Sensory Activities for Preschool/Elementary Aged Children

Increase Arousal Level

Proprioception is the sensation that has been observed to help children regulate their responsiveness to sensation. (Blance & Schaaf)

- Allow frequent movement breaks
- Olfactory input - scented lotion to rub into arms/hands, use scented markers
- Sit on small inflated disk with irregular surface on it
- Jump on a trampoline, caution for safety - adult must be present and spot
- Jump or climb in and out of inner tubes
- Play running “Red light/Green light” or jumping games such as hopscotch
- Bounce on a Bouncy Ball (Hippy Hop)
- Jump on a pogo stick

Decrease Arousal Level through Proprioception

- Push against a wall, chair push ups
- Wheelbarrow walking and animal walks (crab walk, bear walk, army crawl)
- Offer a snack of crunchy healthy foods
- Wear a weighted vest or compression Under Armor
- Reduce lighting and noise in the room (ear plugs or noise reducing head phones)

When in Doubt Regulate Arousal through Proprioception Activities

- Participate in climbing activities (such as on a playground)
- Play in a sandbox with damp, heavy sand
- Have child push a child's sized cart filled with plastic bottles filled with sand or water and then put away on low shelf.
- Color a rainbow with large paper on floor or with sidewalk chalk outside
- Put one child in a laundry basket and have another child push him around, can pretend it is a
train. If another child is not available can fill with heavy items to push

- Play catch with a heavy ball or bounce and roll a heavy ball
- Make an obstacle course with items to climb over and on such as balls, cushions, tables and chairs, large boxes
- Fill a pillow case with a few stuffed animals in it for weight and the child can then push or pull the pillow case around
- Encourage one child to pull another child in a blanket around the floor
- Fill up big toy trucks with heavy items, Pushing with both hands to knock things down
- Play cars under the kitchen table where the child pushes the car with one hand while creeping and weight bearing on the other hand
- Have your child carry and unpack groceries
- Use a heavy quilt on their bed for them to crawl under for sleeping
- Child can wear a heavy backpack or fanny pack while running errands for increased input and organizing input
- Have your child help with household chores that provide "heavy work" such as: vacuum, sweep, mop, dust, empty the trash, carry the laundry basket, load and unload the dryer, wipe off table after dinner, push chairs under the table after a meal, clean windows or fronts of appliances using a spray bottle, cooking activities – stir, mix, chop, roll, etc., bathe the dog, wash the car, yard work including raking, sweeping, shoveling, digging dirt.

**Decrease Sensitivity to Tactile Sensation**

Pressure-touch is thought to be organizing and calming for children who are over-responsive to sensation, (Blanche & Schaaf, 2001)

- Play "steam roller" - roll up in a blanket or children take turns lying on the ground and rolling over each other
- Sandwich child between pillows, couch cushions, and/or blankets
- Firm towel rubs after bathing or swimming
- Give bear hugs
- Hide under bean bag chair playing "turtle - crawling around with bean bag chair resting on the child's back
o Provide and receive massages
  o Play "bulldozer" roll a large ball over the child

**Provide Rich Tactile Activities as Tolerated**

Tactile activities are helpful to children to learn to move and manipulate their body and hands in a coordinated, planned manner.

  o Cuddle stuffed animals or favorite blankets
  o Offer messy play with hands in pudding, yogurt, ice cream, mashed potatoes, cookie dough, finger paint, etc.
  o Manipulate various putties such as PlayDoh, Silly Putty, can find hidden objects such as beads or pennies and manipulate into shapes and letters
  o Find objects hidden in a container of sand, dry bean, macaroni, rice, corn, packing peanuts, dirt, oatmeal, etc. Can add some spices for added olfactory sensation
  o Water play with spray bottles
  o Write and color with a vibrating pen
  o Squeeze and walk on bubble wrap or other various textures barefoot
  o Play a game of identifying objects hidden in a bag by touch only (no peeking)
  o Play pretend shaving using shaving cream on legs, arm, hands and a popsicle stick to “shave” off
  o Play carpet games such as commando crawling, rolling, making angles
  o Play with your child to roll over different surfaces such as blankets, carpet, leaves, grass, etc.
  o Have child identify shapes, letters and numbers drawn on his or her arm, leg or back

**Decrease Sensitivity to Vestibular (Movement) Sensation**

Use activities that are stop and go and occur in a variety of planes. For the child who is sensitive to movement or who needs calming, use movements that are straight and slow and rhythmical like swinging or rocking.

  o Have child sit on swing and drop beanbags placed between knees or feet onto a target
  o To teach pumping on a swing stand in front and have the child extend legs as swing moves forward so adult can push on bottom of the feet
  o Use sitting disc (can be a semi deflated beach ball) for child during homework or mealtimes
o Ride tricycle or bike
o Go sledding
o Put on some upbeat music and dance
o Cartwheels and somersaults as tolerated
o Play ring around the Rosy
o Rocking chairs child sized or on an adult’s lap
o Bounce on big balls
o Roll like a log down hills in the grass
o Swing in a hammock
o Ride a scooter
o Hang upside down from a low chair or couch

**Decrease Sensitivity to Auditory Stimuli**

Noises can put a child on edge and be overwhelming to a child. Below are ways to help a child filter out unwanted auditory stimuli.

- Ear plugs or noise reducing headphones
- Ear buds with soothing music
- A metronome, set to 60 beats per minute as background noise
- Change your quality or intensity of voice
- Encourage child to hum softly to himself

Adapted from the book: *Sensory Integration: Applying Clinical Reasoning to Practice with Diverse Populations*, chapter 13 Sensational Ways to Play