

Exploring Sensory Tools: supporting calm and alert bodies through movement and touch

Sensory tools (not toys) provide purposeful sensory input that can help students regulate their bodies, maintain attention, and stay engaged in learning tasks. Not all tools are the same. Many tools offer more than one type of sensory experience and what can feel calming (soothing) to some might be alerting (invigorating) to others. The brain loves patterns: they are predictable and consistent. This reduces uncertainty and lowers stress, helping to feel calm. Explore below to discover different properties of sensory tools and how they support regulation in different ways.



spin

mesmerising, comforting

Spinning creates repetitive, smooth, consistent motion. It is a predictable motion, which often feels safer and calming. Watching objects spin is a visual anchor, providing something steady to return to.



squeeze / stretch

calming, stress relieving

Squeezing or stretching things provides the body with deep pressure, especially through the muscles and joints. This is incredibly powerful for organising the nervous system.



click / listen

focusing, rhythmic

Clicking, tapping or listening to certain sounds, especially when it's rhythmic, can help to calm and release energy in a safe way. Being in control of the noise makes it more predictable and can also help to mask any unpredictable sounds.



touch / feel

soothing, grounding

Holding or touching objects gives the nervous system grounding information about the world- what shape, texture, temperature and weight it is. Touch can also improve awareness of the body, as well as a sense of stability.



watch

calming, focusing

Watching things, especially if they have gentle movement is a safe and engaging way to regulate. They can be mesmerising, grounding and good for reducing anxiety or racing thoughts.



chew

organising, calming

Chewing combines rhythm, pressure and oral sensory input. It activates strong muscles in the jaw, which send deep pressure signals to the brain, having a calming and organising effect.

Practical Tips: Use helpful tools early, before your learner becomes overwhelmed. Every learner experiences sensory input differently, so it's important to work together to notice what helps them feel calm or alert. Let your learner guide you in finding what works best for them. Clearly explain how and when to use sensory tools. Together, think about what successful use looks like, how it might affect others and how it will be managed. To support this, you could use 1:1 practice, visual reminders or social stories.

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spin

mesmerising, comforting



fidget spinners
spin rings
spinning tops
twirling ribbons



squeeze / stretch

calming, stress relieving

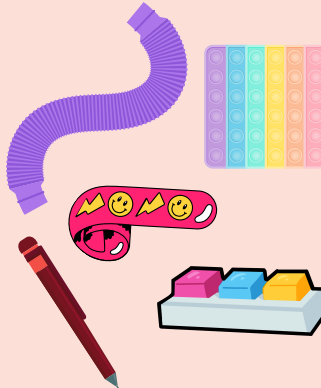


stress balls
Squish toys (eg. Nee Doh)
theraputty
stretchy strings/noodles
resistance bands



click / listen

focusing, rhythmic



clicker keychains
pop-its
snap band bracelets
click pens
pop tubes



touch / feel

soothing, grounding



textured pads
infinity cubes
tangle toys
spiky balls/rings
sensory fabrics
weighted pads/toys

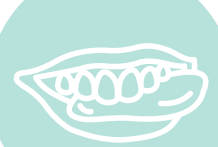


watch

calming, focusing

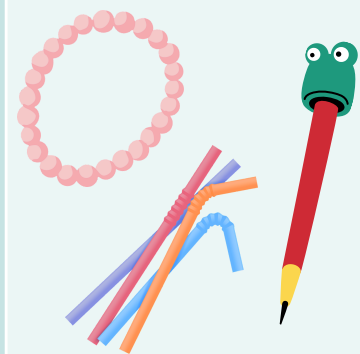


liquid motion bubbleblers
glitter jars
colour-changing light toys
kaleidoscopes
lava timers
spinning tops



chew

organising, calming



chewelry
chewable pencil toppers
silicone straws
silent whistles
For more information, see
the 'Sensory Snack Ideas'
handout

Also consider using items from nature to feel, scrunch, watch, twirl, smell, hold and more! Think about what you have available to you- using the learner's own clothing or attaching textures to the underside of their desk/chair can be a more discreet regulation tool.

This handout is intended as a general guide. Please consider safety, age-appropriateness and individual sensory preferences. If your learner has an Occupational Therapist, please consult them for more guidance.