

MIDAS - SWALE Specialist Teaching Learning Service

Sensory Toolkit

Tactile System

The tactile system helps us to differentiate between textures, size, and shape and where the touch is coming from. The tactile system also helps us to detect pain, temperature, and light touch.

Under Responsive

If a child is under responsive, they often require more sensory input and are seeking for more within their environment.

Activities to trial

Create an individual tactile exploring box. This may include:

- Fidget toys such as spinners, fidget cubes, poppers, stress balls
- Different textured materials
- Theraputty/Play dough
- Feel and touch books

Regular messy play activities / opportunities:

- Water play
- Aqua beads
- Paint
- Corn flour, shaving foam
- Food exploring – lentils, rice, beans, pasta
- Sand
- Slime

Other strategies:

- Use a base layer, such as lycra sports skins under clothes
- Eating crunchy or chewy foods
- Use of a straw or sports bottle when drinking
- Blowing activities such as: bubbles, blow football

Over Responsive

If a child is over responsive, they often take in more sensory input than is required. They may seem bothered by or overwhelmed by sensory input.

Activities to trial

Consider the environment:

- Minimise unexpected touch and give warning where possible
- Use firm rather than light touch

Consider the activity:

- Can you use tools such as paint brushes/rollers/gloves
- Can you remove the stimuli e.g. labels in clothes

Consider your approach:

- Approach from the front so that they can see you
- Obtain their attention and provide prior warning before an activity starting e.g. hair brushing
- Avoid light touch, using firm pressure

Other strategies:

- Minimise the risk of being bumped e.g. standing at the back of a line.
- Calming proprioceptive activities prior to tasks

Proprioceptive System

Proprioception is related to body awareness, which is knowing where your body parts are positioned. Proprioception supports your child's development of coordinated movements and helps them to grade the level of force used for an activity such as throwing a ball and stroking a pet.

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Over Responsive

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Activities to trial

- Carry heavy items e.g. shopping, backpack, laundry etc.
- Jumping on a mini trampoline
- Wall push ups
- Chair push ups
- Pushing/pulling activities
- Playground/park (climbing frames, monkey bars)
- Crashing activities (piling cushions, pillows, duvets)
- Animal walks
- Yoga, gymnastics, swimming
- Therapy ball activities
- Games such as Simon says, musical statues
- Theraband activities
- Push on large therapy ball with someone else giving resistance from the other side
- Play "row your boat" both sitting on the floor or tug-of-war games
- Wipe the whiteboard/table

Activities to trial

- Begin with slow activities
- Introduce movement activities slowly and gradually
- Wall push ups
- Chair push ups
- Calming proprioceptive activities (heavy work activities)
- Steam rollers with use of a therapy ball
- Allow additional time when learning or exploring new movements

Vestibular System

The vestibular system is your sense of movement and balance and gives us information about where our body is in space, whether we are moving, upright, upside down or at a tilt. The vestibular system is located within the inner ear and is stimulated by head movements and input from other our senses, especially the visual system.

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Over Responsive

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Activities to trial

- Pre-empt movement needs
- Regular movement breaks
- Move n sit cushion
- **Swinging** – use playground swings, monkey bars, soft play areas, ropes, tires, hammock.
- **Rocking** – on a rocking chair, a rocking horse. Playing “Row your boat” would also be effective.
- **Rolling** - encourage your child to roll with their hands extended above their head, with their legs
- outstretched while remaining straight.
- Therapy ball activities.

Activities to trial

- Give reassurance
- Graded approach – working on the floor to feel grounded.
- Ensure feet are on the floor
- Gentle rhythmical linear movement e.g. rocking back and forth or side to side.
- Calming proprioceptive activities
- Encourage child to face forward when using transport and look at the horizon.
- Use of distraction techniques such as; fidget toys, headphones.

Visual System

The visual system uses light to detect information through our eyes and interprets or makes sense of that information in the brain. It provides us with immediate feedback from the environment and helps us to anticipate, plan and monitor changes. It tells us about locating objects and helps with daily tasks such as reading.

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Activities to trial

- Use of a bookmark under reading line/working window
- Reduce visual distractions
- Avoid clutter in the room/table/walls
- Visual cues/visual instructions
- Use of natural light as much as possible
- Glow sticks/lava lamps/fish tank/sensory bottles
- Games such as 'I spy'
- Word searches/matching games
- Sorting/organising items.

Activities to trial

- Reduce visual distractions
- Avoid clutter in the room/table/walls
- Use of natural light as much as possible
- Reduce bright lighting
- Use of a baseball cap/sunglasses/hoodie to block out visual stimuli
- Access supermarkets at alternative times when lighting is dimmed
- Calming proprioceptive activities

Auditory System

Hearing is important to alert the brain to incoming stimuli whether for protection or understanding. The auditory system underpins speech and language development.

Under Responsive

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Activities to trial

- Establish quiet work areas
- Use their name first to gain attention
- Give simple, clear instructions, one at a time
- Provide enough time to process the question
- Use visual prompts

Over Responsive

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Activities to trial

- Provide prior warnings to known noisy environments or loud noises
- Keep background noise to a minimum
- Headphones/ear plugs/ear defenders/ear muffs
- Visual timers
- Visual prompts
- Use of name first to gain attention
- Give simple, clear instructions, one at a time.
- Establish quiet work areas.

Taste and Smell System

The sense of taste is closely linked to smell. It is critical to our enjoyment of food and can have a big impact on our food preferences. Attachment to smells creates memories and has a strong link to our emotions.

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Activities to trial

- Sucking – resistive sucking through a straw, sports drink bottle etc.
- Blowing – blowing through a straw to make bubbles, whistles, balloons etc.
- Biting, crunching, chewing food/non-food items e.g. granola, veg sticks, chewing gum.
- Scented pens

Activities to trial

- Calming proprioceptive activities prior to mealtimes
- Be aware of smells around us and how they can affect others e.g. reduce strong perfumes/laundry scents
- Smell – putting a familiar scent onto handkerchief/scarf/mask/sleeve/piece of material that the child can use as required to override any unpleasant smells