

Sensory Tips for Weekly Planning Guide

Week	Area	Sensory Tip
1	SPD	Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is difficulty responding to sensory input to the brain, especially tactile (touch), vestibular (movement), and proprioceptive (muscles/joints) input. Refer frequently to your "Understanding Your Child's Sensory Signals" book to learn more about sensory signals and how to respond.
2	Proprioception	Proprioception in the joints, muscles, and tendons are activated during heavy/hard work activities such as pushing, pulling, hanging, carrying, climbing. Proprioception is an excellent tool for calming, organizing, and self-regulating the nervous system. It is also the ideal type of sensory input to address "fight or flight".
3	Vestibular	When you think vestibular, think movement. The vestibules are located in the inner ear and detect motion. Vestibular input can be alerting or calming to the nervous system. The brain thrives on movement to learn, attend, and process information.
4	Vertical movement	Vertical vestibular input, such as jumping, bouncing, or hopping, is one of the most regulating planes of movement for the nervous system. For a quick, powerful dose of calming and regulating input, up-and-down movement is the way to go!
5	Tactile	The tactile (touch) system involves the entire skin network including in the mouth. Tactile input includes light or firm touch and the discrimination of different textures including dry to wet and messy. Tactile input can be alerting, calming, or over-stimulating, depending on the person.
6	Vestibular/auditory	The vestibular (movement) and auditory systems share a cranial nerve which sends input to the brain. When moving, the auditory system is ready to process. So when you are doing movement activities, incorporate a listening or singing. And when doing listening activities, incorporate movements activities.
7	Circle Time	At circle time, make sure the child who is defensive to touch sits on an end. This will minimize the threat to the nervous system. On the other hand, make sure the "hands-on" sensory seeking child is also positioned on an end. This will limit his ability to distract others.
8	Circle time	At circle time allow various sensory tools to be used to help children focus. Examples: fidget toy, weighted lap pad, bean bag chair, or an oral sensory tool. Explain to children that these are tools to help them learn.
9	Safe place	Make sure that your Safe Place is a sensory retreat for children who are dysregulated. It needs to be a small, cozy space with three sides located in an area of the room with minimal distractions. It should have low-lighting and a soft bean bag chair or large pillow for the children to snuggle on or under, as well as fidget toys, stuffed animals, and other sensory tools.
10	Outside time	All children (and adults) need to spend at least one hour a day outside. This is important for overall health as well as nervous system regulation. Our bodies get the vitamin D3 from the sun that we need for brain and nervous system health. Also, children will naturally get input with the power sensations through climbing, hopping, skipping, jumping, crawling, etc. Teachers should NEVER take away outside time as a consequence of "misbehavior" . . . that's the opposite of what they need.
11	Fidget toys	Many children need to wiggle and fidget to pay attention. Instead of saying, "Sit still and listen", provide a sensory tool for the fidgety, wiggling child. A fidget toy, pipe cleaner, Wikki Stix, etc., will quietly provide the vestibular (movement) input the child is craving in order to pay attention.
12	Eye contact	Eye contact is a sensory signal and is often misunderstood. Difficulty making eye contact may be a sign of overstimulation or dysregulation of the nervous system.

		Since eye contact is a very high level skill for the brain, the dysregulated child may actually be <u>unable</u> to make eye contact. Pressuring a child to make eye contact will add to the stress. Eye contact will happen naturally when the nervous system is regulated.
13	Tummy time	One of the easiest and most beneficial ways to provide a dose of organizing and regulating sensory input is "prone on elbows", also known as tummy time ! "Prone on elbows" means lying on the belly on a flat, firm surface like the floor, propped up on the elbows, but not resting the chin on the hands or the floor. Tummy time facilitates shoulder girdle strength and stability, which is essential for fine motor and visual motor development. Encourage it often throughout the day.
14	Messy play	It's important to be sensitive to each child's tolerance for messy play. Make sure the child can tolerate dry textures (beans, sand, rice, etc.), then move on to in-between textures (play-doh, squishy fidget toys, etc.) and finally full messy play (finger paints, shaving cream, etc.) Gently encourage, but don't pressure, a child to participate in each level of messy play.
15	Prone extension	Prone extension a complex task that promotes sensory integration. In the "superman" position, the arms and legs are in full extension reaching outward and the head is lifted and looking forward. Using scooter boards in prone and wheelbarrow walking (fingers face forward) are also excellent prone extension activities.
16	W sitting	"W" sitting should be discouraged. This is a sensory signal that the child's body lacks core strength, postural tone, and proprioceptive awareness. It is very hard on the hips and knees AND it does not allow for trunk rotation and crossing midline, which are critical skills in sensory integration development. Encourage side sitting, long sitting, or criss cross applesauce instead.
17	Side-sitting	Encourage your child to sit in the side-sitting position . . . both left and right. This is excellent for proprioception and working on core strength.
18	Crawling	Crawling is a critical developmental milestone for sensory development. Crawling promotes shoulder stability and hand separation (crucial for fine motor development), prone extension, bilateral integration, motor planning, and provides a great deal of proprioception. Since many children did not crawl as babies, it's important that crawling activities are available to your students.
19	Sensory anchor	A sensory anchor is a behavior or repetitive activity which helps the brain feel "good". Examples: lining toys/objects up, staring at a spinning object, hand flapping, toe walking, making repetitive mouth sounds, chewing on things. It is important to respect these sensory signals and let the child do it. If the child perseverates and becomes fixated on a sensory anchor, encourage him to transition to a fun heavy/hard work play activity, movement activity, or tactile activity, which will also regulate the brain.
20	Sucking	Providing an oral sensory tool can decrease fight or flight episodes, as well as strengthen muscles in mouth. Allow children to keep a water bottle at school. Camelbak® water bottles are especially regulating because of the biting and sucking proprioceptive input required.
21	Oral sensory tools - food	Another activity that provides oral sensory input and promotes self-regulation is sucking anything thick through a straw . . . applesauce, pudding, yogurt, etc.
22	Oral sensory tools - food	Foods that are crunchy or chewy, or ones that can be sucked, bitten, pulled or licked provide good sensory feedback and should be encouraged.
23	Full body flexion	Full body flexion is an excellent way to promote sensory integration. This is the ability to lie on the floor on your back and then tuck your whole body into a ball. This includes tucking your chin, holding your knees close to your chin with your arms crossed on the chest. Provide opportunities to practice this.

