

STRATEGIES TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH *Sensory Challenges*

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SENSORY CHALLENGE: ATTENTION & CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

1. CALMING A RESTLESS OR OVER-AROUSSED CHILD

INSTRUCTIONS:

The Does Your Child? Section offers educational information about characteristics of children with the above mentioned sensory/behavior challenge. Your child may present with one or many of these characteristics.

The Try This! Section offers simple strategies for helping your child cooperate and develop skills. Not all suggestions are appropriate for every child and family. Only use strategies that apply to your child's age, developmental level, and situation. It is suggested to use this checklist while consulting with a professional who has explained and is monitoring these strategies.

>>> DOES YOUR CHILD?

- Have difficulty sitting still.
- Have excessive energy.
- Run around without purpose or direction.
- Look like he or she is "on the edge" of melting down. He/she might refuse to cooperate and be confrontational.
- Move quickly from one activity to another.

>>> TRY THIS!

PLAN AHEAD:

- One of the best strategies for keeping a young child calm is to anticipate a "melt down." Observe your child's behaviors to identify his/her triggers so you can respond better.
- Develop a picture schedule of your child's daily routine to review every morning and several times during the day.
- Verbally forewarn your child when there is going to be changes to your regular routine.
- Verbally tell your child what positive behaviors are expected. For example: "Use walking feet" instead of "Be good."

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>>> TRY THIS!

CHANGE THE SENSORY ENVIRONMENT

- Offer your child a warm bath.
- Some young children calm down while taking a shower.
- Wrap your child in a blanket that has been warmed in the dryer.
- Some children respond well to vibration such as holding vibrating toys.
- Cover your child under a weighted blanket. If you do not wish to purchase a specially designed weighted blanket, try a heavy comforter or sleeping bag. Maintain ongoing supervision while using the weighted blanket.
- Offer your child ear phones to listen to soft music or a “book on tape.”
- Some children calm in the presence of “white noise”. Consider putting on a fan at high speed.
- Offer water bottle filled with warm water. Your child can hold it or place it on his/her lap.
- Provide your child with a “Quiet Corner” that allows him to regroup when he feels the need. A “Quiet Corner” is a small area that has stuffed animals, books, bean bag chairs, blankets, etc. where your child can go to have some time away. Teach him how to use it. “When you’re upset (or mad, sad, angry, need to calm down, etc.) you can go to the Quiet Corner until you feel better.”
- Take your child out of a room that has overhead or fluorescent lights; these may be irritating.
- Take your child outside. Rather than having him run around, consider taking him on a long, steady walk. This can be very calming and organizing.
- If your child is in a large group, remove him to a quiet area or smaller group.
- Provide reassuring touch that may include holding his hand or rubbing his back.
- Provide movement which may include placing your child on your lap and gently rocking back and forth. You may offer take him for a walk, push him on a swing, or go for a wagon/stroller ride.
- Offer smells that may soothe your child. Calming scents include vanilla and lavender.
- Offer foods that tend to help a child calm down. These include:
 - Sucking yogurt or applesauce through a straw.
 - Offer crunchy foods such as pretzels.

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»» TRY THIS!

SELF-CALMING STRATEGIES -

Teach your child calming strategies. Even preschoolers can perform the following with practice:

- Encourage your child to breathe in deeply through his nose and out through his mouth in a rhythmical manner.
- Synchronized breathing: Without talking to the child, begin by looking at your child while you become aware of one another's breathing. Provide touch cues as he/she tolerates while you model calm, deep breathing patterns for the child to get "in sync" with your relaxed state.
- Encourage your child to firmly squeeze his fists, and then relax. Repeat several times.
- Encourage your child to sit down and use his hands to push down on his thighs while rubbing back and forth.
- Label the child's restlessness to help him understand what behavior is being targeted. For example you may tell your child that he is running on "fast speed." When he/she calms down you can once again label his behavior by stating that he is at "slow speed" or the "just right speed."
- Teach your child to calm him/her self through self massage of their ear lobe. Using their thumb and index finger, gently rub back and forth until relaxation occurs.
- Teach your child to calm him/her self through self massage of their hands. Firmly place the palms of each hand together and rub back and forth until relaxation occurs.

HEAVY WORK & DEEP PRESSURE - Offer your child opportunity for what is known as "Heavy Work." These activities provide your child with opportunities to move his muscles against resistance.

- Carry heavy objects such as carrying groceries, heavy pillows.
- Pulling or pushing objects such as a wagon, heavy laundry basket, or heavy box.
- Digging in the yard or sandbox.
- Use his hands to work with play dough or clay.
- Allow your child to bury his/her hands in a large bin of dry beans or rice.
- Play the "sandwich game." Your child lies between two pillows or cushions (the "bread" or "sandwich buns") with his neck and head exposed. Ask him which ingredients he would like to make his sandwich. When an additional item is selected (ex: mustard, lettuce), provide some pressure by carefully pressing down on the pillow/cushion.
- Some children calm down when offered gentle pressure to the top of the head.
- Try using an inexpensive elastic fabric headband or "Under Armor" version.