



## **Advisory Teaching Service**

### **Classroom Based Sensory Circuit and Movement Break Ideas**

This advice sheet has been written and produced by Gloucestershire ATS and the following strategies may be used to support individuals and whole groups of pupils. Further advice to settings is available on request.

Some children have difficulty focusing and maintaining attention in school, making it harder for them to learn. This can be seen in different ways such as movement seeking behaviours, inattentiveness, sluggishness and slumping in their chair. For some children, this can be heightened following transitions, play times, times of change, or when there is less routine.

Children may become more attentive and focused when there are changes in their environment and appropriate activities are provided.

Consider the following alongside any advice given by the Occupational Therapy Service or other professionals in relation to individual pupil needs.

### **Whole school/classroom approaches to consider:**

- Consider the sensory demands of the classroom environment.
- Where possible provide flexible teaching and learning opportunities which take account of auditory, kinaesthetic and visual learning approaches.
- Have an area where there is less sensory stimulus so that pupils can work with limited distraction when needed.
- Provide safe (quiet, comfortable) spaces in school for calming and consider the resources that are offered.
  - ✓ Calm boxes with quiet activities such as interest led colouring, tracing cards, soft sensory items or other quiet activities of choice
  - ✓ Breathing aids and visual prompt cards such as Hi Five Breathing, square/box breathing, windmill breathing and bubble blowing
- Consider splitting the lessons that involve a lot of sitting, for refocusing and calming- see ideas below.
- Consider the needs of pupils by providing access to:
  - ✓ Alternative methods of recording.
  - ✓ Different resources for calming, extension, withdrawing.
  - ✓ Concentration aids
    - blue tac
    - squidgy balls
    - chair bands
    - foot fidgets/rollers
    - wobble or Move-n-Sit cushions
    - weighted lap pads
    - standing desk
    - noise reducing headphones/ear loops
- Consider the range of sensory differences in relation to daily classroom activities:
  - ✓ Some children may find messy play challenging.



- ✓ Lunch times can be difficult for some children with sensitivity to certain smells and textures.
- ✓ Crowded situations including lining up can be very difficult for children with sensory integration difficulties.
- ✓ Playtimes and PE can be difficult for many children with physical, sensory or social interaction needs.
- ✓ Art can be challenging for children who have motor control, visual or sensory needs.

### **Classroom Based Sensory Circuit Ideas**

A sensory circuit approach is designed to guide pupils through a series of activities that stimulate and then regulate their sensory system. It may be helpful to carry out activities from the following categories in turn.

#### **Alerting ideas to wake up the body and increase focus:**

- March on the spot to a song on the interactive board
- Standing still, twist your body round to look behind you and back 5 times each side
- Seated knee highs- march legs up and down under or beside the desk
- Fast finger taps- tap each finger to thumb quickly and repeat in patterns
- Get out of your seat and jump 10 times on the spot
- Frog jumps - squat and jump forwards as high as you can 10 times
- Bunny hops - for 30 seconds
- Shoulder pumping – rapidly shrug shoulders up and down
- Jumping beans - jump in all directions with both feet together for 30 seconds

#### **Organising ideas to improve body awareness, planning and self-regulation:**

- Seated Head Shoulders Knees and Toes – a slowed-down controlled version to increase motor planning
- Seated or standing cross-body knee touches
- Perform 10 star jumps or adapt to mini stair star jumps – arms only- out-in-up-down
- March on the spot with high knees
- Touch hand to opposite knee for 30 seconds
- Provide simple mazes or patterns and ask the children to trace them with their fingers

#### **Calming ideas to reduce overload and bring pupils back to baseline:**

- Sit on the floor or in a comfy seat
- Self-hug squeeze - Cross your arms across your shoulders and squeeze and take slow, gentle breaths in and out
- Perform deep breathing exercises - try roller coaster breathing. Using your finger, trace up and down the fingers of your opposite hand. Breathe in as you go up each finger and slowly breathe out as you move down each finger.
- Perform 10 wall press-ups. See if the class can push the wall away!
- Yoga stretches – stretch as tall as you can and hold for a count of 10. Fold over, bending knees a little and hang there for a count of 10 -repeat.
- Perform chair press-ups – from sitting in your chair, push your hands against your chair and lift your bottom off the seat. Keep your breaths long and gentle; hold this position for 10 seconds. Rest then repeat.



