NHS

Children's Integrated Therapy Service

Occupational Therapy Team

USING SENSATIONS TO INCREASE ALERTNESS IN CHILDREN WHO TAKE TIME TO GET GOING OR TO CALM A CHILD

Heavy Muscle Work Activities

These can help a highly sensitive child to calm, or help a child that takes time to react become more alert.

- **Carrying, Pushing, Pulling** objects, eg pushing a weighted trolley, pushing a child's car with someone in it, pushing a pram with some weight in it.
- **Crashing** into beanbags
- Supervised bouncing on a **trampoline** or old mattress on the floor, if they enjoy it.
- Wearing a weighted **backpack** or coat with weight in pockets (up to 5% of body weight) e.g. backpack containing books, vary the weight slightly day by day.
- Playing with firm **playdough** or **Fun Putty** (if they enjoy it)
- **Push-ups**, Supervised Tug of War
- Giving a firm hug to a toy
- Playing football
- **Cycling**
- Pushing hands together, or against a wall
- **Throwing**
- **Kicking**
- **Chewing** Gum
- **Sucking** from a **sports bottle** or spouted cup which requires a strong suck, especially if the drink is thick, eg milk shake.
- **Blowing** games, or blowing musical instruments

Effects of Changing Noise Levels

There is no right or wrong level of noise for children, but -
Music that is quiet and slow, with even beats, (e.g. classical music, ocean waves, rain storm) tends to calm children.
Music that is fast and loud, with uneven beats, (e.g. rock 'n' roll, jazz) tends to increase alertness levels.
Noisy situations, e.g. school dining room, fire alarm, buzz of fluorescent lights, lots of people talking, can be too much for highly sensitive children. They may like to have **background noise**, such as familiar radio or television programmes on all the time or they may make noises to drown out noise from the environment.

Effects of Tastes and Textures in the Mouth on Behaviour.

Different tastes and food textures in the mouth can affect behaviour and mouth movements.
Different food textures and tastes can wake children (and adults) up, calm them down or help them to be organised.
Sucking is calming.
Chewing is organising (some children chew their clothes).
Crunching tends to wake people up, e.g. raw vegetables, crackers, pretzels, popcorn.

If a child dribbles saliva a lot, dairy products (e.g. milk and yogurts) can increase dribbling, but citrus (e.g. orange, lemon, grapefruit) tend to thin saliva.

Sweet things tend to be calming (but can increase dribbling saliva).
Sour flavours (e.g. lemon) make people more alert.
Spicy foods (cinnamon, salsa) make people more alert than sour.
Bitter and **hot** foods make people more alert than spicy (sensitive people often find them too much)

Effects of changing what we see

Generally **bright colours and bright lights** are alerting,
dim colours and dim lights are calming.

- Children who take time to react or have difficulty "getting going" usually react quicker in a bright room with the lights on, especially fluorescent lights. Use brightly coloured and shiny materials and toys with them.
- Children who are highly sensitive are usually happier in a dim coloured room with dim lighting - just natural daylight, with no sunshine and no lights on, (fluorescent lights are often too strong for them) - turning the lights off can help to calm them. Use softly coloured, dull materials and toys with them.

There is no right or wrong way for all children to work, but if the room is set up to suit the child, they will be able to work better.
Rooms with lots of people and things in them are usually better for children who take time to react or need help to "get going".
Tidy rooms with only a few people are usually better for highly sensitive children.