

SENSORY CALMING ACTIVITIES

The following activities can be used to calm/relax your child. Appropriate times to use these activities may be prior to transitions, stressful experiences, bedtime, or when your child is overly excited. In general, the desired response is relaxation, but not extreme drowsiness.

Visual

- lighting: low or dim; avoid bright or flashing lights.
- reading to child is often calming.
- use a room with few visual distractions: walls and objects in neutral (e.g., beige) or cool colours (light blue, lavender or green) are more calming than those in warm, vibrant colours.
- some children need to be allowed to wear sunglasses.

Auditory

- people interacting with child should utilize calm voices with low, even tones.
- use of music: generally quiet or melodic (e.g., environmental sounds, classical, new age) is calming. However, you may want to observe child for their preferred taste in music.
- white noise from radio static, vacuum cleaner, hairdryer, etc. may calm some children.
- minimize auditory distractions.
- consider use of headphones.

Touch

- in general, firm pressure is more calming than light pressure touch (e.g., deep pressure massage, or slowly rolling a therapy ball on the child's back who is lying on his stomach on the floor).
- avoid unexpected touch; communicate to the child before touching; if possible avoid touching the child from behind.

Touch/Pressure

- joint compression can be settling. Sustained, light joint compression can be achieved by placing your hand on the child's head and adding a small amount of pressure. For some children, it may be necessary to increase the amount of pressure. It is essential that the joints are in correct alignment for this type of input, i.e., sitting up straight with the head in neutral.

Temperature

- neutral warmth can be achieved by rolling up in a blanket or sitting/lying in a sleeping bag or blanket sleeper (e.g., when watching TV). This can sometimes be achieved by sitting in a beanbag chair or on a waterbed.
- taking a warm bath may be helpful

Movement

- in general, movement which is slow, rhythmical and repetitive is relaxing; slow rocking in a rocking chair, gentle swinging in a hammock or on a glider swing, sitting/lying on a water bed, lying prone over a large therapy ball while being rocked side to side or forward and back.

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Vibration

- use of a battery-operated vibrator massager to arms and legs may be relaxing to some children but not to others. Watch child carefully. Vibrating pillows could be used. Consult with the occupational therapist before initiating such a program.
- allow child to use electric toothbrush

NOTE: It is essential during these activities that the child maintain consciousness. Observe carefully for any warning signs of loss of consciousness (grogginess, lethargy, incoherent behaviours/speech). If any of these observations are made, discontinue the activity until an occupational therapist can be consulted.

PROPRIOCEPTIVE OR "HEAVY WORK"

Observe the child carefully to see if these activities are calming or facilitatory.

- chewing gum, crushed ice, frozen bananas, crunchy foods
- jumping on trampoline, jumping into cushions
- wearing ace bandage (wraps). Avoid wrapping so tightly as to cut off circulation
- deep breathing exercises
- pushups, situps, sommersaults (an upside down head position is calming for some children)
- pillow sandwich
- allowing child to sear backpack filled with books/toys
- in the winter, having children play outside while wearing all necessary winter clothing gear can be a proprioceptive and heavy work activity.

Having a sensory hideout available for child which consists of a safe "womb-like" atmosphere, such as a small pup tent set up in the living room filled with pillows, books, favourite blankets and/or stuffed animals is a very appropriate way to encourage self-calming strategies.