

# General Sensory Strategies

We gather information about our bodies and the environment around us through seven senses:



What we smell, this is known as our **olfactory sense**



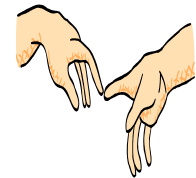
What we taste, this is known as our **gustatory sense**



What we hear, this is known as our **auditory sense**



What we see, this is known as our **visual sense**



What we touch, this is known as our **tactile sense**



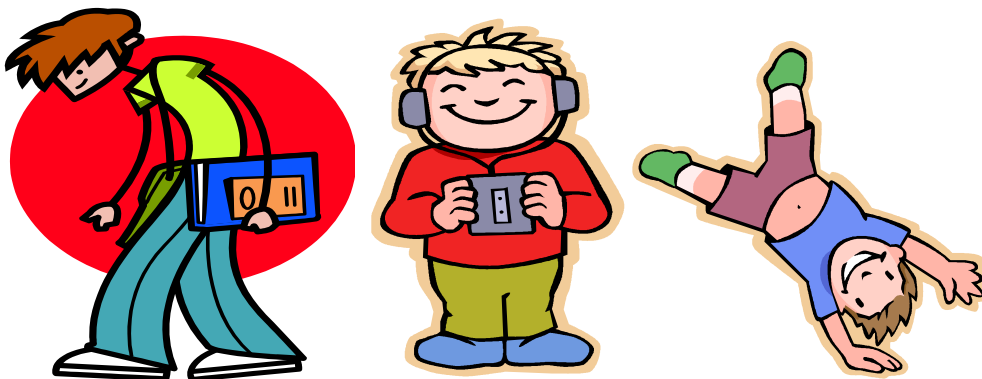
How we move, this is known as our **vestibular sense**



Our muscles, this is known as the **proprioception sense**

Children can sometimes have difficulty processing this information, resulting in them over or under responding to different types of sensory stimulation. This can link to difficulties with day to day tasks, such as dressing, feeding, accessing the curriculum etc.

This pack contains strategies for dealing with challenges the child may experience in relation to various functional activities. Each individual child will have different challenges, therefore you need to read through them to determine what is relevant for each child.



# Home Environment



## DRESSING

### **Possible challenges:**

Child finds clothing irritating/restrictive, dislike of labels and seams, won't tolerate new clothing, sensitive to certain textures, child needs adult assistance to engage with dressing, tendency to strip off certain items.

### **Sensory Strategies:**

- Ensure distractions are minimised while child is getting dressed
- Remove tags until child's system can tolerate them
- If child cannot tolerate seams, turn socks inside out or wear undergarments to reduce friction, or you can also purchase seamless socks from specialist websites
- If new clothing is irritating, wash to take out the stiffness
- Use a mirror to give visual feedback and enhance body awareness when dressing
- Apply deep pressure, prior to dressing e.g. push down on child's shoulders with gentle, but consistent pressure for a few moments and then proceed to upper and lower arms, and upper and lower legs

### **Behavioural Strategies:**

- Visual timetable/organisational strip/dressing strip
- Sticker chart
- Stress-free environment



# PERSONAL CARE

## Possible challenges:

Difficulties with hair cutting/brushing, washing, bathing, showering, brushing teeth, washing hands.

## Sensory Strategies:

- Apply deep pressure, prior to, during and after brushing/cutting hair e.g. place your hands on top of child's head and exert gentle but consistent pressure down. As above, also apply to shoulders and arms if required.
- Use a firm stroke or pressure as you comb or wash your child's hair
- Have your child count as you comb, wash, cut or rinse the hair - give definite time limits to the task e.g. "lets count to 10"
- Give your child ownership and control with hair washing by allowing them to pour the water
- Use a large towel and quickly and firmly wrap the child in it, providing deep touch to extremities
- Encourage child to wash themselves as self-imposed touch produces a less defensive reaction
- If the child is showering, encourage a hand held nozzle

## Behavioural Strategies:

- Visual support system
- Reward system/sticker chart





# SLEEPING

## Possible Challenges:

Difficulties settling at bedtime, waking up throughout the night, irregular sleeping patterns.

