

Sensory Diet

Name: _____

Date: / /02

A sensory diet is an individualized sensory program of daily activities that is designed to meet your child's sensory needs. Just as we need a variety of foods to nourish our bodies, your child needs a variety of sensory activities to nourish his or her sensory system. A variety of sensory activities throughout the day will increase your child's ability to be ready to learn, to listen, to reduce frustration and to increase positive behaviors. Try to incorporate activities into your daily routine, such as before and after school, in the afternoon/evening and before bed for the most success. A variety or combination of calming, alerting and organizing activities is best.

When having your child perform the following activities, always watch and listen to how they respond. For example, if your child seems to become too hyper with an alerting activity, switch to a calming activity to help them reach the "just right" arousal state. Sometimes your child will let you know what kind of activity they need to organize their sensory system. Listen to them! They know their body the best.

Calming Activities:

Calming activities are best for helping to lower your child's arousal state, from high or hyper to just right, also, before or after challenging tasks, to decrease anxiety/fearfulness and before bedtime. Calming activities for your child may include:

1. Rocking that is slow and rhythmical, such as rocking in a rocking chair, a rocking horse or swinging in a back and forth motion.
2. Deep pressure brushing (administered as directed by therapist), lotion or oil massages.
3. Blanket wraps, cuddling, hugs, or weighted blankets/vests.
4. "Heavy work" activities, such as pushing/pulling activities, carrying groceries or laundry, move wet laundry into the dryer, etc.
5. Calming music such as lullaby, classical (Mozart and Bach are good choices) and new age music. This is especially effective when combined with #1-4 above.
6. Joint compressions (administered as directed by therapist), or pushing against a wall or floor with hands, feet, etc.
7. Sucking a thick shake through a straw, blowing bubbles or blowing through a straw for cotton ball races or blowing games with party favors.
8. Taking a warm bath.

Alerting Activities:

Alerting activities are best for helping to raise your child's arousal state, from low to just right. If your child seems lethargic or very tired, try an alerting activity to prepare him or her for a task. Alerting activities for your child may include:

1. Jumping up and down on a trampoline, mattress or stabilized therapy ball. Always be sure an adult is present for safety.
2. Bouncing up and down on a therapy ball or beach ball.
3. Crunchy foods, such as chips, popcorn, crackers, pretzels, nuts, apples, and carrots.
4. Cold foods, such as a Popsicle or crunching ice.
5. Fast, arrhythmic movement, such as rotational movement (spinning).
6. Arrhythmical music such as jazz and salsa.
7. Taking a shower.

Organizing Activities:

Organizing activities are best for helping your child to tolerate a variety of sensory inputs to regulate their sensory system. A regulated sensory system is essential for readiness to learn. Your child has a variety of sensory systems that he or she uses to take in information from the environment and they use this information to form responses to that environment. The (3) most influential systems for sensory organization are described below with accompanying activities.

Vestibular System: The vestibular system is located in the inner ear and is responsible for our sense of balance and knowing where our head is in space. It is commonly referred to as the movement sense. This system is responsible for getting the muscles ready for action. Vestibular activities for your child may include:

1. Bouncing up and down on a bouncy ball with a handle or jumping up and down on a trampoline.
2. Burrito roll – roll your child up in a blanket and roll along the floor or spinning activities, such as ring around the rosy.
3. Use couch cushions to build a ramp and help your child roll down the ramp onto a pillow or cushion or slide down a slide at the playground.
4. Swinging in a blanket, swinging on a swing or riding a bicycle.

Proprioceptive System: The proprioceptive system is made up of receptors in our muscles, joints and connective tissue, that give us information as to where our body is in space, how much pressure we use to grip things or how hard we press down on the paper with a pen or pencil for example. It is commonly referred to as the position sense. Proprioceptive activities for your child may include:

1. Carrying heavy loads or “heavy work” such as carrying books, a bucket of water, grocery bags, etc.
2. Pushing/pulling activities such as pushing a wheelbarrow or weighted cart, playing tug of war, etc.
3. Jumping and crashing into a large beanbag or pile of pillows.
4. Joint compressions (administered as directed by therapist).
5. Sandwich activities, where child is squeezed between two couch cushions.
6. Bear hugs.
7. Pouring activities using dried pasta, beans, sand or water.
8. Animal walks, such as bear walk, crab walk, seal walk, etc and the wheelbarrow walk.

