



waitingwell

with The Owl Centre **Charity**

SENSORY DIET

A sensory diet is a programme of activities that provides a child with a variety of sensory experiences throughout their day to help change their mood levels to help them calm and engage. The activities can become part of everyday tasks and routines.

A sensory diet includes a combination of **alerting**, **organising** and **calming** activities for example:

- **Alerting** activities benefit a child when they are under-responsive, they may need a boost to become effectively alert. These activities involve vestibular movement in an up/down direction, as the vestibular system resides in the inner ear.
- **Organising** activities help to regulate a child's responses. These activities, known as proprioception, involve heavy physical work that stimulates nerve and muscle proprioceptors.
- **Calming** activities help an oversensitive child to decrease hypersensitivities to sensory stimuli. These involve gentle vestibular movement however are best before a child becomes completely overwhelmed.

The aim of the sensory diet is to provide the 'just right' amount of sensory input to help your child join in with the world around him. Sensory needs change from day to day. Do not feel you must carry out every activity every day, this is a guide of possible opportunities to provide James with additional sensory input to help develop self-regulation skills, and you can explore them together, with James rating how they make him feel.

Some children may be over-sensitive to sensations and will be fearful or withdraw from certain activities or sensations. Other children may be sensory seeking and find many of these activities enjoyable. Many children fluctuate between these and you must carefully observe your child's reactions and respect them. A child who is indicating fear or distress should not be forced to participate. The child's fear and discomfort is based on his or her nervous system's reaction to sensation and is real, and not under his or her control.

Sensory seekers tend to be very active children, who are on the go. They often respond positively to very intense forms of sensory stimulation and look for ways to move, jump, fall, crash, kick, push, etc. Creating ways to incorporate these needs into safe and fun activities that provide the desired intensity may allow your child to come to a calm and focused place. Think about ways your child can safely push, pull, kick, hang, jump, and lift. (For example, bowling, playground monkey bars, trampolines, pushing a "heavy bag" back and forth with you, pulling a heavy wagon.)



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Children who are sensitive to certain sensations (sounds, lights, smells) may like activities that provide intense deep pressure to the skin, resistance to the muscles, and input to the joints. In general, these inputs are calming for the system for all children.

Lastly, watch for signs that your child is becoming overly silly, unsafe, extremely over-active, or inattentive. Also watch for sudden yawning, hiccoughing, burping, or changes in skin colour. If you note these things, stop the activity immediately and if necessary, find something calming for your child (wrapping up in a blanket, very slow rocking, big bear hug, snuggling in a big comfy chair, warm bath or shower).

Please contact us with any questions or concerns.



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Time of Day	Additional sensory stimulation	What does this do?	Comments
Wake up	Jumping on bed.	Alerting: vestibular and proprioceptive arousal	
Getting Dressed	Use deep pressure activities before dressing to help with orientation and tactile comfort.	Offers opportunity to develop perception of self and objects	Activities could include a brisk rub with towel, massage, squashing games with bean bags
Leaving for School	Carrying bag with heavy books in it, riding scooter or balance bike to school.	Provides proprioception to help attention.	
Morning Session movement break	Roll over therapy ball on tummy. Make a beanbag sandwich.	Providing proprioception or movement breaks.	See routine provided with report.
Snack	Eating crunchy food such as apple, pears, carrots Drink through straw	Provides jaw compression	
Lunch / playtime	Running, monkey bars, rope ladder, balance bike.	Vestibular activities to provide movement sensations , strong active muscle work climbing.	Sitting on and at appropriate height chair and table at lunch time
Afternoon session movement break	Play on equipment in play area.	Activates vestibular system, provides proprioception and helps attention	Something of this nature should be carried out every two hours to promote attention.
Going home	Carrying heavy bag		
Chill out time	Jump on mini trampoline and crash onto sofa or pile of pillows. Sandwich game. Reading books in a rocking chair or bean-bag chair may be beneficial	Vestibular input from jumping, proprioception from crashing. Heavy muscle work and deep pressure. Gentle backward and forward rocking is calming.	Play the sandwich game (James lies in between two pillows and pretends to be the sandwich, while you provide pressure to the top pillow. Ask him "harder or softer?" as you push on the pillow.
Dinner time	Use a bendy straw to drink from. Include crunchy or chewy foods where possible in meal	Requires good muscle control for sucking, uses trunk muscles and mouth muscles.	Provide foods with interesting tastes throughout the day, to increase sensory experiences.
Bath Time	Encourage smooth and knobbly sponges and different types of wash cloths, scrubbing brushes.	Encourage James to rub his arms and legs firmly with a towel to activate proprioceptors and help calm his nervous system	
Bedtime	Make a sandwich by firmly pressing on arms, legs and back with a soft pillow or cushions.	Helps James calm his nervous system.	Use the weighted blanket whilst sleeping only with monitoring.



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