## Sensory Strategies:

- Develop a calming routine before bedtime i.e. quiet activities at the same time every night e.g. bath, story, bed
- Use a heavy, weighted blanket or even a sleeping bag to provide deep pressure and a calming, snug environment
- Black out blinds
- Avoidance of bright bedroom colours, patterns or lots of pictures on the walls
- Minimise clutter at bedtime i.e. tidying toys into box
- Use of relaxation music or story tapes

## Behavioural Strategies:

- Visual support system - bedtime routine
- Reward system/sticker chart



# Meal Times

## Possible Challenges:

Picky eater, limiting self to certain food textures/temperatures; aversion to sensation around or inside the mouth i.e. in relation to spoon, cup rim or food texture (may also be intolerant to "touch" around their face and mouth, difficulties with tooth brushing); frequently hungry wanting large portions; won't stay at table to eat.

## Sensory Strategies:

- For younger children when introducing solids: Allow child to explore texture with their hands, this is important preparation for accepting the food in the mouth; introduce soft munchy textures when weaning, e.g. soft crisps, before introducing lumpy foods; progressing with lumpy textures should be done gradually
- Consider a soft or hard plastic spoon as opposed to metal as this is likely to be tolerated better
- Encourage independent finger/ spoon feeding even if this requires hand over hand assistance - this allows more control and better acceptance of new foods
- A chewy tube can help progress oral motor skills for managing more solid textures/ increasing tolerance in the mouth (please ask your Speech and Language Therapist or Occupational Therapist)
- For oversensitivity to texture of food: Touching and stroking exercises (stroke the child's face gently but firmly) can be done regularly throughout the day but also as part of a routine prior to mealtimes, teeth cleaning, face washing
- Help prepare child for meal times by applying "deep pressure" by pushing down on child's shoulders with gentle, but consistent pressure for a few moments and then proceed to upper and lower arms, and upper and lower legs
- A quiet, consistent environment, set up the same way each time is preferable with minimal distraction (i.e. TV switched off)
- Ensure child is sitting at table to eat - promotes better structure and posture
- If diet is quite restricted, start by introducing similar foods to what is already being tolerated (i.e. different brands of same food)

## Behavioural Strategies:

- Positive interaction between the child and adult will help develop the child's confidence - a low pressure environment for trying new foods
- Try having shared plates at mealtimes i.e. bowls of different vegetables, side dishes and main course in the middle of the table and everyone demonstrating helping themselves to the different foods
- Try to create a food rich environment i.e. get child to play with plastic fruit and veg, play games with foods (e.g. put hands into different foods and encourage to lick fingers), create a food scrapbook with pictures of different foods to discuss with your child
- Visual support system to denote the order in which to eat
- Reward system/sticker chart
- If child eating too much/ frequently: use smaller sized plates to restrict portion size



# Homework

## Possible Challenges:

Child finds it difficult to focus on homework tasks

## Strategies:

- Limit unnecessary noise in the environment if they find it difficult to work with background noise
- Have a regular routine for homework completion i.e. try to do homework at the same time each day
- Regular "movement breaks" after every 15-20 minute period of sitting, e.g. trampoline/play activity
- Allow the child to change position i.e. standing up, leaning against a wall, working on the floor
- Use of a chair with arms on it to help child keep their position at the table - this gives them more feedback about positioning
- Use of weighted items such as a "lap buddy" (stuffed beanbag cushion) to provide heavy input that re-enforces body awareness and may have a calming effect
- When over-excitabile, deep pressure and stretch activities exert a calming effect
- Use of a sports water bottle on the table
- Use of fidget toys while completing written tasks e.g. blue tack, rubber bands, stress balls

## Behavioural Strategies:

- Visual support system for doing homework
- Reward system/sticker chart
- Keep refocusing child if they try to change the subject i.e. "we can talk about that later once you have completed 5 questions"
- Can break homework up to do at different times rather than all in one sitting



# School Environment



## COPING IN THE CLASSROOM

### Possible Challenges:

Child withdraws or reacts negatively to others who touch him lightly; acts out when standing in line or near others; avoids using messy materials e.g. glue; difficulty coping in a busy classroom; difficulty coping with noise; difficulty with floor sitting (in a group); excessive mouthing or chewing of objects

