



## Advisory Teaching Service

### Setting up a Sensory Friendly Space

**The following advice is intended to support schools who are considering setting up a space for children and young people to access to manage their sensory needs.**

Sensory friendly spaces should provide tailored environments that cater to various sensory stimuli, helping individuals to navigate their sensory experiences more effectively. Such spaces can reduce anxiety and stress while fostering a sense of safety and calm.

#### Purpose

- To support pupils in developing self-regulation strategies.
- To reduce incidents of dysregulation and associated behaviours.
- To promote inclusion and wellbeing for pupils with SEND.
- To provide staff with a proactive tool for supporting sensory and emotional needs.

It is important to consider the intended purpose of the space being developed.

**Calming areas** are quiet spots designed for relaxation and decompression, featuring soft lighting, comfortable seating, and minimal noise.

**Sensory Regulation spaces** are areas which provide tools for sensory self-regulation, to support individuals in managing their sensory input and offering options to calm or stimulate based on personal needs. Self-regulation involves planning, persistence, and thinking about one's actions. It is the process of monitoring your own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Macklem, 2015). Burman et al. (2015), mentioned a couple of different definitions such as "management of the self, by the self" and "control over the self, by the self".

Remember that the goal of the area is to offer a safe space, or to give children a place to calm down, feel safe, and regroup when they are overcome with big emotions at school. It is not a disciplinary measure but rather a proactive tool to support individuals in navigating different levels of regulation.

## **Important considerations when planning the space**

When it comes to developing a sensory friendly space in a school where there may be a variety of needs, it will be important to agree rules and protocols for success and align with behaviour policy and SEND provision.

### **Assessment, Flexibility, and Planning:**

- Begin with a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the unique sensory, self regulation requirements of pupils who may benefit from the space.
- Design the area with flexibility in mind, allowing for easy modification of the environment based on individual needs and preferences.
- Make sure use is understood by those who might use/ support within the space.

### **Design, Equipment, and Budget Considerations:**

- Ensure the space is well-designed with sensory-friendly elements, such as calming colours, soft lighting, and comfortable seating, while also considering budget constraints.

### **Monitoring:**

- Include use of the space as a provision into any pupil plans and review impact regularly.
- Clearly define expectations for the use of the space.



## Resourcing ideas

<b>Strategy/ resource</b>	<b>Benefit</b>
Soft Lighting – Smart lighting is ideal as can be customised.	Gentle illumination can help create a soothing environment, minimizing harsh shadows and glare.
Comfortable Seating- Bean bags, cushions, or floor mats	Cozy, soft seating options contribute to relaxation and comfort.
Furniture Use soft, movable furniture as much as possible. Avoid clutter—keep it minimal and predictable. Ensure accessibility for pupils with physical needs.	Flexibility and inclusivity
Sensory Tools - these could be calming, alerting or emotional supports Calming tools: cushions, bean bags, weighted lap pads, soft lighting. Alerting tools: wobble cushions, mini trampoline, fidget tools, sensory bottles. Emotional supports: feelings chart, 'Now and Next' boards, breathing prompts. <a href="#">Classroom Sensory Strategy Toolkit</a> – The OT Toolbox	Support children to calm, re-energise, and manage big feelings. - Supports children with autism, ADHD, sensory processing differences, or emotional regulation needs.
Aromatherapy	Utilizing calming scents can promote relaxation and reduce tension.
Colour Choices- calming hues such as soft blues and greens	Promote relaxation and reduce agitation
Textures: Incorporate various textures eg soft blankets or textured wall coverings,	Can provide calming tactile feedback.
Familiar/ self chosen Items- each CYP could have their own box/bag with resources that they have identified as helpful to them.	Can create a sense of security and ownership,
Mindfulness Activities – adults can support with relevant activities such as breathing. <a href="https://veryspecialtales.com/breathing-exercises-kids/">https://veryspecialtales.com/breathing-exercises-kids/</a> <a href="https://childhood101.com/fun-breathing-exercises-for-kids/">https://childhood101.com/fun-breathing-exercises-for-kids/</a>	Promotes focus and reduces emotional distress.

Follow the ATS Video on our GCC CWAN YouTube channel. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYrm2ArgsNRy4kKHf9aPsPQ">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYrm2ArgsNRy4kKHf9aPsPQ</a>	
Deep Pressure	Weighted blankets or vests can provide calming pressure, aiding in reducing anxiety.
Visual Supports	Utilizing visual cues can help in communication and understanding emotions.- can be linked to school based programmes/resources.

#### Further reading and references

[Regulation Station Ideas - The OT Toolbox](#)

[How to Build Sensory-Friendly Environments for Autistic People - Rainbow Therapy](#)

[Self-Regulation Spaces — CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT](#) Squarespace.com

[Outdoor Calming and Sensory Spaces](#) TTSgroup.co.uk

[Sunderland Autism Outreach Team - Sensory Regulation](#) Sunderlandaot.co.uk

[Crafting a Sensory-Friendly Space for All](#) Abtaba.com

[Creating an Effective Calming Corner For Self-Regulation](#) Inclusiveteach.com

[13 Budget-Friendly Small Sensory Space Ideas | WonderBaby.org](#)

[Sensory tents and cooldown spaces - Leeds Mencap](#)

[Benefits of Sensory Rooms & Spaces in Schools and Homes](#)

