

Sensory Circuits

What are Sensory Circuits?

Sensory Circuits are sensory motor skills programmes that help neurodivergent children to self-regulate and be ready for the school day. Completing a sensory circuit session supports children to reach the level of alertness needed to concentrate during lessons. Sensory Circuits are designed to be done first thing in the morning but could be run after lunch as well. Children participate in a circuit of activities designed to improve brain processing efficiency, and they usually find that the circuit is a fun way to start the day.

Who would benefit from following sensory circuit sessions?

Sensory Circuits would benefit all children but are particularly aimed at children who find it hard to concentrate, organise themselves or make sense of how their bodies feel. Sensory circuits involve 3 types of activities; when used in order they can be effective in supporting individuals to improve their levels of attention and focus. They can help to tackle sensory differences and support children with lots of energy to enable them to redirect it positively.

Suggested equipment:

Trampoline
Balance board
Chair
Skipping rope
Gym balls
Cones
Bean bags
Wall bars
Crash mat
Hoops
Bench etc.



Running a sensory circuits programme

Sensory Circuits involve 3 types of activity, each section should be about 5 minutes long and it is important that they follow the order.

Alerting – to provide vestibular stimulation (balance); preparing the brain for learning and for the expectations of the classroom.



Examples of alerting activities:

- bouncing 10 times on a mini trampoline or space hopper spinning a hoop
- bunny hops / crab walks / frog jumps

Working together to make sense of the world

- jumps
- therapy ball for rolling over and bouncing on
- skipping
- walking on cans/stilts



Organising – sorting and preparing the body and brain, providing situations to increase focus, attention span and performance; activities that require multi-sensory processing and balance.

Examples of organising activities

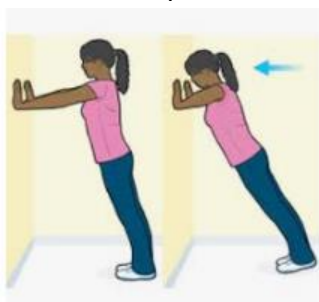


- balancing on a beam
- log rolling
- climbing wall bars
- throwing bean bags into a target
- arm push ups against the wall
- blowing bubbles or blowing a paper ball to a target
- wobble boards for balance work
- T-stool for balance work (one legged stool)
- skipping and jumping a moving rope
- Simon Says...

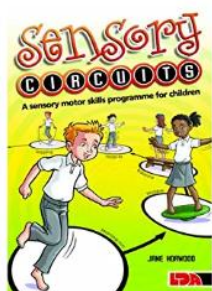


Calming – activities to help children to be calm and ready to learn when they go to the classroom.

Examples of calming activities



- placing feet or hands in weighted bean bags
- lying under weighted blankets
- steamroller squash
- having balls rolled over their backs
- hot-dogs (rolling child up tightly in a blanket)
- push ups on wall



It is important to end with calming activities so that children are ready to focus on their learning.

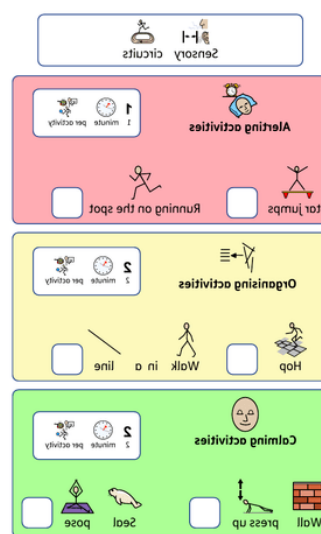
There are many examples of alerting, organising and calming activities in books and on the internet.

‘Sensory Circuits: A sensory motor skills programme for children,’ by Jane Horwood

Working together to make sense of the world

Top tips for running a successful Sensory Circuits programme

- Make sure all the equipment is ready for all three parts before you begin.
- Make a list for yourself of the correct order of activities
- Use visuals to support understanding
- Ideally 5 minutes for each stage, you can include a couple of activities in each section
- Some individuals may need to spend more time in the alerting activities and a considerable amount of time in the calming section to be as calm, organised and as ready for learning as possible.
- Provide a clear structure, perhaps by numbering the activities
- Music can be helpful to 'wake up' and to mark the end of the session



Troubleshooting

How long should a child take part in circuits?

For many neurodivergent children, the sensory circuits programme is an essential part of the day and assists in the management of their sensory differences. It is possible to transfer some of the skills learnt in sensory circuits and use them in frequent movement breaks throughout the day. It is important to remember that the use of sensory circuits is an intervention to manage sensory processing and is not a reward so should not be removed without careful planning or replacing with other similar activities.

How often should we change Sensory Circuits?

Repetition is important as automaticity of skills is built by doing tasks again and again. Predictability and routine is also very important for neurodivergent children. Only change one or two activities perhaps every half term. Activities can be extended or made easier depending on the needs of the individual.

Updated in July 2024. The above advice is based on our experiences at Freemantles of working with children who have autism and related differences

Working together to make sense of the world