Tactile System: The tactile system is made up of our skin and our receptors located within it. It is commonly referred to as the touch sense. This system is essential for your child to develop fine motor and self-help skills. Tactile activities for your child may include:

1. Water play is a fun activity. Fill a small bin or sink with water, water toys, sponges, plastic cups etc. Have your child practice pouring, squeezing the sponge, reaching for toys etc.
2. Finger-painting. Paint with paper over rough surface, such as sand paper, or add gritty substances, such as sand, to increase texture.
3. Shaving cream, whipped cream, pudding, peanut butter and other wet/sticky substances are great for children to get their hands into for play.
4. Bucket full of uncooked pasta, rice and beans (or with various types of cereal) with hidden objects is a great activity. Parental supervision is needed for children who may attempt to put items in the mouth due to choking hazard. Encourage your child to hide their hands or practice their pouring skills using cups or a bucket and plastic shovel.
5. Make texture cards or beanbags out of different fabrics. Choose items that are soft, hard, bumpy, rough, silky, etc. Fabrics such as silk, lambs wool, corduroy, terry cloth, fur and flannel are good choices.
6. Put a variety of know objects into a bag or box and have your child identify the items without looking at them.
7. Playdoh and gooze are also great materials to increase your child’s sense of touch. Try hiding objects, such as marbles and coins within it and have your child find them using their sense of touch.

Other Sensory Systems:

Oral Sensory/Gustatory System: The oral sensory, which includes the sense of taste (gustatory), system is comprised of the mouth. This is the most utilized system by children between the ages of 0-2 years to learn about their environment. Due to the high density of sensory receptors in the mouth, oral input is very powerful for sensory organization. Oral sensory activities include:

1. Blowing activities such as blowing bubbles, blowing through a straw for cotton ball races, blowing whistle and party favors and blowing a pinwheel.
2. Sucking a thick shake or smoothie through a straw. The thinner the straw, the harder your child has to work to drink the shake, increasing the intensity and organization of oral input.
3. To increase intensity for oral sensory input, try sour, bitter and spicy flavors to stimulate the mouth.
4. Vibrating toys, such as the Massaging Action Teether by The First Years.
5. Crunchy foods, such as pretzels, popcorn, chips, carrots, and chewy foods such as raisins, bagels, gum, etc.

Visual System: The visual system is comprised of our eyes and the part of the brain that interprets what we see. Even though your child may not need glasses to correct their vision, they may still have difficulty with moving their eyes together and/or interpreting visual input, which has a great impact on motor skill development. Visual activities for your child may include:

1. Use motivating toys/objects to encourage your child to follow the toy's movement with their eyes. Move the toys from side to side and up and down as instructed by your therapist.
2. Encourage your child to keep their eyes on a toy as you bring the toy closer to their nose and back out again. This helps the eyes to work together.
3. Play I Spy with your child, choosing large or small items in the room depending upon your child's abilities.
4. Play flashlight tag in a darkened room by having your child try to "catch" your flashlight on the wall. Try to form simple shapes and letters and encourage your child to guess them.
5. Have your child choose the picture/item that is different from the remaining identical pictures/items, using 2, 3, or 4 choices, depending upon your child's abilities. For example, use 2 pictures of ducks and 1 picture of a cow or 3 spoons and 1 fork and have the child choose the picture or item that is different.

Auditory System: The auditory system is comprised of the ears and the part of our brain that interprets sound. Even though your child may not have a hearing loss, they can have difficulty interpreting and processing auditory sounds. Auditory activities for your child may include:

1. To decrease arousal state from high to "just right," use rhythmical, predictable and unchanging sounds or music. For example, classical, marching songs, children's songs and some forms of rock and rap. You can also use rhythmical clapping rhythms as well.
2. To increase arousal state from low to "just right," use arrhythmical, unpredictable and changing music such as salsa and jazz. Use arrhythmical clapping rhythms as well.
3. Encourage your child to pick out specific sounds in the environment to improve his or her ability to discriminate sounds.
4. Make animal sounds, sing or play telephone or Simon says games to increase auditory skills.