

Sensory Activities

What is it and why is it important?

Our sensory systems have a strong impact upon our arousal states and our ability to manage our own alertness. This is called sensory regulation.

Children with sensory processing difficulties struggle to regulate themselves effectively. They may often appear tired, sluggish and sleepy or over excited, hyperactive and filled with excess energy when their peers may be more calm and alert.

Providing controlled sensory input through activities such as those exemplified below can help a child to calm themselves or ‘wake up’.

Vestibular (movement and balance)

This sense has a particularly strong connection with the body’s ability to self-regulate itself to meet the demands of the situation.

Slow and linear movement, such as rocking a baby, has a calming effect on the body and is beneficial for children who are running at high energy and need to calm down.

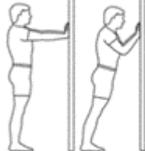
Peanut ball rocking	Lie on their stomach or back over a peanut ball (or other inflatable ball) and gentle rocking forwards and backwards.	
Swinging slowly	Sit on a swing, such as standard, hammock or garden chair, and swing gently in one direction- back and forth. Don’t go too fast!	

Fast and/or spinning movement is much more alerting for the sensory system and can be used to ‘wake up’ the child. But be careful not to give too much as some children can easily become overly alert quite quickly. Follow fast movement with heavy work (proprioception) or deep pressure tactile as demonstrated below.

Peanut ball roll and crash	Kneel in front of a peanut ball and roll over it quickly to crash onto a bean bag or pile of cushions.	
Jumping on a trampoline	Bounce on a trampoline or trampette giving a countdown to control length of time.	

Proprioception (body awareness)

This is given through use of muscles and joints and is particularly calming for the body. Heavy work and use of the body provides this, so having a child carry heavy objects such as the shopping or moving furniture can be used throughout the day.

<p>Push the wall over!</p>	<p>Push as hard as they can against the wall using all their strength to try and topple it over.</p>	
<p>Body sock</p>	<p>Climb inside a lycra body sock and use their muscles to stretch their arms and legs against the fabric as best they can.</p>	

Tactile (light touch and deep pressure)

Light touch can be very alerting for some children whereas others seek it out to a great degree. If your child shows any avoidant or defensive reactions to light touch avoid such activities. Otherwise providing a good dose of it can give their tactile system the stimulation it craves.

Deep pressure, such as a tight hug, travels a different path to the brain and 'overrides' light touch signals to an extent. It has a calming and regulating effect on the body.

<p>Mouldable foam soap</p>	<p>This can be used to rub into the hands or arms, shaped into objects like 'snow balls', drawn in with a finger or clapped between hands to make it snow.</p>	
<p>Physio ball steam roller</p>	<p>Roll a physio or peanut ball over the length of the body to provide a deep pressure squash. Ask the child if they want 'harder' or 'softer'. Avoid the face!</p>	