



BrainWorks Quick Start Guide

Thank you for becoming a BrainWorks Member!

Our goal is to take the confusion out of “sensory diets” and empower the child to meet their sensory needs effectively and eventually independently if possible!

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Quick Start Instructions

Creating a sensory diet can be overwhelming at first. All of this is easier with the assistance of an occupational therapist. While there is a lot you can do on your own, a skilled O.T. can give you a more in-depth view of your child's needs and a plan for how to address those needs. In the meantime, here is how you can get started:

1. Fill out the Sensory Symptoms Checklist included in this manual.

2. Now look closely at the results for the "NEAR" senses (TACTILE, PROPRIOCEPTIVE, VESTIBULAR). Are most checkmarks in the left hand column, indicating *over-responsiveness*? If so, your sensory diet will use primarily the calming (red arrow) activities. Or are most of the checkmarks in the right hand column, indicating *under-responsiveness*? If this is the case, your sensory diet will use lots of alerting (green arrow) activities.

Here is an overview of the *BrainWorks* arrow system:

- **Green Arrow:** These activities are best for *under-responders* and *sensory seekers*. These will be alerting for most kids. For the sensory seekers, these activities will help them reach the necessary threshold level for input to be meaningful for their brains.
- **Yellow Arrow:** These activities encourage focus and attention. These almost always bring both *over-* and *under-responders* to the appropriate level of arousal for learning and productivity. These are "just-right" activities.
- **Red Arrow:** These activities will help a person slow down or calm down. For *over-responders*, these activities will help the person modulate the sensory input more effectively and feel less overwhelmed.

3. Find the appropriate "Strategy Summary" guide to give you an overview of the appropriate sensory diet. To determine which Strategy Summary Guide to use, look again at the results of your checklist in the "near" senses (TACTILE, PROPRIOCEPTIVE, VESTIBULAR).

4. Now take a look at the options for sensory diet tool formats (descriptions and instructions for use found in this manual) and decide which will work best for your child or client.





5. Select the picture cards you need depending on the child's age, sensory needs, and equipment available. ALWAYS choose some "Just Right" picture cards because these are good for everybody, PLUS either the "calming" or "alerting" cards depending on your child's needs).

FOR EXAMPLE: If you have an 8 year old and the "Sensory Symptoms Checklist" reveals that he/she is primarily under-responsive in the NEAR senses (tactile, proprioceptive, and vestibular), you will want to select some of the "just right" activities AND some of the "alerting" activities.

6. Assemble the Sensory Diet Tool using the format and picture cards you have selected. To assemble the File Folder, first lay it flat on a rug or carpet and use an ice pick or other sharp tool to poke a hole in the black circle on the odometer. Insert the red spinner and place the cap on it from the other side of the folder. Next, place Velcro dots on the squares under the tachometer and on each square inside the folder. You may choose to laminate the picture cards for durability. Place the opposite Velcro dots on the backs of the picture cards you have selected.

To assemble a Key Ring Tool, select up to 15 picture cards that will be most appropriate for the environment where your child will be using the key ring tool. You may wish to laminate the cards for durability. Punch a hole in the corner of each card and place on the ring.

To assemble a First-Then Tool, it is recommended that you print the 4" picture cards off of the website (www.sensationalbrain.com) and laminate them. However, the smaller cards will work too.

7. Learn to use the TACHOMETER teaching aid on the front of the file folder: Keep the folder handy and refer back to it frequently as you observe your child. If he/she is appropriately engaged in an activity, point out that their sensory "engine" is going "just right" at that time – point to the middle area of the TACHOMETER. At this "speed," we are able to focus and attend without being easily distracted or feeling too sluggish.

If you notice your child is agitated, irritable, hyper, unfocused, fidgety, point out that his/her sensory "engine" is going "too fast." Point to the green light on the STOP LIGHT card or the far right/green area on the TACHOMETER. At this speed, it is hard to think clearly or focus appropriately.





For under-responders, this is a time to choose green arrow activities to give them the burst of input they need to reach their sensory threshold. However, for over-responders, this is the time to give them red arrow activities, because their nervous systems are feeling overwhelmed. If you notice your child is sluggish, “zoning out,” or just plain sedentary, point out that their sensory “engine” is going “too slow.” Point to the red light on the STOP LIGHT card or the far left/red area on the TACHOMETER. At this speed, it is hard to get anything done or focus on what is important. This is when green arrow activities are needed to “rev” the engine up. Refer back to the teaching aid frequently until the child fully understands his/her “engine.”

8. Next, look closely at the results for the “FAR” senses (auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory). For each sensory system, notice if your child is primarily over- or under-responsive. Although most of the sensory activities on the BrainWorks picture cards address the “NEAR” senses, the effects will be modulating to the “FAR” senses as well. Additionally, we use environmental modifications and adaptations to address the needs of the “FAR” senses.

Refer to the “Home Modifications Checklist” and “Classroom Accommodations Checklist” found in this manual for suggestions and ideas.

PLEASE NOTE: Not every child or adult falls neatly into one category (Over/Under-Responsive). If you are left feeling like your Sensory Symptoms checklist leaves you more confused than anything, please feel free to email: Rachel@sensationalbrain.com.



Sensory Diet Format Options and Instructions for Use

File Folder Tool

Recommended Uses:

- Ages 3-12
- Classrooms
- Individuals

Benefits of this template:

- Can be used by multiple children in the same classroom.
- Great for kids who have fluctuating sensory modulation.

How to use file folder with children:

- Use *proactively* by allotting time for a sensory break before challenging tasks.
- Use *reactively* by acknowledging student is not attending well (point out target behavior) and allow activity choices before getting back to task. Or, better yet, encourage the student to recognize his/her own sensory needs and meet them at appropriate times.

