Using a "Sensory Diet" with Children with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)

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What is a Sensory Diet?

A sensory diet is a carefully designed, personalized daily schedule of sensory enriched activities, equipment, and strategies to help a person stay focused and organized throughout the day. Children with a Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) may have a difficult time adjusting to everyday stimuli. Some children are overly responsive to some types of input in their environment, while other children are under responsive. Many children are under responsive to some inputs, such as movement, and overly responsive to other inputs, such as touch.

Children with SPD demonstrate abnormal responses (under- or overreactions) to stimuli such as a particular clothing fabric, pressure on the skin, routine changes or transitions of their schedule, visual input, certain food items, sounds, and smells. Children with sensory dysfunction do not respond normally to these environmental stimuli and require additional planned activities that allow their focus and attention to be redirected. Physicians may refer these children to occupational therapists.

An occupational therapist (OT) can develop a sensory diet to help a child with SPD by engaging the child in activities specifically tailored to his/her needs. This "diet" provides the right amount of sensory input for readjusting the neurological system and helps the child to function at his/her "optimal" level. After participating in sensory diet activities, the child is more able to focus and handle the stresses of his/her everyday environmental situations. The child is usually happier and better prepared for learning after participation.

Information Needed to Help Create a Sensory Diet

The key to creating a successful sensory diet is providing the right frequency, duration, and intensity of sensory experiences in order for the child to maintain the appropriate level of arousal for daily functioning. The OT creates a sensory diet by evaluating the child’s needs for certain stimuli through observation and involvement with the child. The OT may use a parent/teacher questionnaire to gather additional information. In order to create the most effective plan of activities, the OT may ask the following questions of parents, teachers, and caregivers.

- When does the child demonstrate "upset" behavior? Can you determine the "trigger" for this behavior?
- Are transitions a problem for the child? When do they occur?
- Does the child have specific food or clothing preferences? Specific food dislikes and/or clothing dislikes?
- Does the child have difficulty with peer relationships? Does he/she play too roughly with other children or prefer to play alone?
- Does the child have gross motor problems such as falling down frequently, bumping into things, trouble with balance, or coordination delays?
Does the child have fine motor problems such as difficulty grasping a pencil, poor handwriting, poor ability to cut with scissors, or a weak grasp resulting in difficulty with fasteners, buttons, zippers, and snaps?

Is the child sensitive to things on his/her hands and face? Is he/she upset by shaving cream, glue, fingerpaint, or food items?

Does the child overreact to nail cutting, hair washing, bathing, or other forms of hygiene?

**The Sensory Diet**

After a close evaluation, the OT devises the sensory diet to help the child cope with his/her environmental stimuli. While planning the sensory diet, the OT:

- Involves the child and includes his/her input about activities he/she enjoys.
- Determines the setting(s) in which the child will experience the sensory diet.
- Plans the activities around logical breaks throughout the day.
- Has any special tools or necessary equipment readily available for the activities.
- Involves teachers and encourages classroom involvement.
- Includes the use of picture schedules for those with more severe needs.
- Determines if there is a need for a trained professional to be available during the activity.
- Uses a variety of sensory activities to maintain interest as well as target the student's needs.

Each and every child with SPD is unique and special. No two therapies or sensory diets will be the same. Consult your child’s occupational therapist or pediatrician if you suspect that your child is having sensory processing and integration issues. For more information, read extensively about SPD at the web sites and resources listed below.

**Resources**


# SENSORY ACCOMMODATION SUGGESTIONS

**TO MAKE DESK WORK EASIER**
- Provide desk closest to teacher
- Provide alternate desk away from group activities
- Assign desk at front of class
- Adjust desk to child's height (correct placement is child's feet on floor/stool with elbows resting on table)
- Provide rubber band around chair legs for child's feet
- Use alternate seating options; ball, knee chair, move-and-sit, disc-o-sit or air cushion
- Allow child to stand
- Allow child use of weighted lap pad
- Allow frequent breaks

**FOR SITTING IN A GROUP**
- Allow child to sit on a carpet square
- Mark child's spot on carpet with tape
- Allow child to use chair or beanbag
- Seat child closest to teacher
- Seat child at edge of group
- Seat child at back of group
- Seat child at front of group
- Allow use of handheld fidget toys/manipulatives
- Allow child to sub-vocalize
- Allow child to change position as needed (from knees, to straight legs, to crisis/cross, etc)

