



North Seattle
Cooperative
Preschools

Parent Advisory Council (PAC)

Community News

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Tuning into the Senses for Emotional Regulation - by Rebecca Hoyt

Think of the many ways in which emotional and physical experiences are intertwined. There is the thrill of cresting a hill of a roller coaster and the heady mix of terror and exhilaration as you race down. Some people are rewarded with feelings of joy after intense physical exertion. Hunger can make the mellowest of people irritable and grouchy. A sharp pain may make you lash out with anger before you realize the physical sensation of pain. This powerful connection between our physical and emotional selves allows us to use one in order to activate or soothe the other.

Using sensory activities can help improve general well-being throughout the day, especially during times of emotional dysregulation. This is certainly true for children who need playful, non-threatening sensory experiences to enhance their ease and comfort in the world. A tight bear hug can help a child enter a situation in which he normally feels anxious. Jumping on a trampoline not only releases energy, but can fill a child with a sensation of centeredness that continues after the jumping stops. Spinning in circles can help a child activate his parasympathetic nervous system or brake pedal when he's feeling overwhelmed.

Occupational Therapists often talk about a "sensory diet," taking in the necessary sensory experiences to feel at ease within our bodies so we can better handle both the internal and external demands we encounter throughout the day. Tuning into your child's sensory needs is another powerful tool you can use to make for more enjoyable moments with your child.

There are three ways to think about incorporating sensory experiences into your child's day to support his feeling of equanimity throughout the day.

- **Daily Sensory Experiences:** things like physical play, jumping, play-doh, water play, dancing can all be sprinkled throughout your day to maintain equilibrium.
- **Planned Breaks:** is there a time of day or particular events that are often difficult for your child? Think about transition times, coming home from school, anxiety before the babysitter comes. Sometimes providing deeply satisfying sensory experiences can help positively vent those feelings that accumulate during the day. Providing kids with sanctioned sensory sessions reduces the emotional load they may be holding onto.
- **Meltdown Sensory Support:** when your child is flooded with big emotions, using sensory input can help your child more quickly regulate his emotions.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Tuning into the Senses for Emotional Regulation	1
Calendar of Events	4
Parenting Circle Class	4

When introducing sensory activities into your routine, you must pay attention to your children for signs of distress or discomfort and stop immediately.

Types of Sensory Input and Activity Ideas

Proprioception is the sense of the relative position of parts of the body in relation to other parts of the body. It includes the sense of effort, the sense of force, and the sense of heaviness with which we grade our movements. Proprioception uses receptors located in the skin, muscles and joints to build the internal sense of our bodies or the knowledge that our body belongs to us and not someone else.

Proprioceptive Input is the best source of sensory input to help with sensory modulation & emotion regulation. It helps with the release of serotonin, which contributes to the regulation of many central nervous system processes - mood, sleep, anxiety, appetite, aggression, and memory. It also helps release dopamine, a neurotransmitter that regulates our pleasure and reward systems. Kids who bite, pinch, head-bang, chew on clothing, give tight hugs may be seeking proprioceptive or deep pressure input to increase serotonin levels to a calming level. Proprioceptive input can be provided through resistance activities, weight bearing activities, moving heavy items, or more passive experiences like deep pressure.

Proprioceptive Activities:

- Burrito: Roll your child snugly in a blanket and use gentle pressure to add “cheese,” “salsa,” etc.
- Sandwich: Have your child lie on a cushion and place another on top. Press with gentle pressure.
- Steamroller: Have your child lie on his stomach and roll an exercise ball or foam roller on your child's trunk, legs, and arms.
- Jump: Have your child jump on a mini-tramp or a mattress or the couch.
- Partner Row: Two people sit criss cross facing each other. Reach out and hold hands in front of your bodies and begin to alternately push and pull so your upper bodies rock forward and backward with each motion, like you're rowing a boat.
- Applying deep pressure to shoulders/arms
- Tight bear hugs
- Crawl on hands and knees or belly
- “Crashing” into large cushion
- Warm bath with gentle scrubbing washcloth
- Playful wrestling
- Swimming

The **Vestibular System** is the master controller of our movement, balance and spatial orientation. It can be thought of as our ability, desire, or avoidance to move through space.