Guide the student to refer to the “Tachometer” on the outside of the file folder. Explain the following:

- Red means “Stop.” When our brains and bodies are on “stop” we may be feeling sluggish, sleepy, unmotivated, and lazy. Use terms appropriate for the child’s age and developmental level. If you are familiar with the “Alert Program,” you may want to use the engine analogy. For younger kids, you can use Pooh characters as an analogy, with Eeyore being the character on red.
- Yellow means “Just Right.” When our brains and bodies are on yellow, we are alert and able to focus, not going too fast nor too slow (engine analogy). For younger kids, Winnie the Pooh is usually “Just Right.”
- Green means “Go!” When our brains and bodies are on “Go!” we are moving quickly, our engines are going fast, and we are much more like Tigger than anyone else in Pooh--land. Green isn’t always happy and fun though; if our brakes aren’t working, we can lose control of our engine. This is what happens when we are over--stimulated – when we’re bothered by lights/sounds/touch/movement, it is like our brakes are broken.



After using the tachometer to find out how they are operating at the moment, cue the child to open the folder and choose appropriate activities. For example, if they are on “green,” they will need to choose red or yellow activities to “slow down” UNLESS they are *sensory--seekers*. When sensory--seekers are on green, they need the really **intense** green activities to help them reach their high threshold for sensory input. If the child is on “red,” he/she will need to choose yellow or green activities to “speed up.”

Depending on time available and the child’s needs, cue the child to pick up to four activity cards to move to the outside of the folder and place on the Velcro under the tachometer. As he/she completes each activity, he/she will move the activity card back to the inside of the folder. They should be encouraged to use this as an “activity schedule” and to complete the activities as independently as possible.

Key Ring Tool

Recommended Uses:

- Children and teens ages 6--18
- Reference tool for use by a teacher or aide/paraprofessional

Benefits of this tool:

- Small, can be hooked on belt loop or to binder ring
- Easily accepted for use by older kids
- Great for kids who have fluctuating sensory modulation

How to use the key ring sensory diet tool:

Cue kids to refer to the “tachometer” picture card and determine where their brains are operating:

- Red means “Stop.” When our brains and bodies are on “stop” we may be feeling sluggish, sleepy, unmotivated, and lazy. Use terms appropriate for the child’s age and developmental level. If you are familiar with the “Alert Program,” you may want to use the engine analogy. For younger kids, you can use Pooh characters as an analogy, with Eeyore being the character on red.
- Yellow means “Just Right.” When our brains and bodies are on yellow, we are alert and able to focus, not going too fast nor too slow (engine analogy). For younger kids, Winnie the Pooh is usually “Just Right.”





- Green means “Go!” When our brains and bodies are on “Go!” we are moving quickly, our engines are going fast, and we are much more like Tigger than anyone else in Pooh--land. Green isn’t always happy and fun though; if our brakes aren’t working, we can lose control of our engine. This is what happens when we are over--stimulated – when we’re bothered by lights/sounds/touch/movement, it is like our brakes are broken.

After helping the child determine which stop light color applies to him/her at that moment, guide them to choose activities from the key ring tool that will help them to move toward “Just Right, or yellow.” For example, if a teen knows that he is over--stimulated and unable to focus, he is on green. He needs to choose red activities to “slow him down” or yellow to move him toward “just right.”

First--Then Tool

Recommended Uses:

- Young children and children with cognitive impairments

Benefits of this tool:

- Beneficial for kids who need frequent sensory breaks
- Allows sensory choices based on forms of input the caregiver knows will be the most beneficial to the student

How to use the First--Then sensory diet tool:

- Determine if the child needs red, yellow, or green activities before beginning work. Present two activity choices (i.e. if you determine that the child needs red (calming) activities, hold up two red choices, and allow him to choose one). After activity completion, guide the child to the work center/table.
- Place a card on the “First” side that indicates work. It can be our general “Work” BrainWorks card, or you may choose something more specific.
- Present two appropriate choices based on the type of sensory input you know the child will need to continue to work after the “Then” time. Allow him/her to place his/her choice on the “Then” side.
- Engage the child in the “work” task. Upon completion, cue the child to remove the “work” card. Show him/her that it is time for their chosen “Then” activity. It may be beneficial to set a timer. When the timer goes off, have the First--Then card prepared to start the cycle again.





FAQ's

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is Sensory Integration (also called sensory processing)?

Eighty percent of our brains are devoted to processing incoming sensory information and formulating appropriate responses to our sensory environment. Even as you sit reading this information, you are being bombarded by sensory input: the visual stimulation of the computer screen and the visual decoding of the words on the screen, the sounds in your house – voices, electronics, outdoor sounds, the feel of your clothing on your skin and the weight of your body against the chair, the temperature in the room, internal sensations from your muscles controlling your posture and SO much more! If your brain is processing (or integrating) the information effectively, you are able to focus on what you are reading and “tune out” the other sensations competing for your attention.

What is Sensory Processing Disorder?

For children and adults with sensory processing issues (sometimes called Sensory Processing Disorder or Sensory Integration Dysfunction), the brain has difficulty making sense of the sensory information and deciding what to focus on and what to filter out, and how to respond appropriately to the information. This response may be a motor action, such as adjusting your posture so you don't fall down (clumsiness), or it may be a cognitive response, such as being able to concentrate on your spouse's (or teacher's) voice even though the kids are being noisy in the same room. People with sensory processing issues have to expend a lot of extra energy and thought power making sense of their sensory world and trying to formulate appropriate responses. Therefore they struggle with poor attention, low frustration tolerance, moodiness, anxiety, and sometimes depression. Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is an umbrella term that encompasses several different types of disorders resulting from poor sensory integration.

What is Sensory Modulation Disorder?

Sensory Modulation Disorder is one specific type of Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). Sensory modulation refers specifically to the brain's ability to respond appropriately to the sensory environment and to remain at the appropriate level of arousal or alertness. There are actually three primary types of Sensory Modulation Disorder:

Over-responsivity: An exaggerated response of the nervous system to sensory input. For example, people who get motion sick easily are over-responding to vestibular input (the sensation of movement). The nervous system goes into fight-or-flight mode even when no real danger exists.

