

Just Right:

Supporting Sensory & Emotional Regulation in Children

Resource pack

JUST™

RIGHT

This pack will explain:

- The principles behind Just Right
- Why sensory regulation is important
- How Just Right can help your child recognise their emotional state
- How to carry out the Just Right programme with your child

Introduction to the Just Right programme

Just Right is a programme, which supports children to:

- Recognise how they are feeling- are they ready to engage?
- Access the strategies they need to alert or calm themselves. This may or may not have a sensory basis.

The Just Right programme uses a colour coded tower which helps them explain how they are feeling using a clear, visual structure:



- **Red**= shutdown (in flight/fight mode)- NOT CALM/NOT ALERT
- **Orange**= bubbling/anxious/fizzy- NOT CALM/HYPER ALERT
- **Green**= just right, **CALM AND ALERT/FOCUSED**
- **Blue**= tired, bored, ill, fidgety (seeking movement)- POSSIBLY LOOKS CALM/NOT ALERT

Theory behind the sensory aspect of the Just Right programme

Some children may struggle to regulate their behaviour, attention and alertness due to difficulty processing sensory information.

We use sensory experiences to understand the world and our place in it, to develop our motor co-ordination skills and cognition and to regulate how alert we are.

Sensory information comes through touch, taste, smell, sight and sound. We also sense movement (vestibular sense) and where our body is in space (proprioceptive sense) and internal feedback- e.g. are we hungry/need the toilet? (interception)

The ability to combine and organise all this incoming information and respond effectively is called **sensory integration**.

Many children with autism struggle with **filtering**. They take in too much information and can't then focus on what's relevant/important. They are **hyper sensitive** and overly responsive to their environment. Processing information will take longer as they try to make sense of the "queue" of experiences their systems are responding to. This can feel very overwhelming and so they will try to **avoid** situations with a high sensory processing load.

At other times, children with autism may struggle to get enough sensory information to make sense of what going on around them. They are **hypo sensitive** and will **seek** additional sensory input to help them make better sense of things.

Many children will experience both: hyper and hypo sensitivity in different senses. This can also fluctuate from day to day.

Theory behind the emotional regulation aspect of the Just Right programme

Many children with autism struggle to recognise and make sense of their own and other people's emotions. They can't always understand or describe how they are feeling. They may not know what to do to best manage their feelings.

This may be, in part, due to the fact that we have a very complicated lexicon for describing emotions. If you're not "okay" this could be described as: unhappy, upset, worried, bothered, nervous and so on. The "edges" of these emotions are often hard to distinguish and so do not fit in with the often clear-cut and systematic way of thinking common in autism.

Just Right offers children with autism a clear and visual way to communicate their emotions. It plays to the strengths often found in people with autism- better visual processing and clear systems. There are fewer "wooly" edges.

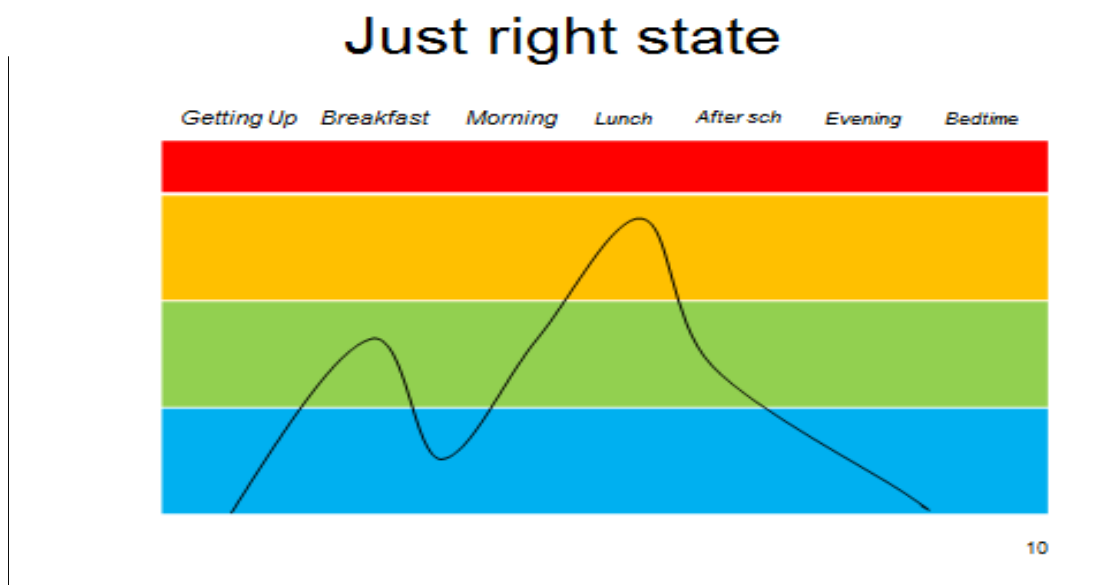
It also removes the needs to equate their emotions with those of others- perhaps they display happiness or excitement in a non-typical way. Just Right gives them the ability to customise their communication around emotions- so they better understand what they look like, say or do when they feel good, or need calming or alerting input.