Vestibular Input can provide powerful and long lasting centering sensations as it coordinates movements of the eyes, head and body. This can affect our balance, muscle tone, visual-spatial perception, auditory-language perception and emotional security. Kids who seek movement, spin, can't sit still, hang upside down on couches and chairs may be seeking vestibular input. A child who dislikes swinging, holds on tight when going up stairs, dislikes being hung upside down may be trying to avoid vestibular input. Often, children who are in a state of high arousal prefer predictable, rhythmic, slow movement/touch. Fast, unpredictable, and arrhythmic inputs can be useful for “activating” kids in low states of energy.

Vestibular Activities:

- Swing: Encourage her to swing on playground swings, trying various types of swings and movements, such as front to back and side to side.
- Spin: Spin using a Sit n' Spin or office chair. Hold your child's arm and spin in a circle as he lifts off the ground, or play airplane by holding one of his arms and the leg on the same side of his body as you spin in place.
- Get upside down: Position your child on the couch or chair so her feet are above her head to hang upside down.

- **Rock and Roll:** Sit crisscross with your child on your lap and start by rolling backward onto your back. Then, using your legs and abs, roll back up to sitting again. Repeat this motion, rolling forward and backward like a boat on the waves. Have kids try it independently: sitting with knees bent (feet on the floor in front of them), they can roll down onto their backs and then up to sitting.
- **Standing Sway:** Stand facing your child holding both hands out in front (stand about a foot apart). Slowly extend your arms, the child keeping his body straight and leaning backward and then pull the child gently back toward you. Repeat this rowing motion.
- Bouncing on a yoga ball
- Rocking in a rocking chair
- Going down a slide
- Somersaults
- Magic carpet (drag the child around the floor on a blanket-depending on child's needs use different planes of movement, side to side, spin)
- Hammock (can use a large blanket held on each end by an adult. Swing the child in side to side or from front to back)

The **Tactile System** refers to how we interpret the information we get from the receptors on our skin. It is the first of our senses to develop as an infant.

Tactile Input: There is a relationship between touch and the emotional centers in the brain. The right kind of touch has been shown to lower blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol (the stress hormone) levels. It can also stimulate the release of oxytocin, a hormone that promotes bonding. Children who are sensitive to tactile input may avoid getting their hands or face messy, including activities like finger painting and playing in the sand. Seams in socks, scratchy labels in clothing, and certain materials may be difficult to tolerate. Other children may have the opposite experience, seeking out more tactile input to give their bodies what they need. These children love to touch and be touched. They crave hugs, sit very closely to another person, and seek out different textures and touch experiences. They may seem more settled when they can fiddle with objects - rubbing them, turning them over and over, squeezing them.

Tactile Activities:

- Deep touch is calming, while light touch can feel alerting
- Water play
- Sand play
- Shaving cream play
- Play Doh/Slime
- Finger painting
- Sensory bins
- Brushing hair
- Water beads
- Popping bubble wrap
- Back rubs
- Access to blankets of different textures
- Squishy balls to fidget with

For More Information: *The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder* by Carol Kranowitz *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* by Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson
Health.Harvard.edu Theinspiredtreehouse.com

Calendar

May

21 PAC Meeting

Parenting Circle Class

The Parenting Circle Class at our local Shelters works to build community and create space for parents who are dealing with the many challenges of raising children while experiencing homelessness. There is art, crafts, snacks and conversation. Each week has a theme to promote connection, routine, and positive discipline strategies. The facilitator encourages parents to reflect and connect with each other and with their children while teaching about child development and meeting parents wherever they are on their journey, raising healthy and resilient young people. The greater Seattle community's support of this program helps foster the opportunity for families to build bridges above the struggles of homelessness to keep family connections strong for those in the most difficult circumstances.

The Parent Education Program has had a successful year with our classes. Much thanks to our instructors, Emily Bradley and Judy Aks, for taking on the task of creating an innovative way for our program to reach out to families to provide parenting education and support. We have served families at Sacred Heart Shelter and Mary's Place during this academic year; thanks to generous donations and a grant.

In order to continue this innovative model, we are fundraising for the coming academic year. We have set up a fund with our college's foundation, the Education Fund, titled the Cesily Crowser Memorial Homeless Family Support Fund. If you or your co-op class would like to make a donation, please follow the link below:

<https://nscef.ejoinme.org/>, indicate the "Donation Category" as "Other"; then put in Crowser Fund in the box.

Checks can be made out to the Education Fund, indicate "Crowser Fund" on the memo line; mail to:

Education Fund, North Seattle College, 9600 College Way North, Seattle 98103

