

Sensory Breaks & Sensory Strategies

What it is, why it is used:

A Sensory Break is a designated portion of time that may allow a child to de-escalate from the sensory stimulation of the classroom setting. Sensory breaks also are beneficial for students that benefit from additional movement or deep-pressure input opportunities to help with focus, attention, and learning.

A Sensory Strategy is a tool that can be used throughout a school day to help a child with achieving and maintaining an attentive and calm state for learning.

Sensory breaks and sensory strategies are supported OT practices, but research in these areas remains inconclusive. The more typical the neurology of the student, the more likely the effectiveness.

How and when to implement and Materials Needed:

Consultation with the building occupational therapist would be needed in determining sensory breaks and sensory strategies for students that receive OT support on their IEP.

Sensory Breaks can be completed in the classroom environment, in a designated sensory space, or anywhere within the school setting.

- A specific building sensory space can be utilized and may include materials that allow for additional movement and deep pressure input such as a mini trampoline or a ball pit.. See Sensory Spaces for more information.
- Use of a school gymnasium, hallway, or playground can be effective when the sensory break requires excessive movement, jumping, pushing, or pulling such as riding a tricycle, propelling a scooter board, pushing a library cart, or climbing on playground equipment.
- In-class sensory breaks can include activities such as chair push-ups or frequent movement opportunities.
- Encourage whole-class movement breaks. JAMin' Minutes and Go Noodle are good options.

Sensory Strategies are tools that can be used at any time or location in which there is need.

Examples include:

- Noise canceling headphones in a loud cafeteria or school assembly if a child is aversive to noise.
- Chewing gum or other chewy/oral options (chewelry) to increase attention/focus and promote calmness.

- Dynamic seating strategies in place of traditional classroom chairs include things such as ball chairs, zuma rockers, move and sit cushions, howda hug chairs, standing desks, etc. for students seeking movement and/or deep pressure input for improved attention.
- Weighted items such as a vest/jacket or lap pad may also elicit a calming effect but should be used with the supervision of the building occupational therapist.

Things to consider/problem solving:

The student's age and developmental level are important to consider when setting up sensory programming. A functional sensory break when possible is ideal such as stacking chairs in the cafeteria. Also, **Sensory breaks and strategies ARE NOT EARNED but rather are a regular part of a student's day.**

Ideally, students who are able should learn how to regulate their own sensory systems. Programs such as the Alert Program/How does your Engine Run and Brainworks both are recommended.

Sensory items are often purchased with building funds (special education or PTO), fund-a-need requests, or grants.

Useful resources to learn more:

Equipment for sensory spaces:

www.abilitations.com, www.therapysshoppe.com, www.southpaw.com

Walmart, Target, and other local stores also carry items that are similar to the therapy catalogs.

Dynamic seating options:

www.zumarockers.com, www.howda.com, www.amazon.com

Self-Regulation Programs:

www.alertprogram.com. www.sensationalbrain.com

Weighted Items:

www.sensacalm.com, www.amazon.com, the above catalogs

LPS can make items weighted items as directed by the occupational therapist

Oral Items:

Chew gum or place snacks during the day

www.chewelry.com or www.amazon.com

Noise canceling headphones:

www.moggiesearmuffs.com