Under-responsivity: A lack of response, or insufficient response to the sensory environment. Sometimes these people appear to be daydreaming or unfocused on what is happening around them. They may also be uncoordinated and have difficulty with motor skills development.





Sensory-seeking: The nervous system of the sensory-seeker needs intense input in order for the sensation to be registered properly in the brain. Therefore the sensory-seeker craves intense sensations constantly.

How is Sensory Processing Disorder diagnosed?

Typically, SPD is diagnosed by an Occupational Therapist after the child has been referred by a pediatrician or a teacher who has seen signs of sensory processing issues. Occupational Therapists trained in diagnosis and treatment of SPD typically use a combination of standardized assessment tools, sensory checklists, and observation to confirm a diagnosis. At that point, the therapist will determine how the sensory processing disorder is affecting the child's development and work to devise an appropriate treatment plan.

How is Sensory Processing Disorder treated?

Treatment usually involves occupational therapy. Some physical therapists and speech and language pathologists are also trained in treatment of SPD. The therapist will determine the particular type of SPD and the affect it is having on the child's development. Some forms of SPD primarily affect motor skill development. Treatment usually takes place in a therapy gym with a variety of equipment, such as swings, crash pads, mats, and scooters and is designed to enhance the child's ability to interpret sensory input accurately and make adaptive responses with their bodies. If the child's SPD primarily affects sensory modulation, the treatment will be aimed at reducing symptoms of over-responsivity or under-responsivity to sensory input. In addition to clinically-based therapy, a sensory diet is often recommended.

What is a Sensory Diet?

"Sensory Diet" is a term that was originally coined by Patricia Wilbarger, an occupational therapist. A sensory diet is what all of us use to keep our brains alert and focused throughout our days. Most of us have created our own sensory diets without consciously thinking about it. You may drink coffee to stay alert during long meetings or twirl your hair while concentrating. Some people do their best problem-solving while pacing back and forth in their offices. Many people exercise to "decompress" – to help them modulate the sensations that have been taxing on their nervous systems throughout their day. Some people need intense sensations in order to feel good – really hot showers, extra spicy food, and extreme sports like bungee-jumping. Music is an important part of most people's sensory diets – certain types of music help you calm down while other types perk you up. For people with a sensory modulation disorder, figuring out what their brains need to be alert and focused, or calm enough to go to sleep at night, requires some assistance. Often, a "Sensory Diet" is recommended to them by an occupational therapist or other professional trained in sensory integration treatment. The sensory diet is usually a written or picture schedule of selected activities designed to be used throughout the person's day to keep their nervous system at the



appropriate level of arousal. Brainworks is a sensory diet tool used by many occupational therapists to provide children and teens with pictures of activities chosen specifically for them that will enhance their sensory modulation.

What can a parent do at home to help a child with Sensory Processing Disorder?

Consult with an occupational therapist for specific recommendations for your child. In the meantime, use our Sensory Checklist to get an idea of how your child is responding to sensory input. After filling out the checklist, use BrainWorks picture cards to address your child's sensory needs and to help him/her learn to self-regulate. BrainWorks is a tool that has been created for use by parents, as well as professionals, to empower children to use sensory input appropriately to calm or alert their nervous systems as needed.

What is BrainWorks?

BrainWorks is a sensory diet tool created for use by parents, therapists, and teachers. After consulting with your child's therapist, or using our sensory checklist to determine what type of sensory modulation disorder your child has, you can easily access forms and sensory diet picture cards that can be printed out or purchased for immediate use. The activity picture cards have icons that will help you identify which activities are calming and which are alerting to the nervous system. BrainWorks takes the guess work out of creating sensory diets! For professionals who create sensory diets frequently, BrainWorks saves your valuable time and allows you to quickly and easily print out or photocopy the specific information and activities your client needs. BrainWorks is very user-friendly and has a built-in teaching component (the modulation icons) that will help children and their parents to quickly choose activities needed by their nervous system at any given time. BrainWorks has activities for use in home and school settings and is divided into categories based on age and type of modulation disorder (over-responsive, under-responsive, or sensory-seeking).

What age range is BrainWorks designed for?

The BrainWorks activity picture cards are designed to be used for children ages 2-18. For birth to two-year-olds, there are special forms for parents and caregivers to help them choose activities to calm and alert the babies and to stimulate development of sensory integration. BrainWorks also has information forms for adults with sensory modulation problems.





Activity Descriptions and Equipment Needs

Many of the activities on the BrainWorks picture cards can be done with toys and equipment readily available in the home or classroom. However, some may need special equipment. Here are some sources for therapy products.

Recommended Equipment Sources

[Harkla](#) - High quality sensory products and weighted tools.

[Pocket Full of Therapy](#) - Unique therapeutic toys and equipment for sensory diets.

[Smart Knit Kids](#) - Seamless clothes and compression shirts!

[Flag House](#) - A little bit of everything therapeutic.

[Beyond Play](#) - Great selection of toys and equipment for use in sensory diets.

[Southpaw](#) - Therapeutic Products for clinics and schools

**Please note: This list of sensory activities is intended to be a guide in selecting appropriate activities for the children you work with. However, not all of these activities are safe and appropriate for all children. It is up to the supervising adults to ensure the safety of the children participating in these activities. Furthermore, the usual effect (calming, alerting, "just right") has been listed for your benefit but not all children respond the same way to each type of sensory input. Again, careful observation and supervision by adults is essential.*

Action Songs – Any fun songs that get kids moving will work! Provides vestibular, proprioceptive, auditory, and visual input. Typically alerting.

Air Wedge – Especially great for kids with low muscle tone or poor posture. Provides vestibular and proprioceptive input. Typically “just right.” Can be alerting.

