



CENTRE FOR AUTISM
MIDDLETOWN

Sensory Strategies for the Classroom



Sensory Strategies for the Classroom



Proprioception (muscle sense/body position in space)

Most young people respond positively to proprioceptive input; we generally do not see dislike or avoidance of proprioceptive input.

Proprioceptive input can [alert](#) a young person who is under-responsive.

Proprioceptive input can [calm](#) young people who are hypersensitive to the sensory input.

Proprioceptive input can have a positive, regulating impact across all sensory systems.

Classroom ideas:

- Erase or wash blackboard or dry-erase board, stretching up high.
- Clean canteen tables.
- Carry a plastic crate with books to library, with 5 percent of child's body weight.
- Carry plastic water jugs to another classroom or to canteen.
- Push breakfast cart back to canteen.
- Squeeze, roll, pinch, or pull clay.
- Carry a backpack (if the student does not have any back-related problems) with 5 percent of body weight. This is helpful also during transition when walking into class or from the bus to support regulation.
- Kick legs against a theraband (stretchy exercise band) or bungee cord, which is tied around the front of student's chair.
- Push chairs to a new location, with old telephone book fastened with heavy tape under seat of chair.
- Perform seat push-ups: while seated, student places hands on chair on each side, raises body and legs off the ground. Repeat 10 times.
- Do wall push-ups: like a push-up but standing with hands on wall and feet apart away from wall.
- Practice wall squats: stand with back against wall and slowly squat down, hold for five seconds, and stand back up. Repeat 10 times.
- Put chairs on top of desk at end of day, then take down chairs to start day.
- Drink from water bottles.
- Chew on sugarless chewing gum; it can be calming and organizing for many students.
- Munch on chewy snacks (e.g., raisins, pretzels).
- Rub a Velcro strip stuck under the desk.
- Squeeze fidget balls/objects for calming and self-regulation.
- Rub lotion on hands and arms, with a calming smell.

Sensory Strategies for the Classroom



Vestibular (Balance/head position against gravity)

Over Reactive – can only cope with a small amount of movement

- Avoid spinning and backward movements
- Avoid activities in which feet are off the ground
- Provide alternatives in P.E.
- Use deep pressure input if the student seems nauseous or upset after movement

Under Reactive – need lots of movement throughout the day

- Seating (e.g. Movin' Sit cushion, exercise ball)
- Timetabled sensory strategies (can be used to provide any form of sensory input to increase alertness during the day)
- Vary positions when working e.g. standing, walking

Movement breaks

Examples...

- Chair pushes
- Tidying materials, books etc.
- Taking messages to other teachers
- Exercise programme
- Going for a walk/run





Sensory Strategies for the Classroom

Tactile (touch)

Over Reactive – can only cope with a small amount of touch input

Practical Subjects

- Allow student to use alternative materials e.g. pencils instead of paint, dry ingredients
- Allow student to wear gloves in tactile/messy activities
- Limit duration of tasks
- Follow with a calming activity
- Avoid timetabling practical subjects beside each other
- Schedule in a calm break after tactile subjects, such as Art and Home Economics

Crowded environments

- Allow student to move through corridors at quieter times
- Permitted to arrive late to class to allow for transition when corridors are less crowded
- Provide quiet spaces at break and lunch e.g. library, games room
- Provide non-contact alternatives for sport and P.E.
- Consider where the student is seated in the classroom to allow adequate personal space
- Place the student at the end of the line in Assembly etc

Clothing

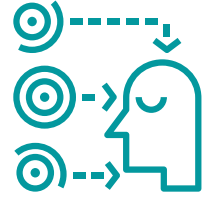
- Provision of tighter clothing next to the skin e.g.
- Cycling shorts
- Tight vests/T-shirts
- Socks with tight elastic
- 'Under armour' garments or equivalent
- Introduce new clothes gradually
- Wear new items for a short time only and gradually increase



Under Reactive – need lots of input throughout the day

- Provide fidget objects
- Incorporate use of practical (tactile) materials in all subjects

Sensory Strategies for the Classroom



Olfactory (smell)

Over Reactive – can only cope with a small amount of scents/odours

Under Reactive – need lots of input throughout the day

For both over and under reaction to smells, the strategies are the same:

- Provide a cloth with a strong scent which the young person can hold over nose
- Provide jars in the classroom filled with preferred smells for over-reactive student
- Keep rooms well ventilated for over-reactive students, and educating under-reactive students about hazardous odours



Visual

Over Reactive – can only cope with a small amount of visual input

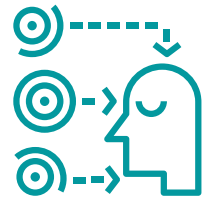
Under Reactive – need lots of input throughout the day

- Sunglasses or peaked cap on sunny days
- Think about position of seat in the classroom i.e., away from the window
- Reduce visual distractions on display walls

- Allow times for visual stimulation during the day in small bursts



Sensory Strategies for the Classroom



Auditory (sound)

Over Reactive – can only cope with a small amount of sound/noise

- Provision of ear defenders, noise cancelling headphones, in-ear plugs which filter sound at higher frequencies
- Allowing the pupil to listen to music through headphones to block out sound in noisy environments
- Coming in an alternative entrance or at an earlier or later time when it is less busy



Under Reactive – need lots of input throughout the day

- Use visual strategies to support issues with not noticing when name is called, instructions given etc
- If someone is seeking auditory input at a high volume, first check hearing
- Allow times for listening to music during the day in small bursts



References

<http://sensory-processing.middletownautism.com/>
Low-Cost/No-Cost Classroom Sensory Strategies PDF