It also allows them to explore and identify triggers leading to significant emotional responses- whether these have a sensory basis or not.

Regulating our alertness/readiness to engage

Our level of alertness could be described as how ready we are to act. This varies throughout the day, depending on what we are doing.

Sometimes, we all take in too much sensory information for us to achieve that 'Just Right' level of alertness. At other times we take in too little.



Example of how our level of alertness changes throughout the day

When this happens, we often use strategies and activities to get to the level of alertness we need. We are constantly adjusting whether we need more or less input.

Think how you might alert yourself when you need to wake up or calm yourself if you feel agitated? We often do this automatically.

Children with autism may struggle to carry out regulating strategies themselves, or their attempt to do this may be inappropriate.

How to use Just Right with your child

- Just Right is about what comes BEFORE engaging, not rewards that might come after. It's about whether the child is "ready to engage"
- There are two key aspects:
 - Self reflection (I'm in the ____ zone)
 - Self regulation (This will help me get back to the green zone)



Self-reflection: triggers

Sometimes we can clearly identify triggers which might put a child in a particular zone, or keep them in green. There are some suggestions below. Can you see which have a sensory and which have a non-sensory basis? Sometimes there are elements of both.

Try customising by adding your own:

<p>Very high I need time out...</p>	<p>Being shouted at Big change to anticipated routine Favourite toy breaks Loud singing Turning off computer Travel on buses</p>
<p>High I need help calming...</p>	<p>Getting something wrong Rules in game changes Changing for bed Transitions Losing Crowds My birthday is soon Parties</p>
<p>Just Right I'm ready to engage</p>	<p>My daily routine is stuck to Changes are explained in advance I have time to talk about/engage in my special interests I feel successful I like the activity or like the reward I get afterwards</p>
<p>Low I need help alerting...</p>	<p>I'm bored Tiredness Sitting still for a long time I don't understand Too much talking without pauses No motivator- nothing is in this for me</p>

Self-reflection: behaviours

Just as with the example on p6 of how our level of alertness naturally changes through the day, so do children flow between the different states identified. The colour chart can be used to identify when children are starting to move out of the Just Right zone when we don't know the trigger- by observing their behaviour. Remember that orange is "high"- this may be anxiety or excitement- either way they will find focus difficult

<p>Very high I need time out...</p>	<p>Children may appear: unable to engage in activities as too overwhelmed, upset, angry, unable to cooperate, frozen, needing space.</p> <p>Strategies: quiet safe space, time alone.</p>
<p>High I need help calming...</p>	<p>Children may appear: to be losing concentration, poor attention, fidgety, constantly on the go, excited, emotionally on edge, bouncing, flapping, hanging or climbing on people, hyper, over-excited.</p> <p>Strategies: static activities (avoiding too much movement). Involve traction, push, pull, carry, hang.</p>
<p>Just Right I'm ready to learn or play...</p>	<p>Children may appear: calm, alert, ready to learn or play, settled, concentrating, good sitting, organised, focused. Easy to get on with others and have fun.</p> <p>Strategies: activities which maintain the child's Just Right state.</p>
<p>Low I need help alerting...</p>	<p>Children may appear: tired, bored, sedate, floppy, fidgety, easily upset, angry, sluggish, spacey, sleepy, sad, upset</p> <p>Strategies: movement based activities.</p>

Developing self-reflection in your child

- For each “zone”, you want to know:
 - ***What does each zone look like for them?***(what do they say/do- body and face- which lets us know which zone they’re in). You can use photos and videos to help them understand what this looks like for them.
 - ***What are the triggers which take them out of the green zone?*** (social, emotional, sensory)- internal and external
- Talk about the green zone most- this is where we want to be so we need to recognise when we’re there.
- NB A child’s green zone might not look “typical”- how do they actually show they are calm or happy?
- Unusual behaviours might be keeping them green- the key is “what happens next?” Was it a help or a hindrance?
- Help your child begin to recognise which zone they are in- in or after events. You can link this to emotion words they may already use, or try more “physical” descriptors like “fizzy” (orange) or “floppy” (blue)..
- Talk about which zone you are in too- so that they know we all adjust throughout the day in order to feel “just right”.
- Reassure them that no one is in the green zone all the time- sometimes we have to “hang on” in orange for a while, as long as we know a “green” break is coming up.

