

## Helping your child's sensory needs during isolation

Although there are many positives to spending time with our families in these uncertain times, there are going to be occasions when this does not seem such fun. Most of our children are not designed to be in the house, sitting around, watching TV and need much more physical activity. Some of our children prefer this and will love nothing more than being fed whilst they sit for hours at a computer game or tablet! Many of our children need a routine to help them through the day and a lack of this along with a lack of purpose will make things very challenging for them—and us!

With this in mind I have put together some of the activities we do in school to help keep the children well regulated. I have also put links to websites I use for ideas of interesting sensory things to do with the children. None of this is rocket science and is mostly common sense but sometimes common sense goes out of the window in times of stress!

Good Luck, Stay Safe and Be Positive!

Debi Ost, OT and mum to a worrier who needs routine!

It is very common for children with ASD, ADHD, Fragile X, Down's Syndrome to have differences in the way they receive and react to sensation. Sometimes they over react, e.g., put their hands over their ears, are irritated by tags in clothes, only eat dry 'beige' food etc etc. Sometimes they under react e.g., slouch, don't hear instructions, are sleepy, don't notice they need the loo etc, etc. Sometimes they are sensory seeking—either to get more of a sensation because they don't receive it well or to get other sensations to calm down the senses they don't like. Often we see quite bold behaviour here such as jumping, crashing and climbing on furniture, craving for certain food stuffs, spinning etc.

The reasons why a child may be acting in the way they are takes some working out but until we have done that, it is kind to protect them from the senses which cause them distress (we can work on helping with improving that once we are back at school if you notice this) and to provide them with the sensations they need or crave in a safe way.

One way of doing this is with a 'sensory diet' so called because it involves giving bursts of movement at intervals throughout the day. Have at least 5 10-20 minute sessions throughout the day, beginning at breakfast and ending just before bed.

At school we use simple equipment in our sessions at school (Swiss ball, scooter board, trampette) you may not have access to all of these but often families have a Swiss ball from use during pregnancy. They are a great investment (available widely inc Amazon, Sports Direct—you need one that, when inflated, your child can sit on with their feet flat on the floor). I have attached a leaflet with ideas of what you can do with one for your child. If you don't have access to a ball, don't worry there are loads of other ways

# Sensory diet activities

The best exercise you can give is activities or tasks which provide pulling, pushing, squeezing, squashing of the joints and body as these things are very organising for the sensory system and are used both to calm and ready the body.

- Jumping—either on a trampoline/trampette/bed or the floor. Try hop scotch, star jumps. Jumping to 'islands' because the 'floor is lava' (mats, cushions, newspaper)
- Running—on the spot, play chase or get your child to follow instructions such as 'traffic lights', changing directions
- Wheel barrow walking and races
- Making a pile of cushions to climb on and under
- Fill a duvet cover with cuddly toys, cushions etc and use it as a crash mat or get your child to crawl inside and be squashed
- Lie your child on the floor. Face down and squash them with couch cushions
- Skipping ropes to jump over or to tie to things to pull along or to play horses (place rope round waist and someone else hold the ends pretend to be a horse or a rider—both horse and rider will get a pulling in their joints)
- Obstacle courses, following a trail of wool under tables, chairs, mats, duvets, over chairs etc etc
- Chores—carrying heavy items eg washing to the washing machine, wet washing to the line, food stuff to cupboards. Crushing the recycling or ripping up cardboard and paper, Polishing or wiping large surfaces such as tables and worktops. Pushing the vacuum round, brushing up,
- Outdoor chores would be raking, brushing, painting the fence, digging, pulling out weeds
- Go out doors—being with nature is proven to have a regulating effect on the senses and to provide a feel good sensation too. All the senses get a work out—listen to birds, look at leaves, stones etc, touch leaves, soil etc.  
Chalking on the floor and the wall the scrubbing it off when finished  
Playing with bubbles, Hide and seek, Bikes, Scooters, Messy play

If your child does enjoy a lot of screen time try to get them to sit on a Swiss ball or even on a football on their chair to add a bit of movement to their stillness!!! Remember that too much screen time can interfere with sleep patterns so try to get your child outside in the sunshine for a bit to get their natural melatonin flowing. Also try to stop an hour before bed.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sensorystuckathome> Follow this link for ideas to a site run by occupational therapists who work with children who need regular sensory input

www.OTToolbox has loads of fun sensory ideas