Supporting sensory regulation

Child Development Centre

Sensory activities can support children in regulating their bodies and emotions. Every child processes sensory information differently. The goal is to explore the child's preferences and needs, and discover what helps them feel comfortable and ready to participate.



- Children need lots of practice with co-regulation before they are able to self regulate.
- An adult's calm presence and supervision is an important tool to support regulation.
- Introduce sensory activities playfully when your child is calm and connected.
- Observe your child's cues (comfort/discomfort). Stop or take a break if they are showing they are not interested.
- Regulation skills develop over time through repetition and supportive relationships – continued opportunities to practice strategies is key.
- Strategies may need to change as your child grows, or as situations vary.

Be a sensory detective

- Notice patterns when your child becomes dysregulated.
- Adjust environmental factors (noise, light, activity level), if able.
- Move to quieter or less stimulating spaces when needed.
- Once your child has practiced and you are familiar with what works, you can try offering regulation strategies during more challenging moments.

Building regulation into the day

- Offer short sensory breaks every 1–2 hours. When possible, offer strategies proactively, or before challenging moments arise.
- Use frequent, brief "sensory snacks" to help incorporate movement and sensory input into daily routines (e.g. chores, transitions).
- Create a calming space (quiet corner with soft light, reduced noise, minimal clutter, and calming items like fidgets) if possible.
- Pair activities with simple, supportive language:
  - "Let's squeeze while we breathe."
  - "You can rock while I count."



Sensory Activity Ideas

Body awareness (proprioception/heavy work)



Provides input to muscles and joints, helping the body feel organized.

- Animal walks (bear, crab, frog, etc.)
- Obstacle courses with jumping, crawling, climbing, or wheelbarrow walking
- Crashing or jumping onto pillows, bean bag, cushions, etc.
- Helping around the house (e.g. pushing a laundry bin, carrying groceries, or sweeping)
- Tug-of-war or resistance games
- Wall or chair push-ups
- Offer deep pressure (e.g. give tight hugs, squishes between pillows or blankets like a 'sandwich' or 'burrito')
- Use a ball or a pool noodle to provide input to your child's arms, legs and back like a 'steamroller'
- Hold or play with weighted items (e.g., stuffed animals, bean bags)

Balance and movement (vestibular)

Provides information about movement and balance. Fast movement and spinning can cause excitement, so monitor for your child's reaction to movement inputs.

- Gentle swinging (blanket swing, hammock, or swingset)
- Rocking (chair or caregiver's lap)



Touch and sensory play (tactile)



- Sensory bins (e.g., rice, sand, shredded paper, rocks)
- Water play (sink, bin, bath)
- Playdough, clay, or putty
- Soft textures (blankets, stuffed animals)

Oral-motor and breathing

Ensure close supervision with food and chew items.

- Blowing activities (bubbles, feathers, balloons, straws)
- Chewing (chewy foods, gum for older children, chew tools)
- Drinking through straws or sports bottles
- Humming or singing



Visual input

- Dim or natural lighting
- Reduced clutter
- Calming visuals (e.g., glitter jars, books)



Smell

Use only if there are no sensitivities or allergies.

- Mild scents such as lavender, vanilla, or chamomile
- Familiar scents from home (e.g., blanket, stuffed toy)