24	Adult must be the rock	A child with sensory challenges is extremely sensitive to the state of regulation of those around them, including when a teacher is stressed, anxious, unsettled, angry, or irritated. These children often see this world as a scary, unpredictable, out of sorts, place. The adult needs to be that solid rock children can rely on in challenging and stressful situations.
25	Spinning	Spinning is very dysregulating and disorganizing to the brain when done too long and too frequently (more than 10 rotations in one direction). Sometimes children with sensory needs do not register spinning correctly and don't get dizzy . . . this is a red flag. Spinning can have a powerful impact on the brain for 6-8 hours.
26	Quality of movement	Quality of movement involves how the brain is "putting it all together" (sensory integration) and is shown through posture, body stability, trunk control, core strength, and body awareness. It is important as a teacher to watch for signs of poor coordination, poor posture, or delays in gross/fine motor skills.
27	Inverting the head	Inverting the head (hanging upside down) is very beneficial to the brain. It is regulating, organizing, and possibly calming or alerting, depending on the state of the nervous system. Provide safe opportunities for children to hang upside down on a playground bar and encourage them to do headstands or handstands. It is best done in small doses throughout the day.
28	Wheelbarrow walking	Wheelbarrow walking is excellent for proprioception and also working on shoulder stability and hand separation/fine motor development. It is very important that your child is not elbow locking and that the fingers are pointing forward on the floor. Hold them closer to the waist if needed to get the correct posture.
29	Deep breathing	Encouraging deep breathing can decrease fight or flight episodes as well as help children recover from a meltdown. Teach children to breathe from their bellies . . . mouth closed on inhale, open on exhale . . . belly pokes out on inhale, belly goes in on exhale. If they are belly breathing correctly, shoulders stay down.
30	Self-regulation	Self-regulation is the ability to adjust or regulate the level of alertness depending on the time of the day and environment. When children have a difficult time with self-regulation, we often observe maladaptive behavior. It is important to identify these signals as self-regulation before jumping to conclusions that it is behaviorally driven.
31	Resistive blowing	Resistive blowing activities have incredible sensory value for a child's self-regulation. Directions for Bubble Mountain: 1. Pour a small amount of water and dish soap into a tall pitcher 2. Put a 2-ft. piece of aquarium tubing into the pitcher 3. Have the child blow hard with long, slow breaths.
32	Resistive blowing	Here's another version of Bubble Mountain. 1. Use the tip of a pencil to poke a hole in one side of a Styrofoam cup. 2. Insert a straw through the hole. (It must fit tightly.) 3. Place a coffee filter or paper towel over the opening of the cup and secure it tightly with a rubber band. 4. Dip the top of the cup into a solution of water and soap. 5. Blow through the straw and watch the mountain appear!
33	Resistive blowing	Another fun resistive blowing activity is to have a cotton ball race. With children seated across from each other at a table or lying on their tummies on the floor, direct them to blow the cotton ball to their partner . . . first with their mouth, then with a straw.
34	Hallway	Telling children to "put a bubble in their mouth" to prevent them from talking, hinders normal breathing, especially if they're required to hold this mouth position all the way down the hallway. A more desirable way to quiet them would be to have

		them participate in movement, stretching, or breathing activities BEFORE they leave the room.
35	Hallway	Requiring children to walk with their hands behind their backs or in their pockets can create a balance and motor planning problem for some children. Children should be allowed to naturally keep their arms at their sides. Touching the hallway walls or other children while walking in line is a sensory signal that they need tactile input during the day.
36	Joint traction	Joint traction is a very powerful form of proprioception and is calming and organizing to the brain, while promoting body awareness and self-regulation. Hanging from a playground bar is an effective way to provide joint traction.
37	Leaning back on chairs	Children who teeter on the back legs of their chairs are seeking sensory input. To provide this input in a safe way, tie Theraband to the two front legs of the chair. The child can then safely push on it with his feet without disturbing anyone.
38	Body language	Being aware of a child's body language and physical responses is one of the most powerful sensory tools you have as a teacher. You can often determine if the nervous system is responding well to a situation simply by watching facial expression, posture, and arm/hand or leg position. Also, voice pitch and speed, breathing patterns, and eye contact may indicate stress in a child.