Developing self-regulation in your child

- Work on building up a bank of strategies which they can use in the orange, red or blue zones to help them get back to green (see next page for some ideas).
- Make sure this is clearly visually displayed so they can SEE what might help them (see p15 & 16)
- Remember how things can fluctuate and change- so adapt as and when needed

How do sensory strategies work to calm or alert your child?

Example 1: Calming

Heavy play, such as pushing/pulling/hanging sends messages to the brain that makes the child feel grounded, more aware of where they are in time and space, and so less “fuzzy” at the edges. It allows one strong, calming sensation to override the bombardment of incoming information.

Example 2: Alerting

Movement wakes the body up, both physically and emotionally so that the child becomes more aware of what’s going on around them and then more able to receive, process and respond to incoming messages through their senses.

Self-regulation: practical strategies (sensory)

It is important to give children a choice of activity / strategy, ideally a choice between two options so as not to overwhelm them.

The activities must always be child led; if they are resistant to an activity or strategy don't insist on them continuing, follow and be guided by their interest.

Very high I need time out...	Quiet time alone / Safe space Quiet tent	Ear defenders Massage Walk / movement break
High I need help calming...	Office duty Vibrating cushion / toys Gardening Wrap and roll Ear defenders Blow bubbles Move furniture Tug-of-war Weighted backpack Weighted vest Carry weighted items Hang / pull up bar Animal walks Squeeze	Quiet time together Walk / movement break Push Pull Cleaning Chew / Suck Quiet work space Therapy ball Trampoline Swing (not spin) Obstacle course Climb Massage Food- chew/suck
Just Right I'm ready to learn or play...	Push Pull Move furniture Weighted backpack Weighted vest Weighted lap pad Carry weighted items	Animal walks Therapy ball (sitting on) Twiddle toy Chew / Suck Hang / pull up bar Quiet work space Fine motor activity Visual time tables
Low I need help alerting...	Ball games Dance Ride trike Ride scooter Ride bike Exercises Swing Squeeze Animal walks	Obstacle course Run Crunch Fiddle toys Jump Therapy ball Climb Walk / movement break Food- crunchy/strong

Practical strategies (non-sensory)

Notice that there is overlap between sensory and non-sensory

<p>Very high I need time out...</p>	<p>Quiet time alone / Safe space Presence of a trusted adult (non-speaking) Writing down my worries</p>
<p>High I need help calming...</p>	<p>Mantras I can say to myself to calm my thoughts Distraction- look at a favourite book/listen to music Go for a walk/have a break Calmness Visual explanations Reassurance Social Stories Talking through/drawing what happened Working out what to do differently next time Reminders of what's next/rewards</p>
<p>Just Right I'm ready to learn or play...</p>	<p>Structure- breaking things into steps Visual support Practice things I find tricky Knowing my timetable Familiar people and places Time with my special interests Knowing I can take a break</p>
<p>Low I need help alerting...</p>	<p>Knowing when this will finish More visual input Brain break- talk about something which engages me for a bit Help me make sense of what I haven't understood Check if I need help- I might not ask</p>

A Just Right Programme for children to use

How do I feel when I am 'Just Right'?

Your child could draw or take a picture of how they feel when they are in the Just Right green zone, ready to engage.

You might then want to try with the other zones too.

You could also take or draw your own picture for the different zones.



Just Right Visual Tower for Self-Regulation



Just Right Individual Profile

	What it looks like	What it feels like	What helps	Triggers
RED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runs off • Shouts • Might hit out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry • Furious • Mad 	I can... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to my safe space Adults will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use calm words • Point me to my safe space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being shouted at • Very noisy place
ORANGE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Body moves more 2. Clenches fists 3. Giggles 4. Name calling of peers 5. Stops speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried • Upset • Fizzy 	I can... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for a break • Use my calm box Adults will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind me to use my calm box 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to day • Noisy/busy day • Making a mistake
GREEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smiles • Answers questions when asks • Asks for help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy • Calm • Warm 	I can... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the visual timetable • Ask if I don't know Adults will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the visual timetable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines • Visual Support • Working beside a trusted peer • Sensory breaks
BLUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yawns • Doesn't look at board • Head on desk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tired • Sad • Bored 	I can... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do chair pushes • Use trampet Adults will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do class exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitting for too long

Sensory equipment for Just Right

You may already have sensory toys and equipment that can be used as part of the Just Right programme. Many of the activities don't need any equipment, others use what's already around the child.