Animal Walk – Crab walk, bear walk, frog leap, seal, and more! Provides proprioceptive, vestibular, visual, and tactile input. “Just right.”

Army Crawl – Use forearms to pull self forward. Feet and knees can help but basically remain in extended position. Encourage army crawling under chairs or low coffee tables. This is a nice activity to incorporate into obstacle courses. The heavy proprioceptive input makes this a “just right” activity.





Aroma – A friendship bracelet with a couple drops of essential oil, votive candles with wicks removed, scented chapstick rubbed on the web space between thumb and index finger, or other scented objects. Provides olfactory input. Preferred scents are usually “just right.”

Backward Walking – Ensure safety by clearing the path and/or have someone giving verbal directions to help the walker avoid obstacles. This is typically alerting since we have to rely on senses other than vision.

Balance Beam – A piece of duct tape on the floor can suffice. Typically alerting.

Balance Board – The rocking motion and balance required make this an alerting activity. DIY instructions can be easily found online.

Ball Pass – Two people stand back to back and pass the ball in one direction for a chosen amount of time, then reverse. Practice counting or spelling during this activity! Provides proprioceptive, vestibular, and visual input. Can add a textured ball or toy for increased tactile input. Usually “just right.”

Ball Pit – A wading pool filled with balls works great at home. Provides proprioceptive, tactile and visual input. Usually “just right.” Can be alerting for some.

Beanbag Chair – The heavier the better for most kids, but any beanbag chair will do. Provides proprioceptive input. Typically calming.

Bear Hug – A tight, full-body hug is great for proprioceptive input as well as emotional well-being! “Just right.”

Belly Breathing – Instant calming effect. Make sure to breathe deep enough to see the belly push outward. Provides proprioceptive input. Calming/organizing/“just right.”

Belly on Ball – Putting together puzzles, tossing beanbags, or doing modified push-ups over a ball provides great proprioceptive and vestibular input simultaneously. Usually “just right.”





Biking – Biking provides proprioceptive, vestibular and visual input. “Just right.”

Bikes and Trikes – Typical or adapted bikes and trikes are all that is needed.

Proprioceptive, vestibular and visual input. “Just right.”

Bilibo – Bilibos have many uses but the most common one is to sit in it and spin oneself. Alerting.

Blowing Bubbles – Experiment with different types of wands to find ones that work best for the child. Provides proprioceptive input (if the child is blowing the bubbles), tactile (popping the bubbles) and visual input. Usually “just right.”

Blowing Games – Many styles of blowing toys available. You can also make up games using straws and cotton balls – have cottonball races or devise “goals” and make it a sport! Blowing provides proprioceptive input to the mouth and chest. Visual and auditory input are usually provided as well. Typically “just right.”

Blowing Instruments – Harmonicas, recorders, whistles and more. The combination of blowing and creating music is typically alerting.

Board Writing – This is a great alternative to pencil/paper tasks. Standing to write large letters/numbers/shapes provides proprioceptive input to most of the large joints and muscles in the body. Some vestibular and visual input as well. Usually “just right.”

Bolster Swing – This cylindrical swing requires balance and provides a fair amount of proprioceptive input to the core and all four extremities making this a “just right” activity most of the time. Fast or multi-directional movement can make it an alerting activity.

Boppy Pillow – Great positioning device for little ones, or children with delayed motor skills. Proprioceptive input comes from the weight-bearing positioning as well as the pillow itself. Righting the head against gravity provides vestibular input. Combine this with play for visual and auditory input as well. Usually “just right,” but can be alerting and even upsetting for kids with upper body weakness. Start with short amounts of time and pair it with highly preferred toys or music to increase tolerance.





Bottles and Sippy Cups – These provide proprioceptive (heavy work) input to the mouth and jaw which is very organizing for the nervous system. Can be a hard habit to break though so be sure to offer alternatives early on! Calming.

Bubble Wrap – Encourage child to use index finger and thumb to pinch-pop all of the bubbles. Or have child use one finger at a time to press down on each to pop them. Provides proprioceptive and auditory input. Have child stand to press on bubbles or use feet to stomp them to increase the proprioceptive input. Typically alerting.

Bumpy Roll – Place soft toys or pillows under a blanket or towel and have child roll back and forth. Or make this part of an obstacle course. Have the child guess the objects under the blanket. Provides proprioceptive, vestibular and tactile input. Usually “just right” but can be alerting.

Chair Push-Ups – Place hands on each side of seat and push up so that behind comes off the seat. For extra challenge, don't let the feet touch the floor! Provides proprioceptive input. “Just right.”

Chair Ride – With child in a wheeled office chair, spin him/her around or push from one side of room to another. Now have child give the adult a ride! Provides vestibular input for the one being pushed, proprioceptive input for the one doing the pushing. Usually alerting.

Change Positions – Stand up, turn the chair around, or straddle the chair while working. Different positions result in proprioceptive input to different parts of the body. Typically “just right.”

Chase – Alerting. Increase the motor planning component and decrease the speed by adding conditions such as walking in a manner where toes of one foot touch heel of other foot, or “chasing” while crab-walking, etc.



Chewing Tools – Chewable jewelry, chewy pencil toppers and more available. Try playing “tug of war” with a chew toy in the child’s mouth for extra pressure input. Provides oral proprioceptive and tactile input. Usually “just right.”

Chewing Toys – For young children, most teething toys will be safe and appropriate. Provides oral proprioceptive and tactile input. Usually “just right.”

Chores – Assign chores that require “heavy work” – laundry, emptying the trash, raking, push mower, and vacuuming are all perfect. Provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually “just right.”

Coffee Grinder – Have child push up on one straight arm and “walk” around this point of support in a circle. Then change arms and go the other way! Provides heavy duty proprioceptive input as well as vestibular and visual input (due to the sideways positioning). Alerting.

Cold Packs – A ziplock bag filled with ice or a cold pack used in lunch boxes can be placed on the back of a forearm or the back of the neck to provide alerting input during homework time. Alerting.

