

SURVIVING THE LUNCHROOM

Supporting Students with Social/Emotional/Sensory Needs

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Agenda

- What is Behavior?
- Sensory Needs and Examples in the Lunchroom
 - Hear, Taste, Smell, Body Awareness, Touch, Movement, Sight
- Strategies to Support Sensory Needs
- Why students may display behaviors in the lunch line/room and positive behavior supports
- Programs schools are implementing to foster effective learning environments

Turn and Talk Activity

How do you make connections with students?

Share ideas with your table...



What Is Behavior?

All behavior is communication.

“When we see a behavior that is problematic or confusing, the first question we should ask isn’t ‘How do we get rid of it?’ but rather ‘What is this telling us about the child?’” (Delahooke 2019, p. 11).



Behavior is Communication...



Consider:

- Are the student's basic needs being met? Is the student hungry, thirsty, or tired?
- Is there anything medically/physically wrong with the child? Is the child in pain?
- Are there sensory needs that the child has?

Turn and Talk Activity

Thinking about the lunchroom, what senses are triggered?

Share ideas with your table...





SURVIVING THE LUNCHROOM

Sensory Needs in the Lunchroom - Hearing



Footsteps, the sound of the wind against your ears, a door creaking, a flushing toilet, even the sounds of someone giving you directions.

All these examples have one thing in common:

sound.

- Exhibiting extreme reactions such as: crying, screaming, or running away or significant difficulty with tolerating sudden noises, specific noises, crowds, and/or loud noises
- Startling easily or becoming agitated in noisy environments
- Being distracted by all sounds
- Having difficulty responding to and following directions presented verbally
- Making constant noises, such as singing, humming, and/or clicking
- Not responding when name is called

Strategies: Hearing in the Lunchroom

- Ear plugs to block out noise
- Headphones to listen to white noise (rain, ocean sounds, a fan), favorite songs or stories
- Allowing student to get to lunch a couple minutes early
- Alternative location for lunch (quiet time in the hall or other designated space)



Sensory Needs in the Lunchroom - Taste & Texture



**Biting, chewing, chomping,
crunching, sucking, licking,
and swallowing.**

**All these activities have two
things in common:**

***taste* and
*texture.***

- Refusing to use utensils to eat
- Choking or gagging during eating or brushing teeth
- Constant biting, chewing on, or mouthing hands, clothing, fingers, toys, and/or other objects
- Constantly making mouth noises, such as clicking, buzzing, and/or humming
- Having difficulty with chewing or drinking from a cup or straw

Sensory Needs in the Lunchroom - Smell



Your favorite piece of chocolate, pancakes on a Saturday morning, rotting fruit in the trash, and your grandma's perfume.

All these examples have one thing in common:

smell.

- Being very reluctant to try new foods or being known as an extremely picky eater
- Having strong aversions to certain smells (food or non-food)
- Seeking out specific smells regardless of safety (food or non-food)

Strategies: Taste, Texture and Smell

- Assign a seat as far away from the lunch line as possible
- Position student near an open window
- Allow student to use favorite lip balm or lotion to give them a familiar scent to help calm
- Allow student to explore their food with their hands
- Gradual Introduction of New Foods
- Offer crunchy foods



Sensory Needs in the Lunchroom - Body Awareness



**Pushing, pulling, stomping,
squeezing, jumping,
bending.**

**All these examples have
one thing in common:**

body position.

- Coloring or writing with heavy pressure or not enough pressure
- Pushing others or playing aggressively
- Doing everything with 100 percent force and not grading the force of movements adequately
- Crashing or falling on the floor constantly throughout the day
- Having difficulty with body awareness, such as running into objects or others
- Appearing tired or sluggish, such as slumping and/or leaning

Strategies: Body Awareness/Body Position

- Weighted stuffed animal/lap pad
- Option to stand/move
- Wearing a backpack
- Defining visual space to sit and/or place items



Sensory Needs in the Lunchroom - Touch



Hugs, clothing, the grass
or sand under your feet,
the food you eat, the coffee
you drink.

All these examples have
one thing in common:

touch.

- Avoiding getting hands or face messy
- Avoiding activities like finger painting, playing with playdough, and eating messy foods
- Having difficulty tolerating certain clothing or textures on skin, such as tags on clothing
- Needing to touch everything and everyone, such as craving hugs and closeness with others, fidgeting with objects, and/or seeking out textures and touch experiences

Sensory Needs in the Lunchroom - Movement



**Spinning, turning, flipping,
climbing.**

**These sensations all have
one thing in common:**

movement.

- Constantly moving, fidgeting, and/or spinning around
- Being fearful of movement, such as stairs, playground equipment, or swings.
- Acting uncoordinated or clumsy, which includes bumping into things, falling, or having difficulty learning new motor tasks.
- Sleeping, slouching, or leaning on desk or on walls when walking in the hallway.
- Having difficulty with maintaining balance when walking and during physically active play.
- Having difficulty with visual activities such as focus or tracking.

Strategies: Movement

- Allow student to leave when finished instead of waiting for classmates to finish
- Option to move (rocking, swaying, swinging of legs, bouncing of legs)
- Wiggle seat
- Flexible seating
- Option to stand



Sensory Needs in the Lunchroom - Sight



Determining the tint of our shirt to wear for the day, finding our socks in the sock drawer, tracking the teacher as she walks around the room.

All these examples have one thing in common:

sight.

