

Sensory Regulation in Action

Classroom & Home Tools That Support Every Learner

Purpose

Sensory regulation is the process of noticing and responding to sensory input in ways that help us stay calm, alert, and ready to learn. For many students – especially those with autism, ADHD, anxiety, or sensory processing differences – sensory challenges can cause distraction or distress. This worksheet offers practical, tiered strategies educators and families can use to build supportive, sensory-responsive environments that promote attention, safety, and emotional regulation.

Understanding Sensory Regulation

Every person has a unique sensory profile: the combination of how they respond to...

- **Auditory (sound)**
- **Visual (light, color, motion)**
- **Tactile (touch, texture)**
- **Proprioceptive (body awareness)**
- **Vestibular (movement, balance)**
- **Olfactory/Gustatory (smell, taste)**

When input is *too much* → overstimulation.

When input is *too little* → under-arousal.

The goal is to help students find their “**just-right zone.**”

Tiered Sensory Support Framework

Tier	Focus	Examples
Tier 1 (Universal)	Normalize sensory tools for all students	Flexible seating, brain breaks, predictable routines
Tier 2 (Targeted)	Match strategies to specific needs	Weighted lap pad, fidget tools, visual schedules
Tier 3 (Intensive)	Individual sensory diet or plan	OT-designed interventions, noise-cancelling headphones, proprioceptive “heavy work”

Classroom Sensory Supports

Need	Simple Solution	Example
Auditory	Reduce noise & offer control	Soft music, carpet squares, noise-reducing headphones
Visual	Limit clutter & use calming colors	Neutral walls, task lighting, visual boundaries
Tactile	Provide appropriate fidgets	Stress balls, textured pencil grips
Movement/Proprioceptive	Integrate movement throughout day	Chair push-ups, delivery jobs, movement breaks
Smell/Odor Sensitivity	Minimize strong scents	Unscented cleaners, fragrance-free classrooms

Home Sensory Supports

Sensory Area	Simple Home Strategy	Example
Morning Routine	Predictable visual checklist	“Brush teeth → Dress → Backpack” posted on mirror

After School Transition	Decompression activity	10 minutes of trampoline or swing before homework
Homework Time	Environment control	Quiet space, low lighting, fidget option
Bedtime	Calming sensory sequence	Warm bath → Dim lights → Weighted blanket

Co-Regulation Through Sensory Support

- **Model regulation:** Adults demonstrate deep breathing, slow pacing, calm tone.
 - **Offer choice:** “Do you want to use the movement break or the breathing tool?”
 - **Validate cues:** “It looks like the lights might be bothering you—want me to turn one off?”
 - **Predict transitions:** Use timers, verbal warnings, or transition visuals.
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Sensory Toolkit Essentials (for School & Home)

- Noise-reducing headphones
- Chewelry or safe chew items
- Weighted lap pad or shoulder wrap
- Visual timer
- Fidget kit (textured, quiet)
- Calm-down cards
- Yoga mat or movement space

- Water bottle for hydration regulation

(Tip: Keep duplicate kits – one at school, one at home – for continuity.)

Common Pitfalls & Fixes

Pitfall	Fix
Treating sensory tools as rewards	Make them available to all: they’re supports, not privileges.
Removing tools when students misuse them	Teach tool use explicitly; redirect, don’t remove.
Overloading environment with visuals	Simplify; choose neutral backgrounds and clear signage.
Ignoring student input	Co-create sensory menu with student preferences.

Sensory Menu Template

Category	Preferred Tools	“Maybe” Tools	Avoid
Movement	Swing, wall push-ups	Balance cushion	Spinning chair
Touch	Soft blanket	Sand tray	Slime
Sound	Headphones, calm playlist	Quiet hum	Loud bell
Sight	Dim lamp	Colored overlay	Fluorescent lights

Collaboration Tip

Schedule a 15-minute “**Sensory Sync Meeting**” between teacher, OT, and family at the start of the year to:

1. Identify triggers and preferred supports.

2. Align routines across settings.
 3. Review tool expectations and storage.
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Action Starter

- Choose one sensory area (movement, visual, tactile).
- Add **one universal support** to your classroom or home routine tomorrow (e.g., movement break timer or visual schedule).
- Track for one week: Did regulation, engagement, or transitions improve?