- Neck and shoulder reset – Slow shoulder roll, ear to shoulder stretch, gentle forward fold over the desk.
- Grounding – name 5 things you can see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.

### **Quick Desk-Based Circuit Examples**

#### **1- minute quick reset**

1. Seated high-knee marching – 20 seconds
2. Cross-body taps – 20 seconds
3. Hi Five- breathing – 20 seconds

#### **Organising sequence – useful before writing tasks**

1. Seated head, shoulders, knees, toes – 30 seconds
2. Desk push ups x 10
3. Finger trace patterns – 30 seconds

#### **Calming break**

1. Self-hug squeeze – 10 seconds
2. Slow breathing- 5 breaths
3. Shoulder rolls – 5 in each direction

### **Movement Breaks**

- They are most successful when offered before pupils become distracted or tired.
- Be mindful of how long pupils can reasonably focus.
- Activities that allow pupils to use a different part of their brain from the academic task can be considered a break.
- A whole class approach can be effective as it does not single out individual pupils or rely on additional adults to facilitate.
- Short movement breaks can be effective, and timers can also be helpful so that pupils know how long the break will be and when they will begin their next task.
- Try to vary the type of movement breaks that are used.
  - Depending on the nature of the task, you might choose something active.
  - Alternatively, you might choose something quieter and relaxing.

#### **Ideas for movement breaks in the classroom include:**

- **Sensory circuits** – a series of activities which alert, organize and calm (see ideas above and also an ATS Advice Sheet [Advice Sheet-Benefits of SensoryCircuits-June2025.docx](#))
- **Movement Jobs**– giving out books and resources and taking messages.
- **Kinaesthetic Teaching** - incorporate multi-sensory activities in teaching and learning to provide natural movement activities. These may include clapping or jumping when counting or spelling, for example or activities like ‘stand up not hand up’, or Quiz Quiz trade activities in secondary settings [Quiz, Quiz, Trade - The Teacher Toolkit](#).
- **Individual seated/standing activities** – shoulder shrugs and rolls, chair push-ups, jumping jacks, giving themselves hugs, palm pushes, cross crawls, pencil twirls, wrist stretches, drawing Lazy 8s in the air.
- **Have a drink** – allow pupils to drink from their water bottle with a straw.



- **Play Simon Says** – Hop on one foot, spin around once, march on the spot 5 times, reach up and down, do 5 star jumps, move like a ....? for example.
- **Dance/GoNoodle** - put on music/videos for children to follow or dance for a short period of time.
- **Musical Listening Games** - pupils sit down when they hear a specific word or sound, then stand up when they hear it again.
- **Move to the beat:** slow/fast, big/small, high/low
- **Hot Potato** – whilst standing, pass beanbags/objects around to music. When the music stops, change direction.
- **Movement Dice** – Roll a dice and assign an action, for example 1 – 5 squats, 2- 5 star jumps, 3 - 5 marches
- **Silent acting** - act out painting a wall, digging a hole, climbing a ladder, for example.
- See examples of printable resources from **Griffin OT**  
[Sensory-Diet-Movement-Cards-Colour-GriffinOT.pdf](#)
- Widget visuals and examples of activities to support movement:



movement cards.pdf



CCT-Sensory-Circuit  
-Cards-PDF-School.r

**For secondary age students**, provide short exercise opportunities if you have access to equipment such as:

- HIIT
- Yoga/Pilates moves
- Use of Therabands or weights
- Use of exercise/gym equipment
- Battle roles
- Slam ball
- Tyres/hoops – jumping in and out

#### **Quick Whole-Class Energiser/reset (1–2 mins)**

- **10–Second Challenge**
  - You've got 10 seconds to...
    - do 10 squats or arm circles
    - 5 jumping jacks or lunges
- **Desk/chair Push-Up or Wall Sit**
  - 20–30 seconds for a quiet reset
- **Box Breathing + Shoulder Rolls**
  - 4 sec inhale → hold → exhale → hold
  - Add slow shoulder rolls
- **Follow the Leader**
  - One student creates 3–4 moves, class copies
  - Rotate leaders quickly