Cold Water Splash – Simply splashing cold water on the face and neck can be a quick and easy method of alerting input.

Cotton Ball Races – Blowing cotton balls toward a target if playing alone or across a finish line if racing against a partner provides alerting sensory input.

Cozy Corner – A bean bag chair or a floor pillow in an out-of-the-way spot in a room is all that is needed to create a cozy corner. Provides proprioceptive input and results in decreased visual and auditory input. Typically calming.

Crashing Play – Make it safe by giving them a large beanbag or couch pillows to crash into. A toddler step stool, or a low couch, usually works well to jump from. The crashing provides intense proprioceptive input. Adding running or jumping to the crash would provide vestibular input as well. Usually “just right” but can be alerting to some.



Crawling – Make it a game by incorporating crawling into obstacle courses, “Follow the Leader” or “Hide-and-Seek on Hands-and-Knees.” Provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. “Just right.”

Cross Crawl – Pretend to be climbing a tall ladder using same arm and leg simultaneously. Try again using opposite arm and leg simultaneously. Provides mostly proprioceptive input. “Just right.”

Cross Overs – Cross right foot over left foot and right wrist over left wrist. Then pull hands in toward chest and up. Take a couple deep breaths in this position then switch positions of hands and feet. Organizing, “just right” input.

Crunchy Foods – Crackers, carrot sticks, and more. Provides oral tactile input. Usually alerting.

Cuddle – Benefits the sensory system as well as making one feel loved! Provides proprioceptive and tactile input. Calming.

Cuddle Swing – Swing made with stretchy but compressive fabric. The stretchy fabric provides proprioceptive input, the motion provides vestibular input and visual input. Usually “just right” but whether you swing slow & linear or fast & multidirectional can change the effect on the nervous system.

Dancing – No equipment or explanation needed! Provides vestibular, proprioceptive, and visual input. Usually alerting.

Deep Pressure – Pressure from a big ball, tight hugs, play wrestling, and laying under a heavy pillow or a beanbag are a few good ways to get this type of input. Provides proprioceptive input. Usually calming.

Desk Stretches – Grasp hands together with arms straight behind back, grab upper corner of chair with both hands and turn trunk in that direction, then switch to other side. Provides proprioceptive input. Mostly “just right” with a slight alerting/organizing effect.





Desk Theraband – A piece of theraband tied to the legs of a desk or chair gives wiggly legs something to push and pull against. A bicycle inner-tube or a bungee can work as well. Proprioceptive input. “Just right.”

Dig – Sandboxes, shovels and pails are great. Inside, a sensory table with similar utensils will work also. Provides proprioceptive and tactile input. Usually “just right.”

Disc Swing – Can be hung from a swingset, a tree, or a basement rafter. The required position results in proprioceptive input and the movement causes vestibular and visual input. Usually “just right” but can be either calming or alerting depending on the movement (slow & linear vs. fast & multidirectional).

Doorway Pulley – This rhythmic exercise is typically calming.

Dots and Squeezes – Start by making a “dot” in one palm by pressing firmly with the opposite thumb. Then start a series of squeezes at the wrist, moving up the arm to the shoulder. Then repeat on opposite arm. Calming.

Drinking Through Straws – Straws are a simple way to increase oral proprioceptive input. “Just right.”

Ear Massage – Start at tops of ears and work downward with small circular motions. Typically calming.

Exercise - Basic exercises (jumping jacks, toe-touches, marching in place, etc.) for 5 – 10 minutes improve everyone’s level of alertness. Provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually “just right” overall but can be alerting too.

Exercise Band – Multiple uses for all major muscle groups. Find it in sporting goods sections of most discount stores. Provides proprioceptive input. “Just right.”



Exercise Equipment – Treadmills, stair machines, stationary bikes and more. Provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually “just right.”

Face Tapping – Use fingertips to gently tap cheeks and temples in a circular manner. Alerting.

Fan – Small desktop fans work well. Provides mostly tactile input. Gentle air is usually “just right” and more forceful air is alerting.

Fidgets – Tangles, squish balls, party favor-type toys and more. Provide proprioceptive and tactile input. Usually “just right.”

Figure 8 Walk – Encourage child to focus on something on the wall while walking in a large figure 8 pattern. Next, switch focus to opposite wall and repeat in opposite direction. Provides some proprioceptive, vestibular, and visual input. Typically “just right.”

Finger Pulls – Start by hooking index fingers together and pulling then repeat with middle fingers, ring fingers, and pinkies. Provides proprioceptive input. “Just right.”

Finger Push-Ups – Start with hands flat on table or desk. Keep fingertips still while flexing fingers. “Just right.”

Fish Tank – In addition to the visual input, feeding the fish and cleaning the tank will provide tactile and olfactory input as well. Calming.

Float Toys – Swimming toys. Swimming provides heavy-duty proprioceptive and vestibular input. Float toys provide some security which can make swimming more relaxing. The result is typically “just right.”

Floor Chair – These are typically purchased through therapy supply catalogs. These are great for kids who need a little postural support for floor sitting or kids who always like to have something to lean against. “Just right.”

Frozen Foods – Frozen peas, banana slices, and grapes, along with yogurt pops or strawberry milk ice cubes are all healthy snacks that are alerting in nature.





Galloping – Use a hobby horse or gallop on your own for an easy form of alerting sensory input.

Gum or Peppermints (this image is titled “Peppermints” but for the app, stick with “Gum or Peppermints”) – Any flavor of gum or hard candies work equally well. Life Savers are best if choking is a concern. Gum and hard candies provide oral proprioceptive, tactile, and gustatory input. Oral input tends to be organizing overall. Typically “just right” although some flavors (such as sour or cinnamon) can be alerting.

Gymnastics - Basic tumbling can be practiced at home in the grass or by using a sleeping bag as a mat. Excellent source of proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually “just right” but the high intensity level makes it a perfect choice for sensory seekers (a good way to “burn off their extra gasoline”).

