

Sensory Materials



[Video capsule](#)

Rationale:

Sensory tools are items that focus on one or more of a person's natural senses to help bring them a level of comfort. Sensory tools often help with self-regulation, and often, when a student has become self-regulated, they can focus and complete assignments. We all receive stimulus from touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste. Then we need to process that sensory information. This can be challenging for many students. When we give our students opportunities to use these materials it limits other sensory-seeking behavior. Sensory tools engage multiple senses, fostering cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth. While fidget toys provide a structured outlet for energy and improve focus.

Benefits:

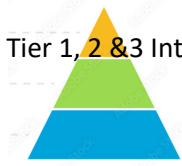
- **Sense of safety:** Creates a safe space for the student to readjust.
- **Sensory input:** This type of stimulation is helpful for students, whether to provide visual stimulation, to give tactile and proprioceptive input, to help focus or to help relax (emotion regulation).
- **Engagement:** Helps decrease sensory seeking behaviors and increase cognitive function (supports participation and engagement). It also helps improve attention and focus.

Difference between a sensory tool and a fidget:

A fidget tool does not necessarily engage a person's senses, like a sensory tool does, but it does fulfill the need to 'fidget' while staying focused.

Importance of making a plan when trying out sensory tools:

Step 1: Identifying the student's need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student's profile and specific challenge • Student's sensory preferences/needs • Context impacting the student (sensory overstimulation) • Objective (purpose of the tool)
Step 2: Choosing the 'right' conditions for student success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tool will be used? Is it safe? Is it the right size? Is it discreet? Does it distract? • When/where will it be used? • Does the use of the tool require supervision? • How/for how long will it be used? (specify the conditions of use) • Do staff need to be trained to accompany the student in using the tool (support from OT)? • Are there any counter-indications or elements of caution to consider (time limit, for specific purpose only, not for students with certain health conditions, etc.)?
Step 3: Putting the plan in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure all the adults involved are aware of the plan (including the parents). Making sure the student is on board. • Introducing/modeling the use of the tool (rules and parameters) • Accompanying the student with the use of the tool until it becomes a new routine. • When needed, reminding the student of the why and the how to use the tool.
Step 4: Reviewing the use of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifying whether the tool is being used correctly. • Reviewing whether the use of the tool is meeting the set objective. • Evaluating whether the type of tool, or the way it's being used, needs to be tweaked/changed. • Reviewing whether a different tool all together would be helpful.



Tier 1 Universal practices

Sensory corner / Designated Area in the classroom

Visual Stimulation: Watching things move and change is satisfying. Slow moving objects are very calming. Examples include glitter jars, liquid timers, sand timers, and a Slinky.

Sounds: Soothing sounds can calm a student immediately. Music has amazing calming effects on our bodies. Sound-reducing tools (noise-cancelling headphones, protective earmuffs, earplugs, etc.) can be an asset to some students, particularly when they are overwhelmed on a sensory level, or they are trying to focus on specific tasks.

Tactile Stimulation: Unexpected surfaces and interesting textures are pleasing to the hand and provide calming satisfaction. Examples of fun things to touch include “mermaid” pillows, textured bin (kinetic sand, rice, lentils, beans, Orbeez), textured frame (soft, bumpy, rough), bubble wrap, soft pillows, Play-Doh, slime, and any bumpy toys.

Breathing: Focused breathing brings in the oxygen we need for improved concentration, better memory, and focus. Examples include visual cards with breathing tips, bubbles, a kazoo, party blower, and pinwheels.

Weighted objects: Some students benefit from the weight on their laps when doing seat work. Others may also use them when sitting on the ground or lying down – having it on their belly or their back.

Oral motor stimulation: (chewy, pencil topper, bracelet) Some students benefit from the use of these tools to help fulfill an oral stimulation need. Others may use them to help them concentrate better during a task. These tools can also be beneficial to help manage stress.

Resource links:

[accompanying a student with the use of a sensory tool.docx](#)

[SensoryRoomPoster-1 \(1\).pdf](#)

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/sensory-materials>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/23-ways-to-create-a-sensory-friendly-classroom/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/paying-attention-30-sensory-strategies/>

[Building and creating as a sensory experience](#)

[Sensory materials through the senses](#)

[Deep pressure activities](#)

[Visual system](#)

[Auditory system](#)

[Tactile system](#)

[Oral sensory system](#)

[Olfactory system](#)

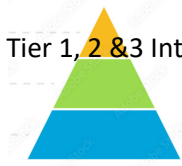
[Proprioceptive system](#)

[Vestibular system](#)

CEBM link:

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/sensory-materials>





Tiers 2 & 3 Targeted and individualized practices

Portable sensory break station & Nurturing Support Center

Organized sensory breaks provide regulation, focus, and engagement by providing additional movement, deep pressure input, and de-escalating sensory stimulation. A station can be set up on a cart and moved around the school to answer specific students' sensory diet needs. Students can have scheduled breaks in the NSC, gym or hallway for sensory time.

*Students can store sensory tools in a reserved basket, having it ready for them and kept away from others. [Personal bin](#)

*A board with choices can help facilitate selection without verbal expression or adult guidance. The student can use the personal choice board to select which tool will best help them at that moment. [Personal choice board](#)



Caution Elements:

One does not need to have a diagnosis to benefit from these strategies. Different types of input cause a release of neurochemicals that can last up to two hours, depending on the type of input, duration, and intensity. Some students are hyper-sensitive (meaning over-reactive), and some are hypo-sensitive (meaning under-reactive). A fidget tool does not necessarily engage a person's senses, like a sensory tool does, but it does fulfill the need to 'fidget' while staying focused.

*Check in with OT for support especially if the tool isn't working or makes behaviours worse.

*Keep in mind student's sensory needs and preferences when looking at these types of tools. Consider where the student situates themselves within the hyper to hypo continuum.

Hyper (over-reactive)	Hypo (under-reactive)
Hearing: noise-canceling headphones, earplugs, hoodie or tuque	Hearing: music, white noise maker, audible books, humming, whistling, nature
Visual: privacy folder, sunglasses, dim lamp, cover for classroom light	Visual: glitter jars, liquid timers, sand timers, led lights, bubble tube
Smell: open windows, open classroom door to air out	Smell: scented markers, scratch and sniff stickers, Febreze
Touch: gloves, space away at locker/desk/line up, tongs to manipulate materials,	Touch: mermaid pillows, textured bin (kinetic sand, rice, Orbeez), frames (soft, bumpy, rough), bubble wrap, Play-Doh, slime
Taste & oral: same food, planned treats (safe options), cold water	Taste & oral: chewy, pencil topper, bracelet, new food, gum, mouth spray, straw

***Breathing:** Focused breathing brings in the oxygen we need for improved concentration, better memory, and focus. Examples include visual cards with breathing tips, bubbles, a kazoo, party blower, and pinwheels.