

# CREATING A SENSORY-SMART ENVIRONMENT

The following suggestions can serve as a guide to creating a safe and conducive environment for kids from hard places.

## 1. PLAN YOUR CHILD'S BEDROOM COLORS

Use calming, neutral colors for the walls. Primary colors can be overstimulating and can even promote hyperactivity. Greens, grays, blues, whites, and muted colors are calming and can help children focus.

## 2. PROVIDE CALM AND SAFE PLACES

Provide designated areas where children can “opt out” of activities. Consider nonthreatening spaces such as teepees, tents, or quiet corners. Outfit those places with books to read, fidget toys, soft stuffed animals, coloring books, self-regulation tools, and headphones to help cancel noise.

## 3. PAY ATTENTION TO ALL THE SENSES

When planning sensory smart environment for your youngster, keep all the senses in mind. The state of our sensory systems can influence both learning and self-regulation. The following is a list of our senses and some ideas for items or practices you can use to help nourish—or soothe—those senses.

## **TACTILE: Through Our Skin and What We Touch**

- Play dough
- Kinetic sand
- Soft carpet
- Velcro strips (grip on both sides)
- Feathers

## **AUDIO: Through Our Ears and What We Hear**

- Soft music
- Ear plugs or noise-canceling headphones for children who don't like loud noises
- Times of quiet or silence
- Speaking times with limited background noise (because some individuals can't filter out one noise from another).

## **VISUAL: Through Our Eyes and What We See**

- Visual stimulation in the room decor should be minimal. (Less on walls = less distraction = less overstimulation.)
- Bright lights for alert times and lower lights for quiet/calm times
- Disco balls and lava lamps
- Mirrors

## **GUSTATORY: Through Our Mouth and What We Taste**

- Healthy snacks (mix of crunchy and chewy, soft and mushy, thick and thin, cold and warm, etc.)
- Gum is great, but it can also be abused. Use with caution (and parent permission)!
- Chewy tubes (be careful about sanitation)

## **OLFACTORY: Through Our Nose and What We Smell**

- This is a great sense to stimulate when working one-on-one. Be careful, however, when working with multiple children. Scents that are calming to one child can be triggering to another. Some scents can also trigger past trauma.
- Try to avoid strong scents and odors
- Use unscented cleaners

## **PROPRIOCEPTION: Through our muscles and joints/where our bodies are in space and where our limbs are in relation to our bodies**

- Appropriate bear hugs and deep-pressure input
- Gluing halves of tennis balls to the seats of chairs can provide calming input
- Practicing wall push-ups
- Elastic material like Lycra

## **VESTIBULAR: Through Our Inner Ear If We Are In Motion**

- Spinning toys, such as a Sit 'N Spin
- Turning upside down
- Swinging on swings at a playground

## **INTEROCEPTION: Through our internal organs and what our bodies are telling us**

- Children with issues interpreting interoceptive input typically don't realize if they are hungry or thirsty. They also often have accidents because they don't recognize their need to use the toilet. Make sure you are prepared for these issues in inconspicuous ways when away from home.