaces for activities such as rolling or building an obstacle course
- Lycra clothing and bedding (tight fitted bed sheets)

Please note – children must be supervised at all times during the use of any sensory based equipment

If you have any queries or concerns regarding the use of any equipment mentioned above, please consult the Occupational Therapy Team.