Here are the main items used in the Just Right programme. All items can be found on places like Amazon, sensory equipment websites (see *Useful links*) or on the high street. For more information please contact your Occupational Therapist.

Item	How to use and why
Movin' Sit wobble cushion	<p>Tactile air-filled cushion, improves posture and sensory feedback. Helps calm children who fidget and supports attention.</p> <p>Use on chair for any table-based activity, including mealtimes, or on the floor at assemblies or carpet time.</p>
Therapy ball	<p>Used to calm or alert depending on activity. Provides balance input if used as a chair.</p> <p>See different activity ideas to use with the ball.</p>
Weighted lap pad	<p>Provides deep pressure calming input.</p> <p>Position over thighs when seated during focused activity. Use for up to 30 mins then remove for at least 30 mins. Calming results can last from minutes – hours after removed.</p>
Weighted blanket	<p>Provides deep pressure calming input.</p> <p>Use for up to 30 mins then remove for at least 30 mins. Never leave a child unsupervised when using a weighted item. See weighted blanket guidelines. Calming results can last from minutes – hours after removed.</p>
Lycra	<p>Encourages active muscle use which increases body awareness. Resistance against the body helps facilitate calming.</p> <p>Do activities involving push, pull and stretch against the fabric. Do in pairs or groups.</p>
Chewy / Chewelry	<p>Provides oral, sensory input. Use anytime. Particularly useful during carpet time, assemblies, focused activity.</p>
Weighted vest or weighted backpack	<p>Provides deep pressure calming input. Supports increased attention. Allows more mobility than a lap pad or blanket.</p> <p>Use before or during focused activity or to help stay calm in a busy environment. Don't wear during strenuous activity, e.g. running or jumping. Wear over child's shirt. Use for up to 30 mins then remove for at least 30 mins. Calming results can last from minutes – hours after removed</p>

Item	How to use and why
Trampette	Provides proprioceptive and deep pressure input, balance and co-ordination. Facilitates arousal. May want to use a calming activity / strategy after this.
Theraputty	Provides calming deep pressure and proprioceptive feedback. Helps increase muscle tone in the hands. Hide toys, coins, buttons inside for tactile searching.
Theraband	Encourages active muscle use which increases body awareness. Resistance against the body helps facilitate calming. Do activities that involve stretching the fabric. Tie securely around the front chair legs to give child force to resist against.
Space-hopper	Provides movement, balance and proprioceptive input. Increases arousal. Children hold onto ball and bounce, or watch bouncing.
Medicine (weighted) balls	Encourages active muscle use, facilitates calming. Roll back and forward in pairs, gradually increasing distance. Carry back to class.

NB Please consult an OT before using specialist equipment

Useful links

www.sensorysmarts.com

Gives an overview of sensory processing plus practical information and solutions for overcoming these challenges.

www.dotolearn.com

Provides social skills and behavioural regulation activities, guidance and resources, communication and academic materials, transition guides for employment and life skills.

www.specialdirect.com

Multisensory resources for supporting children with additional and special educational needs.

www.netbuddy.org.uk

Full of practical ideas from parents, carers, teachers and therapists with experience of learning disability and autism.

www.sensorysmart.co.uk

Practical products for children with tactile defensiveness.

www.rompa.com

Sells toys and resources for children with sensory processing difficulties.

www.autism.org.uk/sensory

See 'The sensory world of autism' for a useful explanation regarding sensory processing and practical ideas to try.

www.sensorydirect.com

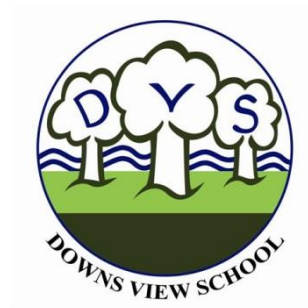
Sells toys and resources for children with sensory processing difficulties.

www.asensorylife.com/index.html

Includes free downloadable resources

Books

- *Self-Regulation Intervention and Strategies*: Tessa Garland
- *Understanding your child's sensory signals*: Angie Voss
- *How to be a superhero called self-control*: Lauren Brukner
- *The Kids' Guide to Staying Awesome and in Control* Lauren Brukner
- *A Volcano in my Tummy* Warwick Pudney & Elaine Whitehouse



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