**FOR WRITING**
- Provide a pencil grip (specify kind)
- Provide angled writing desk or slant board
- Always provide lined paper or specialized paper
- Provide visual instructions for common written tasks
- Assist with brainstorming for written work
- Help organize thoughts for long writing tasks
- Give extra class time to finish
- Allow the option to finish at home without penalty
- Provide a list of common words and their correct spelling at desk
- Allow dictation to a scribe
- Allow assistive technology (specify kind)
- Allow child to dictate ideas into a tape recorder, then scribe his/her own words later or at home
- Warm hands up with proprioceptive work, such as manipulating clay, before writing begins

**FOR READING**
- Allow child to read out loud
- Give child a book mark to hold place and help to follow along while reading
- Minimize visual distractions on the page
- Allow child to move/change position/take breaks

**FOR CLASSWORK**
- Allow child to move to a quieter area/out in hallway
- Repeat instructions to child 1:1
- Allow child to take work to Resource Room
- Provide visual instructions
- Cover page to show only 1-2 problems at a time

**FOR HOMEWORK**
- Allow extra time to complete assignments
- Give modified assignments that require less writing
- Give modified assignments that require less reading
- Give option of drawing in lieu of writing
- Allow work to be typed
- Allow work to be scribed
- Allow work to be modified at the parent's discretion
- Decrease amount of work required

**FOR TRANSITIONS**
- Prepare student ahead of time verbally or with a timer
- Follow schedule as accurately as possible
- Allow child to bring a "transition toy" with them
- Give child something to carry with them
- Have child be the "door holder"
- Have child be the "carboose" (last in line)
- Have child be the "leader" (first in line)
- Remind child to keep his/her hands to themselves
- Remind child about "personal space bubble"

**FOR RECESS**
- Do not take recess away for mis-behavior in class
- Offer good proprioceptive options such as monkey bars, rock wall climbing, or digging

**FOR HEAVY WORK - REGULAR ACCESS ALL DAY**
- Allow child to re-shelve books
- Allow child to rearrange chairs/desks
- Allow child to open and close doors

**FOR SENSORY BREAKS**
- Make child "classroom messenger"
- Allow child to pass out papers
- Allow child frequent trips to the bathroom or drinking fountain as needed
- Sing songs that encourage movement
- Encourage whole class stretching
- Allow child access to sensory tub, sand, beans, rice
- Do chair pushups or tailor sit pushups as a class

**TIPS FOR GENERAL SENSORY SUCCESS**
- Give child warnings before a fire drill or other bells
- Explain false alarms to child when applicable
- Provide "Quite Chill" out space, under a desk, in a corner where they can be alone and safe
- Allow noise-canceling head phones
- Allow gum chewing, hard candy, or other food
- Allow water bottle w/straw at desk or other chewy
- Allow fidget toys
- Post visual routine in classroom
- My child is very sensitive to smells
- My child is very sensitive to touch: Please DO NOT TOUCH HIM/HER
- Keep visual distractions in the room to a minimum
- Play calming music in the background
- Allow modifications to art activities with possible use of tools to increase participation
- Please share my child's 504 with all para-educators in contact with my child
- My child is on a special diet, you can support this by:
  - [ ]
  - [ ]

**MY CHILD'S LEARNING STYLE IS:**
- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic

www.harleysboys.com
10 simple activities to encourage physical activity in the classroom

1. **Secret Password:** Every day establish a secret password activity such as 5 jumping jacks, stand on one foot for 5 seconds, hop three times, etc. Then establish when the student needs to use the secret password - i.e. after a drink of water, before receiving a hand out, when entering the classroom, in between subjects, etc.

2. **Walking Worksheets:** Tape worksheets on wall, easel and chalkboard. Students move from worksheet to worksheet and answer the different questions.

3. **Opposite Hunt:** Divide the class in half. Half of the class write a word on an index card. The other half writes the definition. Shuffle the cards and hand one card to each student. The students must move around the classroom and match the word with the definition. For younger students match up sight words, letter or numbers. Try math problems and solutions.

4. **Pencil Jumps:** For a quick movement break in between lessons have each student place a pencil on the floor. Jump over the pencil a designated number of times.

