



# A Sensory Life

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## Sensory Differences and Challenges Ideas to Help Sensory Kiddos in the Classroom

You may indeed see different characteristics of a sensory kiddo...they are all so unique in their own way. You likely have observed many children as I will describe. You may have the children in the class who can't seem to sit still, they are distracted by everything they hear and see. They also want to touch everything in their little path or they may be very defensive and not want to be touched at all. They might chew on their sleeves, bite others, lash out for no obvious reason, or hide under a desk. They might seem easily distracted and impulsive, and have a poor attention span. **These are all very common traits of sensory processing disorder (SPD).** Unfortunately children with SPD, or sensory differences and challenges, are mistaken as a behavior problem and just simply disruptive.

**This is not the case...**these children need your help and your guidance in the classroom with the help of sensory tools and strategies and seeing the child through "sensory goggles". Hopefully if this handout has made it into your hands, you already have a parent who is educated in sensory based intervention and comes with sensory tools and suggestions to offer! All you will need to do is be receptive to the ideas and respect these sensory differences and needs!

Some common sensory tools you may see accompany a child with SPD may be a weighted lap pad, a compression vest, an oral sensory tool, a fidget toy, chewing gum, or noise cancelling headphones, and many, many more! These tools are specifically geared to help the child self-regulate, promote learning and attention, and improve overall mood and behavior in the classroom. They need to be used throughout the day as recommended for the full benefit.

**Here are some other sensory suggestions and recommendations that can benefit ALL of the children in the classroom!**

### Mouth

- ✓ Water bottles on desks, preferably Camelbak® water bottles due to the mouthpiece feature.
- ✓ Chewing gum
- ✓ Theratubing® on ends of pencils
- ✓ Other various chewy tools for those children who need them
- ✓ Offer chewy and crunchy snacks
- ✓ Encourage deep breathing

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### Movement

- ✓ RECESS is CRUCIAL and should never be used as a discipline tool. Recess should not be taken away; the recess/muscle break is what is going to help the child self-regulate, attend, and focus in the classroom. Students who are deprived of recess can become

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sensory starved. With the regular and frequent muscle breaks, the brain has the sensory diet/nutrition it needs to focus and attend in the classroom as well as improve behavior in the classroom.

- ✓ Sitting in a chair at a desk is often not the preferred way for a child's brain to learn. Other very appropriate alternatives can be: ball chair, standing at the chalk board or with paper taped to a vertical surface, standing on rocker board in back of classroom, laying on stomach on the floor, bean bag
- ✓ Allow for "wobble breaks". As a classroom group: do stretches, dance, sing a song with action parts and body movement, chair push ups, body like popcorn popping, jumping bean bodies
- ✓ Incorporate lift/push/pull/carry activities into the daily routine for all children
- ✓ If a swing is available in the resource room utilize it as much as possible
- ✓ Let children take turns using a rocking chair in the classroom

## **Tactile/Proprioception**

- ✓ Have a fidget toy basket available with various textures and resistance
- ✓ Weighted lap pads and blankets
- ✓ Vibrating pillows or hand held vibrating gadgets
- ✓ Beanbags for laying underneath or laying on top of them on their belly.
- ✓ Squish boxes
- ✓ Group activities of tug of war, climbing, animal walks
- ✓ Playdoh® and Theraputty®
- ✓ Wrap a resistance band around the legs of the desk chair for the child to push and pull with their feet.

## **Auditory**

- ✓ Allow for use of noise cancelling headphones or earplugs (during work time, not instruction)
- ✓ Allow for use of MP3 players with soft classical or other instrumental music

## **Visual**

- ✓ Limit the number of items and displays on the walls
- ✓ Do not hang items from the ceiling and dangle them...the slight movement of these items can be VERY distracting for a sensory kiddo
- ✓ Keep in mind that a tidy, organized classroom and work space can greatly improve the brain's response in a learning environment
- ✓ Natural light into the classroom is best, fluorescent lights can be very distracting and often sensory kiddos can hear them too ☺

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