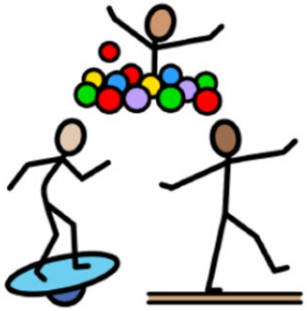
Outcomes First Group

Sensory Circuits



What is a sensory circuit?

- Sensory circuits are a proactive approach to provide therapeutic input to aid and assist in sensory regulation.
- Many may benefit from accessing regular sensory breaks during the day or prior to transitions.
- Sensory circuits promote energy states that are focussed and 'ready to learn'.

How it works?

- It has 3 sections: **Alerting**, **Organising** and **Calming**.
- It is best to complete the sensory circuit in that order.
- Sensory circuits are based on the theories of sensory integration and processing and the practical considerations of providing structured sensory motor input to impact on energy states and regulation.

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Alerting Section:

This section aims to provide vestibular (movement) stimulation within a controlled setting, preparing the brain for the demands of the day. The vestibular system is a sensory system located in the inner ear. It is responsible for helping us understand movement, balance, and spatial orientation (where our body is in space). The vestibular system works closely with other sensory systems, particularly the proprioception (body awareness) and vision. Together, these systems help a student or student to move safely, maintain focus, and feel physically regulated. Understanding this can help staff provide appropriate movement breaks and sensory supports to reduce restlessness and support those seeking additional movement.

Alerting Activities (pick 2-3 of these):

- Skipping
- Trampoline
- Bounce on gym ball
- Jumping jacks/star jumps
- Jumping over obstacles
- Floor ladder
- Tyre hopping
- Hopscotch
- Step ups
- Dancing
- Jogging on the spot
- Running between cones
- Running and changing direction
- Hula Hoops

Organising section:

This section involves activities which require multi-sensory processing and balance. Organising activities form the middle stage of a sensory circuit. These activities require you to organise your body, plan your approach and do more than one thing at a time in a set sequential order. They are designed to help students regulate their level of alertness, improve focus, and prepare for learning by providing structured, calming, and proprioceptive input.

Organising activities include (choose 2-3 of these):

- Kneel to stand, then stand to kneel x 5.
- Animal walks
- Ball walk out (hands/feet)
- Log roll along a mat
- Treasure hunt
- Crawling
- Stepping stones
- Carrying/pushing/pulling
- Rolling from one to another then back again
- Throw ball into a hoop/box/target
- Create a balance obstacle course
- Simon Says
- Balance bean bag on head whilst walking
- Resistance band activities (where appropriate and safe)

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Calming section:

The calming section is the final stage of a sensory circuit. It helps students reduce arousal levels, settle their bodies, and prepare to return to the classroom in a calm and regulated state. These activities will ensure increased proprioceptive input to help calm and organise the senses. Proprioception often involves heavy work, deep pressure or rhythmic and repetitive movements. The purpose is to promote relaxation and emotional regulation, support transition to learning activities, reduce sensory overload and encourage a quiet, settled state of readiness.

Calming activities include (choose 2-3):

- Stretching out in a relaxed body position (e.g. on a mat)
- Deep breathing exercises/ simple yoga poses
- Whole-body stretches
- Slow rocking from side to side in sitting
- Resistance band stretches (where appropriate and safe)
- Pull
- Sustained wall-sit or plank position (knees on floor to make it easier)
- Four-point kneeling and slow rocking backwards and forwards
- Crawl through tunnel
- Stop and hold/freeze games
- Helping to put away equipment (heavy work)

How and when?

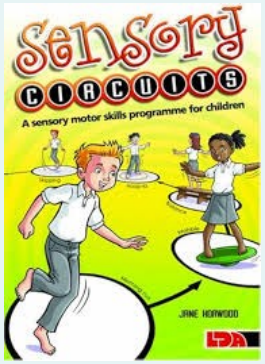
- It is recommended that sensory circuits are completed first thing in the morning, prior to learning tasks that require a change in energy state.
- Sensory circuits can additionally be completed after/before a transition - Break and lunch.
- Sensory circuits should last an average of 10 minutes.
- Sensory circuits do not always need to involve all sections. For example: After an active lunch break organising and calming section may only be necessary.

Saftey checks:

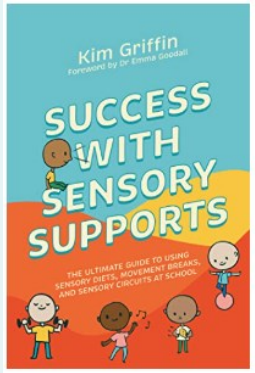
- None of these activities should be painful in any way, however, if the student appears to be struggling or reports any pain then stop the activity.
- If you are concerned that they are not demonstrating improvement/ability to learn a movement, then discuss with your school's occupational therapist.
- Adapt the intensity/duration of the activity according to the student's needs and energy levels

Books/ references:

If you would like further information, the books below are the resources that we use in our schools:



Sensory Circuits: A Sensory Motor Skills Programme for Children : Horwood, Jane: Amazon.co.uk: Books



Success with Sensory Supports: The ultimate guide to using sensory diets, movement breaks, and sensory circuits at school by Kim Griffin: New Paperback (2023) | Chiron Media

Note: *Occupational Therapists can deliver training on sensory circuits*