Sensory Strategies - Calming and Alerting

Sensory Strategies for Alerting, Calming, and Organising Children in the Classroom.

This is a list of some exercises and strategies that can be used as part of a sensory diet to help regulate (calm or alert) sensory systems and improve concentration and attention.

These techniques will support your child to maintain the best possible alertness for best academic performance.

The activities listed below may be considered generally alerting or calming, but will have different effects on different children at different times.

Not only do we each have our own sensory preferences and tolerances, but our responses can change depending on our energy levels, mood, blood sugar levels and other factors in the environment.

Activities that are typically alerting are in general:

* Music with a fast beat
* Music - lower frequencies will elicit movement (drums), while higher frequencies can engage attention (flutes, singing, cymbals)
* Cold temperatures (including foods)
* Light, brushing touch
* Fast movement, especially spinning movements.
* Sour or spicy flavours
* Fast-moving, bright, unpredictable visuals such as fast moving cars or headlights
* Using muscles for “heavy work” of pushing, pulling, against resistance.

Activities that are typically organising are in general:

* Rhythmic movements such as marching on the spot
* Using muscles for “heavy work” of pushing, pulling, against resistance
* Activities that require the child to organise their body, plan their approach and do more than one thing at a time in a sequential order. For example hop scotch.

Activities that are typically calming are in general:

* Slow, steady, rhythmic, repeated, predictable input movements.
* Slow and rhythmic music
* Firm, steady, pressure touch or squeezing (think massage or a big hug)
* Using muscles for ‘heavy work’
* Bland or sweet-tasting flavours
* Slow-moving, dim, long distance views, deep colours for visuals
* Chewing and blowing or breathing out
* Slow linear movements forward-and-back e.g. on a swing or up and down

**Example Activities for Different Sensory Systems**

The suggested activities could also be used at home or as part of sensory circuits

Mouth

* Suck-type water bottles or drinks through a straw
* Chews, T chews, chewy pencil toppers
* Chew on straws
* Blowing bubbles
* Cold food e.g. ice lollies, milkshakes
* Crunchy food e.g. crisps, carrots
* Chewy food e.g. “fruit strings”, chewing gum
* Blow football and similar games

Move

* Wiggle time: whole class wake up activities
* Alternate work positions (e.g. chair, floor, sit, lie, desktop, window sill)
* Stretch “up and long and wide” and breathe slowly
* Squeeze arms to body, legs together, make a funny face
* Move-n-sit cushion, therapy balls, mini-trampoline, exercise bike etc
* Hand/chair/wall push-ups
* Push/pull/lift/carry = heavy work
* Wear back pack with heavy books to calm, or go on a treasure hunt and fill up the back pack.
* Pull each other on carpet, sheet, blanket, “magic carpet”
* Any type of aerobic exercise or sensory circuits

Touch

* Fidget objects (string or paper clips, spiny ball, fabric swatches, blu-tac
* Stress or squeeze ball

Look

* Reduce visual clutter on walls
* Create sensory hide out, den or cave with room dividers, tents, blankets over tables
* Strobe light effect, and computer, video and TV games can be very alerting
* Brightly lit, visually active room is alerting, dimly lit sparsely decorated room with ‘cool’ colours is calming

Listen

* Alternate learning centre (library, quiet room)
* Ear defenders or noise cancelling ear plugs etc
* Listening to music