- Being easily distracted by surrounding visual stimuli, such as posters or art on the walls, activity in the room, and so on.
- Having difficulty visually focusing on a task like coloring a picture or completing a worksheet.
- Not noticing surrounding unless others point them out.
- Staring intently at objects or becoming fixated on visual stimuli, such as fans, lights and so on.
- Arranging objects in a specific way repeatedly, such as lining up objects and/or stacking objects.

Strategies: Vision

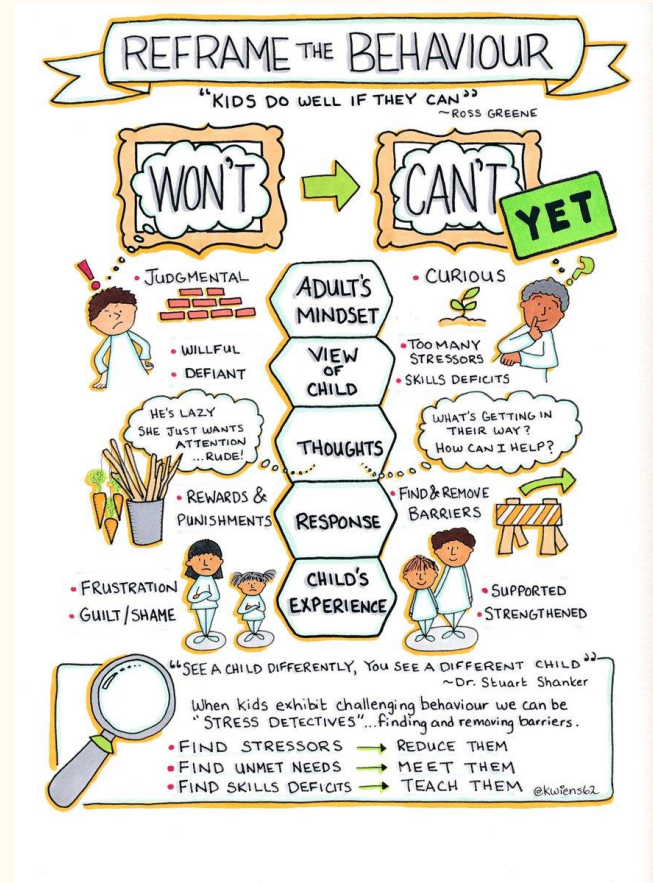
- Turn off or dim the lights
- Create a distraction-free environment
- Position student so that he/she is facing away from the entire room
- Screen off a quieter area of the cafeteria with reduced stimulation where a small group of students can eat.
- Option of wearing sunglasses



Lagging Skills

“Kids do well if they can” - Ross Greene

- Not all students learn the same
- Lagging Skills in the lunchroom
 - Waiting
 - Voice volume
 - Making choices
 - Following multistep directions
 - Routines
 - Taking 1 item
 - Punching in lunch number
 - Using utensils
 - Opening items
 - Keeping track of time
 - Perspective taking
- Some skills need to be taught directly



Preventative Strategies and Supports

- Offer Choices
- Extended lunch
- Alternative lunch options
- Alternative time to eat lunch
- Fidgets
- Sensory toolbox
- Allow student to get lunch first to minimize wait time
- Option to leave when finished
- Encourage students to advocate
- Provide specific praise (e.g. I love how you waited in line quietly, great manners!)



Limit Verbal Interactions

- When in an escalated situation, students may further escalate if adults increase verbal interactions
- Less is More!
- Try using non-verbal communication
 - Gestures
 - Visuals
- Collaborate with staff to problem solve



Welcome to Our COMFORTABLE CAFETERIA



Time to Enjoy a Meal

- Eat healthy food
- Relax and refresh
- Take a break from schoolwork
- Help make lunchtime enjoyable for everyone

Enjoy Time With Friends

- Talk about your day
- Listen to what others have to say
- Allow others to sit with you
- Care about those in need
- Be a good friend

Be Responsible and Respectful

- Clean up your eating area
- Report problems to adults
- Use an indoor voice
- Use good mealtime manners
- Chew with your mouth closed
- Use utensils correctly
- Say please and thank you

Follow Directions

- Listen to cafeteria supervisors
- Stay in your seat while eating
- Walk to and from the cafeteria safely



Comfortable Cafeteria

<https://everymomentcounts.org/comfortable-cafeteria/>

EXAMPLE: VISUAL CUES AND NON-VERBAL DIRECTIONS (INSTEAD OF YELLING)



The Cone System

Social Emotional Learning - SEL Initiatives

What can we do for students to impact the classroom environment?

- Ukeru – methods to ensure student safety during crises
- Second Step – curriculum to teach social and emotional lessons (K-8)
- PBIS – students are motivated to follow established norms and expectations which is reinforced by a system of rewards
- Trauma informed - recognize and respond to those who've been affected by traumatic stress; meet students where they're at

What am I doing to impact the classroom environment?

- Catalyst – How are my voice and actions impacting the classroom environment?
- Restorative practices – Am I focused on compliance and uniformity as a means of delivering instruction? Do I collaborate with students and explicitly teach expectations?
- Community building – Have I taken the time to collaborate with students to create a positive class environment?
- Equity – What do the outcomes of my discipline practices show about any implicit bias that may be impacting me on a subconscious level?



**Thank you for
the very
important work
you do to support
students!**