### Sensory Strategies:

- Teach others to touch the child firmly (but not too firmly - firmer pressure is usually less threatening than light touch)
- Tell the child when they are going to be touched
- Approach child from within their visual field
- Position child at start or end of line
- Assign a special task, e.g. turning the lights off
- Provide deep pressure into palm of hands prior to messy play e.g. via firm clapping, hand over hand
- Use tools to manipulate materials
- Use messy materials that provide resistance e.g. putty, doh, prior to working with messy materials to desensitise hands
- Lucky dips (for younger children) - hide items in lentils, pasta etc
- Minimise classroom clutter e.g. wall displays to a minimum, use of screen around desk, use of desk tidy
- Positioning in classroom - facing board/ teacher but avoiding window/ door where possible
- Hand fidget toy to support listening e.g. stress ball, blue tack, pipe cleaner etc
- Break instructions down and get child to repeat back to ensure understanding
- Use of headphones to help dampen background noise
- Use of carpet tile when floor sitting
- Mouthing of objects - chewy tubes are non toxic chewable items which may be appropriate. Having access to a box of fidget toys may also be helpful.

### Behavioural Strategies:

- Visual timetable
- Visual support systems e.g. organisational strips, activity breakdown strips
- Reward system

- Seated next to teacher
- Social stories
- Give choices and be flexible



# FOCUSING ON WRITTEN TASKS

## Possible Challenges:

Child finds it difficult to maintain concentration and attention in class; may be constantly "on the go", fidgeting and moving around or may appear passive and slumped in their posture; may be distractible

## Sensory Strategies:

- Regular "movement breaks" after every 15-20 minute period of sitting, e.g. brain gym activities, warm ups or stretches (see below), special tasks - giving out books
- Kinaesthetic learning - times table dance etc
- Try a "move in sit" cushion
- Allow the child to change position i.e. standing up, leaning against a wall, working on the floor
- Use of a chair with arms on it to help them keep their position at the table and give feedback about positioning
- Use of weighted items such as a "lap buddy" (small beanbag cushion) to provide deep pressure input that re-enforces body awareness and may have a calming effect
- When over-excitabile, try deep pressure and stretch activities with the whole class (see below)
- Use of a sports water bottle on the table
- Use of fidget toys while listening/ completing written tasks e.g. blue tack, rubber bands, stress balls

## Warm up's and stretches:

- The following specific activities can be tried with the whole class as a warm up or to re-focus specific children on a task:
  - **Push the ceiling:** both hands on your head with fingers intertwined, face hands to the ceiling then straighten your arms, drop your shoulders away from your ears, keeping your arms held straight up, push towards ceiling and hold for 5-10 secs, bend and relax at elbows, repeat 3-4 times.
  - **Hot seat:** get child to hold onto the edge of the chair with both hands, push self up and down 10 times
  - **Mickey Mouse Ears:** place fists next to ears, squeeze, then fingers open and close 10 times.

- **Shoulder Shrugs:** called the "I Don't Knows", palms up shoulder shrugs towards ears, release, 10 times.
- **Windmills:** Arms out to sides of body, make small circles and increase size of circle, then smaller again, drop arms and repeat 2-3 times.

**Behavioural Strategies:**

- Visual timetable with clearly defined breaks
- Reward system/ chart
- Social stories
- Timed tasks (sand timers)
- Differentiate activities



# PREPARING FOR P.E.

## **Possible Challenges:**

Child finds it difficult to get dressed in busy changing environment;  
difficulty focusing and following instructions

## **Sensory Strategies:**

- Give child extra time for changing, maybe have them start 5 minutes early if this is acceptable to them
- Have the child positioned where they have minimal distraction and adequate space, as much as is possible
- Give visual demonstration of what is being asked of them in specific tasks

## **Behavioural Strategies:**

- Visual timetable
- Timed tasks - use sand timer/ visual display to show time remaining
- Present the task visually - a simple drawing
- Organisational strip - pictures of the activities you want the child to do, in the order they need to do them in, talk the child through it then gradually decrease support