5. **Race in Place:** When reviewing material, have the students stand up and run in place by their desks. On the teacher’s signal, student stops running in place, listens to question and writes down the answer on paper.

6. **Daily Rule:** Establish a new daily rule every day that includes physical activity. I.e. walk backwards to water fountain, tip toe to the bathroom, stretch before sitting in chair. See if you can catch the students forgetting the daily rule.

7. **Shredder:** Cut up worksheets in quarters. Students can help scatter the worksheets around the floor face down. On the teacher’s signal, the students can crawl around the floor, find the four quarters of the worksheet, complete the worksheet and give it to teacher.

8. **Push Up Line Up:** When the students line up against the wall to leave the classroom, have each student face the wall and perform 10 wall push ups. After all push ups completed the class can walk in the line.

9. **Mobile Math:** Divide the class in half to review math problems. The students can stand at their desks (paper and pencil on desk). Call out a math problem such as 4+5=. One half of the class jumps 4 times and the other half jumps five times. Each student writes down answer on paper. Continue with other math problems. Vary movements.

10. **Q and A Stretching:** Provide students with paper at desk. Students can stand or sit. Ask a question and student writes down the answer (very large) on one sheet of paper. Each student holds paper up, with two hands overhead to stretch. Teacher checks answers. Multiple choice questions work best.

Looking for more motor activity ideas?? Visit www.YourTherapySource.com
Deep Pressure and Heavy Activities for Home and School

Purpose: To provide sensory input that your child craves. Once these sensory needs are met, he/she will be able to function more successfully at home and in all environments.

1. Carry heavy items (baskets with blocks, groceries for mom or dad, etc)
2. Mop or sweep the floor
3. Allow child to chew gum, eat chewy or crunchy foods, or sip water through a straw when doing homework.
4. Push or pull boxes with a few toys or blocks in them
5. Fill pillow cases with a few stuffed animals for weight and have them push or pull them up a ramp or stairs for an incline
6. Take cushions off a sofa and vacuum under them, put them back. Can also climb on them, or hide under them and play the “sandwich game”.
7. Pull other kids around on a sheet or blanket.
8. Have them pull out and pull in the trashcans on trash day.
9. Yard work, including mowing the lawn, raking grass/leaves, pushing a wheelbarrow.
10. Housework including vacuuming, mopping, carrying buckets of water to clean with or to water plants with.
11. Pull a friends or heavy items in a wagon.
12. Suck applesauce through a straw.
13. Have them pass out papers/items to classmates, siblings, friends.
15. “Hot dog” game where a child lies across the end of a blanket and is rolled (ends up inside the rolled up blanket with head outside).
16. Roll on a scooter board to and from destinations or just as a game.
17. Sharpen pencils with a manual sharpener.
18. Climbing activities (such as playground equipment).

19. Push against a wall or do wall push-ups.

20. Fill up big boy trucks with heavy blocks, push with both hands to knock things down.


22. Have the child open doors on their own and for other people.

23. Play catch with a heavy or weighted ball (bounce, roll and throw)

24. Push weighted carts or boxes across a carpeted floor.

25. Animal walks (crab, bear, and army crawl)

26. Play “Row, row, row your boat” both sitting on the floor pushing and pulling each other.

27. Sensory play – bins/containers filled with rice, beans, water, etc

28. Theraputty, koosh ball, or jell-o play
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrival</th>
<th>Dismissal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Choice</td>
<td>Pencils to sharpen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fill your water bottle.</td>
<td>Get out your B.E.A.R. Book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get your chair.</td>
<td>Record your color of the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get out your B.E.A.R. Book.</td>
<td>Get your mail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get out your pencil box.</td>
<td>Empty your water bottle. Put in tub.</td>
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<td>Copy off the board.</td>
<td>Stack your chair.</td>
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<td>Homework</td>
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<td>Hand in or put away homework.</td>
<td>Put away pencil box.</td>
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<td>Do morning work!</td>
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<td></td>
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Touch your nose, belly button, knees and toes 10 times.

Play rock, paper, scissors with a partner.

Conduct an orchestra.

Play "I spy with my little eye..." with a partner.

Balance ball on your nose and clap like a seal.

Catch flies like a frog.