

## **Sensory Breaks**

A sensory break is a specific amount of time that provides an opportunity for a child to de-escalate from the stimulation of the classroom setting. Some children will experience greater and more specific difficulties in making sense of and organizing all the different sensations that they receive from their senses and how to react to them. A child with Autism or Social Communication Difficulties, whose ability to learn through their senses is affected, will need extra help to do this. Breaks should be individually designed to address the child's level of arousal to enable a child to reach a more optimal stage for learning. That is why opportunities to take Sensory Breaks are so important and should be integrated into the school day alongside interventions such as 'Sensory Circuits'.

Some strategies will be designed, dependent on need, to calm children and others to allow children time to release energy. The aim for all children is to help them to feel more regulated within the school day.

If a child's sensory processing differences are significantly impacting their ability to learn and complete tasks, then the advice of the Occupational Therapy Service should be sought.

[CCS-TR.therapyreferrals@nhs.net](mailto:CCS-TR.therapyreferrals@nhs.net)

### **The organisation of Sensory Breaks**

Activities should be prepared in advance. They must be personalised to each child and regularly selected and updated with the child's and parents' input.

### **Examples of Sensory Breaks:**

Depending on the need of the child it might be appropriate to have a quiet area where some of the following could be made available.

Weighted blanket, tent, calming lava lamps, soothing music, construction toys, and access to gardening activities.

Other children might need to release energy through completing circuits, working on wobble boards, yoga-type exercises or through access to an outside space.

Others might find IT a soothing activity.

One method is to have a range of activities available and shown as a set of cards and the child spins an arrow and engages in the activity shown by the arrow.

### Treasure basket – a “sensory snack”

A treasure basket is one example of a sensory-rich and highly portable resource, making it a perfect “sensory snack.” Within an enabling environment, the child can investigate objects, experiment, or be guided with activities. The sensory stimulation and hands-on approach are great for the brain and memory development, gross and fine motor skills, and strength. It can also help to provide distraction and relaxation for individuals experiencing anxiety or stress. They can appeal to children with different learning styles and abilities with no right or wrong ways of playing.

Ideas of items to Include:

- Sponges- varied sizes and shapes, wooden rings, scarves and ribbons, brushes
- Natural objects e.g., fur cones, dried fruits, feathers
- Metal objects such as chains, a whisk, spoons, sieve, tea strainer
- Squares of material – different textures
- Sensory Bottles- plastic bottles filled with glitter/feathers/rice
- Squishy/soft balls of assorted sizes
- Velcro to pull apart, small mirrors, shakers

The effectiveness of the chosen breaks needs to be constantly monitored and amended accordingly with clear guidelines (possibly through a Social Story) for the child that these breaks are designed to help them when back in class but are ‘breaks’ and have a ‘finish’ time. They shouldn’t be used as rewards or negatively withdrawn but should be part of the daily timetable.

### Useful References and Links

[CCS-TR.therapyreferrals@nhs.net](mailto:CCS-TR.therapyreferrals@nhs.net)

- Autism Toolbox: <http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/>
- AET: <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>
- National Autistic Society: <https://www.autism.org.uk/>