Hand Exercises - Sporting good stores have a pretty good selection of hand exercise equipment. Hand strengthening exercises provide proprioceptive input. This type of exercise is usually calming overall.

Hands and Knees – If a child is unable to maintain this position independently, he/she can be positioned over an adult’s leg or a rolled up blanket for extra support. This weight-bearing position provides great proprioceptive input to all of the large muscles and joints in the body. Extending the neck against gravity provides vestibular input as well. Typically “just right.”

Hanging – This alerting form of input can be obtained indoors with a doorway chin-up bar.

Headstand/Handstand – These positions provide a large amount of vestibular and proprioceptive input. The inversion makes these alerting positions.

Headphones – Music isn’t necessary – the noise-reduction quality of the headphones is beneficial for some kids. Typically calming. Some kids need the noise-reduction but can’t tolerate the feel of the headphones – try other calming auditory strategies instead for those kids (metronome, calming music).





Heavy Work - These are good “school jobs” that allow the student to get out of the classroom while getting calming input from the heavy work (proprioceptive input). Pushing supplies in a cart, carrying library books in a crate, scrubbing the white board or the floor and more.

Hop on One Foot – This alerting form of input can be done anywhere! Try one-footed hopping while working on spelling words or math facts.

Hoppy Ball – These can be purchased at toy stores or discount stores. Provide proprioceptive and vestibular input. The bouncing motion makes this an alerting activity.

Horseback Riding – This is a wonderful after-school activity if available. In the house, a stick horse can be a great substitute! Riding real horses provides vestibular, proprioceptive, visual, and olfactory input. Grooming the horses adds tactile input as well. This is typically a “just right” activity, although fear or anxiety about riding can make it very alerting for some.

Hula Hoop – The concentration and motor-planning involved typically make this an organizing, “just right” activity. However, it’s possibility for frustration can make it an alerting activity!

Inversion – Being upside-down is definitely alerting. This position can be easily obtained laying on your back over a therapy ball. Try rocking back and forth using hands and feet to generate the motion.

Inversion with Bean Bag Toss – Start by laying on back on therapy ball to grab a beanbag. Then sit up to throw the beanbag into a target. This up and down motion is alerting and is great for core strengthening as well.

iPod or MP3 Player – The effect of music varies a lot among individuals. If you are going for a “just right” effect, help students determine the type of music that works best for them.

Isometrics – By nature, isometric exercises cause muscle effort without movement. Try pushing palms together, hooking fingers and “pulling” apart, crossing ankles and pushing lower legs toward one another. “Just right.”





Joint Compression – Apply gentle pressure by placing one hand on joints at either end of the long bones in the arms and legs. Consult an OT or PT for correct techniques. Compression provides proprioceptive input and is usually calming.

Journal or Draw – Free journaling or drawing (without rules or restrictions) is calming for most.

Jumping – Jumping rope, playing hopscotch, or having a jumping contest are easy ways to meet this need. Jumping provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. The up and down motion is typically alerting.

Ladder – With supervision, encourage climbing on stationary or hanging ladder. Climbing provides proprioceptive input. The movement against gravity and the balance required result in vestibular input. Usually “just right.”

Lap and Shoulder Weight – These can be easily made with fabric and dry beans. Try getting 4-7 lbs in an 11” x 17” lap pad. Shoulder weights can be made using adult size tube socks filled with beans or rice and sewn shut. Weight provides proprioceptive input and is typically calming.

Lava Lamp – Great for bedtime! Provides soothing visual input. Almost always calming. Many kids need something visual to fixate on to give their body a chance to unwind and fall asleep.

Light Touch – Light tickly/itchy touch is alerting. Try feather dusters (unused on dust!), fabric scraps or brushes on the arms and legs.

Log Roll – Alerting. Make it fun by placing small objects to roll over.

Lotion – For a “just right” effect, allow the student to choose scented or unscented and encourage deep pressure while applying the lotion.

Make the Room Bigger! – Ask students to help you make the room bigger by pushing with arms, legs, or back. Alerting.



Manipulatives – Any small toys that require the work of both hands are appropriate. Most manipulative toys provide tactile and vestibular input. Usually “just right.”

Metronome – Free apps available. Sixty beats per minute is typically a good rate for modulation. Metronomes provide rhythmic auditory input which is organizing for the brain. Most people prefer the volume pretty quiet – almost to where you have to concentrate to hear it. “Just right.”

Mini Trampoline – Try jumping while playing catch or combine this with a “crash” into beanbag chair or couch cushions. The mini trampoline provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. The up and down motion makes this an alerting form of input.

Monkey Bars - Hang from them, climb on them, do pull-ups on them! This is typically an alerting form of input due to the swinging motion of the body and the effort involved.

Mouth Tools – Textured chew toys, Nuk brushes, and oral swabs (try adding flavor by dipping swab in kool-aid powder or yogurt). These provide oral proprioceptive and tactile input. The highly tactile ones are usually alerting.

Mouth Vibration – Oral vibrators or vibrating toothbrushes. Oral vibration provides proprioceptive, vestibular, and tactile input. Usually “just right.”

Music (Alerting) – Children’s action songs, rock music, and music that makes you want to dance!

Music (Calming) – Piano or other instrumental music, some gospel music, and lullaby songs are good sources for calming music.

Music (Just Right) – Classical music, soft rock, and most highly preferred music will be “just right” for modulation.

Net Swing – Purchased through therapy supply companies. This activity provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. The result is usually “just right,” but like any form of swinging, the effect will vary depending on the motion (slow and linear vs. fast and multi-directional).





Obstacle Course – Creativity will turn any living room or classroom into an obstacle course without any special equipment. Try to include a lot of crawling and rolling. Obstacle courses are a great way of getting a lot of proprioceptive, vestibular, visual, and tactile input in a fairly short amount of time. Also great for working on motor planning! Typically “just right.”

