

Sensory processing

Coping in the classroom environment

These strategies are to help children who have difficulty coping in the classroom environment. The child may wander around the classroom, constantly fidget, chew clothing, disrupt class mates or push others when they come too close.

- Position the child in an area of the classroom with the least amount of noise and activity
- Provide the child with plenty of opportunities to get up and move around during the day such as getting the register, collecting work books etc.
- Have the child help out with 'chores' around the classroom such as banging erasers, washing the blackboard, carrying books to the office, etc
- Provide as many opportunities as possible for active work during the day for example instead of sitting at a desk while doing math, have the child do math problems on the board.
- Devise physical activity errands for the child when his activity level is high (restless, over active) or between activities eg passing out books, taking register to office, etc
- Try using a 'Movin' Sit' cushion, which allows some movement while remaining seated
- Carry out self-calming activities for the whole class, eg taking long slow breaths, listening to music
- Consider singing a lively song with actions to increase the child's alertness and ability to focus for learning
- Be aware of situations that exacerbate the problem, eg changing activities or rooms. Prepare the child for the anticipated change and agree on the appropriate action. Focus on what you would like to happen rather than on what you do not want to happen. If you say do not run out of line into assembly, the negative behaviour will be foremost in his mind
- Introduce a 'waiting chair'; where one child has your attention, the next child must wait in his own chair. Only when the 'waiting chair' is free can he move from his seat
- Provide the child with a fidget toy to use when sat at his desk (ie rubber band, paper clip, small toy, etc). This will give the child something to do but help keep him from disrupting others
- Let the child choose a stuffed animal/toy which he is responsible for and requires being held firmly throughout the circle time activity
- Consider that some children find wearing headphones or ear plugs a helpful way to cut down auditory stimulation and may also find a weighted headset calming
- Teach the whole class about the importance of personal space eg begin circle time by explaining that everyone needs to be arm's length away from each other or provide carpet squares or hula hoops for the children to sit in



Creating a sensory corner and calming activities/strategies

A comfort zone describes an area within the classroom or school where a child can go to regroup if they are over stimulated:

- Clear a side area or corner of the classroom. Use screens or other dividers, ie curtain, to define this space clearly and partially occlude the vision of the rest of the classroom
- Choose soft covering for the floor, and cushions, a soft gym mat or bean bags to sit on (normal tables and chairs are not recommended). The space should aim to be snugly and preferably enclosed (cardboard box) using cushions, beanbags, heavy blankets, sleeping bag or soft toys etc
- Provide lighting which is low and/or indirect
- Noise should be minimised or use relaxing music (nature sounds). Alternatively use white noise such as a fan, or earphones to help block out background noise
- Determine if parents can recreate the 'den' at home if it is found to be useful at school

These activities may help children to slow down and allow them to improve their ability to sit in a more controlled manner and pay more attention to what is happening around them:

- Place palms of hands on top of the head and press down (squash themselves into the floor) with even pressure for a count of 10
- Using a soft ball, get the child to hold it between two flat hands in front of their chest
- Squash the ball as hard as possible to flatten it and hold for a count of 10
- Push against a wall or down against a desk for a count of 20
- Complete activities encouraging the child to lie on their tummy propping on elbows

Oral/mouth tools:

- Use mouth toys: blowers, chewing food, and straws
- Chew crunchy food: apples, popcorn, nuts, orange, etc
- Drink thick fluids from a straw/exercise bottle
- Chew chewy tubes
- Suck lollipops/sweets

Movement tools (some of these activities will require the use of an outdoor or larger area and may be chosen during play time):

- Running
- Getting up and down stairs
- Walking quickly
- Shaking head or limbs
- Jump up and down (ie on trampoline)
- Use gym apparatus
- Play sports (eg football)
- Dance to music
- Sit on Move n' Sit cushion or therapy ball



Touch/hand tools:

- Pour out dry beans from a tin
- Fidget with a Koosh ball, paper clips, rubber bands, straws, thera-band, small figurines, marbles etc
- Stroking rough and prickly textures or soft textures
- Apply deep pressure to calm (big bear hugs on shoulders and limbs)
- Weighted vet/blanket

Looking/eye tools:

- Bright lights

- Lights that change colour (ie bubble lamp, lava lamp)
- Looking at a book/pictures with an adult
- Watching a calming DVD

Listening tools:

- Slow, rhythmical music to calm
- Uneven, fast music on headphones to increase alertness