Sensory Circuits

What are sensory circuits?

They can look like circuits we might do in the gym. They are a sequence of physical activities that are either alerting, organising, or calming. Sensory circuits should be physical, active, and fun. It is important to remember they are not like playing in the park. They should always be structured and cater to the child's needs.

Why do sensory circuits help?

- Sensory circuits can help them by giving them the sensory input that they need in order to focus.
- Some children may benefit from spending more time with alerting, organising or calming activities to set them up for their next activities. Therefore, adapt the circuits to their moods on that day (full of energy – calming circuit). Speak to OT about this if unsure.
- Remember that every child is different, therefore their sensory needs and tolerance for each activity will be different.

Sensory Circuits

When should I use a sensory circuit?

- Sensory circuits can be used at the start of the school day or after lunch because they are a great way to get children settled so they can engage in the classroom.
- Sensory circuits should be done regularly, and the circuit should take around 15 – 20 minutes, with three to five minutes spent on each section.
- Some children may need more circuits during the day. It's important that the activities reflect their sensory preferences too, and that you avoid any sensory stimulation that they do not like.
- Children should be encouraged to take part in the sensory circuits and be supervised at all times.
- It is possible to transfer techniques from sensory circuits to the learning environment to help support a child (shorter movement breaks in class time using classroom equipment).
- Have fun and don't forget the goals you set – are the sensory circuits helping?

Alerting

When should I use an alerting circuit?

These activities prepare the brain for learning. They activate the vestibular system and provide proprioceptive stimulation. The vestibular system is our sense of balance and proprioception is our sense of where our body is in space.

Activities

- Running
- Jumping
- Hopping
- Star jumps
- Skipping
- Dancing
- Walk, hop, jump or skip over the stepping stones as fast as you can.
- Allow pupils to be pulled along by rope or hand while sat down.
- Encourage fast motions on the scooter.
- Pupil can push themselves by kicking off the wall.





Alerting

Important

- Do not encourage use of the climbing frames if the pupil is extremely heightened and dysregulated, as we should never encourage jumping from these.
- If the child becomes fatigued at any point in the circuit, supplement some breaks or calming strategies.
- Be mindful if the child is afraid of heights or has any gravitational insecurity, that some of the swinging activities may not be preferred.

Organising

When should I use an alerting circuit?

- If the pupil is very lethargic in presentation
- Low mood or low energy
- Appears tired or drowsy
- Needs a movement break to help waken up senses.

Activities

- Simon says
- Stepping stones game
- Pat your head & rub your tummy
- Throw & catch
- Heads, shoulders, knees & toes
- Space the stepping stones apart so pupils have to jump to the next one.
- Ask pupil to balance on each stone for 5 seconds before moving on.
- Allow the pupil to pull another pupil around.
- Encourage the pupil to lay on the scooter on their belly and use arms and legs to push themselves around the room.

Organising

Important

- Do not encourage use of the climbing frames if the pupil is extremely heightened and dysregulated, as we should never encourage jumping from these.
- If the child becomes fatigued at any point in the circuit, supplement some breaks or calming strategies.
- Be mindful if the child is afraid of heights or has any gravitational insecurity, that some of the swinging activities may not be preferred.

Calming

When should I use an alerting circuit?

- If the pupil is ‘on the go’ or seeks a lot of movement.
- Calming activities should focus on proprioception and deep pressure, so the individual leaves the circuit feeling calm, focused and ready to engage.
- Deep pressure works by applying weight or pressure to provide proprioceptive input, which calms the central nervous system.

Activities

- Listening to calming music
- Guided meditation
- Massage
- Rolling object over legs/ body & applying gentle pressure
- Applying equal pressure with both hands
- Controlled slow linear swings

Calming

Important

If don't have access to 4D Hall equipment, consider:

- Rolling a gym ball over a child's back while they are lying on their front
- Rolling the child up tightly in a blanket
- Pushing against the wall with flat palms
- Lying on the floor and pushing against the wall with your feet
- Listening to relaxing music throughout or a meditation