One Foot Balance – Typically alerting. Encourage student to count out loud while balancing and gradually increasing length of balance in this position.

Peanut Rock – Wrap arms around flexed legs and rock back and forth. Alerting.

Pillow Fun – Always fun and alerting! Make sure rules are in place (i.e. – “Below the head only!”).

Playground – Playgrounds provide input for all seven senses! The result is usually “just right” for everyone.

Pogo Stick – Alerting. Be careful!

Pool Toys – Large variety commercially available. Squirt toys, diving toys, and balls are typically alerting forms of input at the pool. These toys typically provide light tactile input and some proprioceptive input as well. Usually alerting.

Pressure Garments – Try athletic base-layer compressive garments, long underwear, tight cycling jerseys and shorts, long-sleeved leotards, etc. This gentle form of compression provides calming proprioceptive input. Also helpful under regular clothing for kids who don’t like tags, seams, and wrinkles.

Pressure Push –Lace fingers together and use hands to push down through top of head; place hands palms together in front of chest and press together as hard as possible to the count of 10. This provides pure proprioceptive input and the result is usually “just right.”

Pressure Roller – Purchase through therapy product companies. This provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. This activity is usually calming.



Push Toys – Toy shopping carts and more. Fill with heavy objects to increase the proprioceptive input. “Just right.”

Push Ups – Regular floor push-ups, wall push-ups or modified push-ups with knees on floor or hands on a step. Push-ups provide proprioceptive and vestibular input and the effect is typically “just right.”

Puzzles – Pick puzzles that are the “just right” challenge – neither too hard nor too easy. Puzzles provide visual and tactile input. Engagement in tasks like puzzles or coloring can help some kids “tune out” bothersome sensory input. Usually “just right.”

Rocking – A rocking chair is all that is needed. Mostly vestibular input. Usually calming.

Rocking Toys – Rocking horses, etc. Proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually “just right.”

Roller Blade/Skate – Roller blading and skating provide vestibular and proprioceptive input. The speed usually makes this an alerting activity.

Rolling – Log-rolls, forward rolls, and backward rolls. Rolling provides proprioceptive, vestibular, and tactile input. “Just right” for most kids.

Rolling Pin – Use a regular rolling pin (or one commercially available through therapy product catalogs) to provide gentle deep pressure through backs and legs. Proprioceptive input. Calming.

Row Boat – Sit with feet touching, hands clasped together and “row” back and forth, gently tugging on child’s arms each time. Proprioceptive, vestibular, and visual input. Usually “just right.”

Scented Markers or Pencils – Especially helpful for least-preferred subjects! Preferred smells are usually “just right.” The effect of specific smells varies greatly from person to person. Allowing kids to choose their scents is typically the most helpful.

Scooter – Encourage child to alternate which foot does the pushing on the standing



scooter. Proprioceptive, vestibular, and visual input. Typically “just right” but higher speeds can make this alerting for some.

Scooterboard – Encourage child to lie on belly to propel self with arms for maximum benefit. Proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually alerting.

Scooter Ramp – Encourage child to be on tummy, keeping hands and feet up for maximum results. Proprioceptive, vestibular, and visual input. Alerting.

Scrub Brush – Consult with an OT for how to use this therapeutically. Typically used to decrease tactile over-responsivity. Usually “just right” or calming.

Self Hug – Nothing like a big tight hug for yourself! Typically “just right.”

Sensory Room – Do some research before putting together a sensory room. The goal is to provide a variety of types of sensory input to aid in modulation.

Sensory Shaker – Typically purchased through therapeutic product catalogs but do-it-yourselfers could make a version of this by sewing a large sack out of stretchy spandex-type material and adding ball pit balls. With the child inside, the adult can hold the top to gently shake and bounce the child. Proprioceptive, vestibular, and tactile input. Typically “just right.”

Sensory Table – A large shallow Rubbermaid type box can be filled dry beans, rice, cornmeal and a variety of other household items. Tactile and proprioceptive input. Usually “just right” but different textures can change the effect.

Shoulder Squeeze - Gentle downward pressure through the shoulders or a shoulder massage. Proprioceptive input. Calming.

Sit Disc – Purchase through the therapy product companies. Provides gentle proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually “just right.”

Skate/Rollerblade – Typically alerting.

Skip – Alerting.





Slide – Climbing the ladder provides proprioceptive input, sliding provides vestibular input. The height and the speed usually make it an alerting activity.

Sock Skating – This is fun on any solid-surface flooring! Alerting.

Sour Snack – Healthy alternatives include lemon or grapefruit wedges or frozen lemon juice ice cubes. Alerting.

Spinning – Alerting.

Spot to Spot - Circles cut from paper work well. Have the child jump on only one color of spot to cross the room or follow a specified order (“Jump on red, green, yellow, then green again”). Vestibular, proprioceptive, and visual input. Usually alerting.

Squeeze Box – This can easily be made with a cardboard or plastic box just big enough for the child to sit comfortably inside. Make it cozy with pillows and blankets. The “squeeze” from the sides of the box and pillows provides proprioceptive input. This is calming for most kids.

Stability Ball – Large exercise balls can be purchased at most discount stores in the sporting goods section. Using a ball instead of a chair provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. The effect is usually “just right” or even calming.

Stairs – Alerting.

Stress Ball – A variety of fidget balls can be easily found. Most provide the “just right” type of input.

Stretch and Tug – A variety of stretchy toys can be used. Simple “tug-of-war” with an old t-shirt or towel is beneficial too. Proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually “just right” but the competitive nature of this activity can make it alerting/stimulating.

Stretching Toys - Body socks and other stretchy toys provide proprioceptive input. Usually “just right.”



Stroller – Standard or adapted strollers depending on the child’s needs. Being pushed in a stroller provides soothing vestibular and visual input and is almost always calming.

Study Place – A quiet part of the house designated for the purpose of homework, and stocked with the necessary supplies can become a “study place.” At school, study carrels and dividers are helpful for reducing visual distractions and white noise or calming music may help reduce auditory distractions.

Superman – A strong adult is all that is needed! Encourage the child to extend his/her arms and legs and look up to get maximum benefit from this activity. Vestibular input. Usually alerting.

Swaddle – A baby blanket is all that is needed. Swaddling provides proprioceptive input. It is usually organizing and calming.

Swimming – Excellent source of proprioceptive, vestibular, and tactile input. “Just right.”

Swing – A variety of swings are available anywhere swingsets are sold and adapted swings can be purchased from the therapy product companies. Linear swinging is typically calming.

Swinging Fast – Fast or multidirectional movement is alerting.

Swinging on Tummy – A platform swing can be made or purchased from one of the therapy supply companies. The prone (on tummy) position increases the intensity of the vestibular input from the swinging motion. Usually “just right” but fast, multidirectional motion can make this alerting.

Take a Break – Standing up to stretch or walking to the water fountain are easy strategies to improve focus and get to that “just right” state.

Tall Knees – Encourage child to hold on and keep weight on knees rather than behind. Maintaining this position requires a lot of balance and postural stability and is usually alerting. The speed of the motion and whether it is linear or not will also determine the effect (alerting vs. “just right”).





Tent – A children’s play tent or a blanket placed over a coffee table or card table. Tents reduce visual input and providing pillows or beanbags can add proprioceptive input as well. Calming.

Therapy Putty – The colors of putty typically indicate the level of resistance. Choose the resistance based on the child’s strength and preferences. Try hiding pennies or tiny toys in the putty for the child to pull out with fingers. Great proprioceptive input that is helpful in preparing the hands for fine motor tasks and handwriting. Usually “just right.”

Tortilla Time – Yoga mats work well for this, but a small throw blanket is fine too. Roll the child up tightly in the mat or blanket or turn him/her into a “tortilla” then pull the ends to unroll the child! Provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually calming or “just right.”

Trampoline – Backyard trampolines are very helpful for kids who need really intense sensory input. Always follow safety instructions and check trampoline and net enclosure frequently for wear and tear that may pose a risk. Heavy duty proprioceptive and vestibular input. “Just right” for most kids. Great way for sensory seekers to burn off their extra energy.

T-Stool – These can also be made fairly easily with a small 2 x 4 and a rod with a rubber end for safety. Staying upright on the stool requires a lot of balance and postural control and therefore provides vestibular and proprioceptive input. Usually “just right.”

Tummy Time – Fun toys or an adult to interact with are all that is needed to encourage tummy time. Provides proprioceptive and vestibular input. Usually alerting. Remember that tummy time should start at least by the time the umbilical cord falls off. “Back to Sleep, Tummy to Play.”

Turtle – Use a beanbag chair or floppy pillow as the “shell.” This extra weight will make the act of crawling more beneficial (and fun!). Proprioceptive input. Usually calming.

Velcro – A strip of soft-loop Velcro attached to the underside of the desk for the child to rub can serve as a nice method of calming tactile input.



Vibration – Small massaging vibrators shaped like bugs and animals can be found in most discount stores and department stores. Vibration provides tactile input and can also activate the vestibular system, especially near the head or mouth (by causing movement of the otoliths in the semi-circular canals). Usually calming but everyone responds differently to vibration.

Visual Tools – Hats, sunglasses, and non-prescription lenses with anti-glare coating are useful for reducing visual sensitivity.

Visual Toys – Any toy with lights or spinning parts will be visually stimulating as well as bubble machines, electric aquariums and more.

Walk the Dog - Interacting with pets, as well as meeting their needs, provides a variety of forms of sensory input. The effect is usually “just right.”

Water Bottle – Keeping a water bottle handy is a quick and easy method of calming oral proprioceptive input. Try water bottles with leak-proof resistive valves for maximum benefit.

Weighted Vest – Consult an OT or PT or proper fit and wear guidelines. In general, up to 10% of the child’s body weight should go in the vest and wear time should typically be between 20 and 40 minutes at a time. Proprioceptive input. Usually calming.

Wheelbarrow – Hold the child’s knees to provide more support and his or her ankles for an increased challenge. The upper body weight-bearing and inclined position provides heavy-duty proprioceptive and vestibular input. The effect is usually “just right” and is especially helpful for sensory seekers with lots of “extra energy.”

Wrist or Ankle Weights – Consult with your child’s therapist for the ideal amount of weight for him/her. Proprioceptive input. Usually calming.

Wrist and Hand Toys – Spiky gloves, wrist rattles, chewable bracelets and more. Tactile and proprioceptive input. Usually “just right.”



Weighted Blanket – Weighted blankets can be made fairly easily and inexpensively. Generally 10-15% of body weight. Proprioceptive input. Usually calming.

Weight Lifting - Pure proprioceptive input. Usually “just right.”

Yoga/Pilates – No equipment necessary but a yoga mat and youtube video or book on yoga for children can be helpful. Great source of proprioceptive input. Usually “just right.”

In addition to sensory diet cards are the following activity cards:

Primitive Reflex Cards - Create home exercise programs with these cards for clients to do at home. Use these cards for motor movement activities in the clinic or at school. Watch Kim Wiggins' Course on Primitive Reflexes at Sensationalbrain.com to learn more about retained primitive reflexes. Generally - these activities should be done 2x per day 10x each for 30 days. Start with the exercises for the most retained primitive reflex, completing one reflex at a time for best results.

Emotions / Feelings Cards - Use in conjunction with an emotional regulation program such as The Zones of Regulation, The Alert Program, or The Just Right Curriculum. Include in sensory diets to identify feelings before / after. Templates can be found in the members area of BrainWorks Online.

Routine Cards - Use these cards to create visual schedules and to-do / done visual tools.

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