

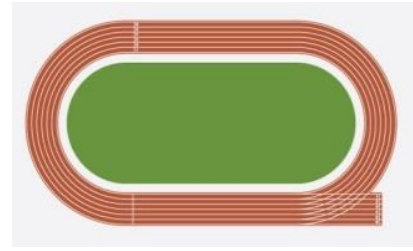


Early Years Inclusion Team

Sensory Circuits

What is a sensory circuit?

A sensory circuit is a daily programme of sensory-based physical activities. The programme should ideally be incorporated into a child's setting timetable twice daily.



Aims of a sensory circuit

- Increase attention and concentration
- Regulate arousal level
- Prepare for the demands of the classroom environment
- Increase engagement in class
- Reduce anxiety level
- Develop motor coordination and balance
- Develop sensory processing skills
- Develop independence in daily activities

When should a child be considered for a sensory circuit programme?

When a child:

- Finds it difficult to sit and concentrate in class
- Is easily distracted in class
- Is disruptive in class
- Has motor coordination skills and/or balance difficulties
- Has difficulties processing and/or modulating sensory information



What is included in the programme?

The sensory circuit programme includes daily activity sessions that last approximately 10 - 15 minutes. The child completes at least one activity in strict order from three sections:

- **ALERTING** - These activities wake up our senses and usually involve head movement e.g. jumping, bouncing, jogging, skipping, and spinning.
- **ORGANISING** - These activities help organise our bodies in space and require more coordinated movements.
- **CALMING** - These activities help us to focus our minds and bodies and usually involve some resistance or pressure on the joints and muscles.



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Activity ideas for each section are included at the end of this advice sheet.

How long should the programme continue?

This depends on the needs of the child and can be anywhere from six weeks to become an on-going activity that is integral to their setting day. What is most important is that there should be half termly reviews to monitor effectiveness and set new targets.

How often should the sensory circuit be changed?

The decision whether to change the sensory circuit is likely to coincide with the termly review. Grading the activity from beginner to intermediate or from intermediate to advanced will always ensure that the child is developing skills.

Why is repetition so important?

Skill levels increase the more often an activity is repeated whilst at the same time the consistent structure of sensory circuits provides the child with predictable sensory input.

Is it possible to run a sensory circuit group?

Staffing ratios and group mix are the main considerations when running a sensory circuit group. It is easy to run groups when there are several activities within each section so that the children can transition smoothly from one activity to another without having to wait around. A whistle and sand timer are useful in ensuring smooth transitioning between activities.

What do I need to purchase and plan before implementing the programme in the setting?

There are four main considerations: staffing, space, equipment and safety.

Staffing

- The SENCO normally takes responsibility for organising the rota, space and resources and for liaising with teachers regarding inclusion of a child onto the programme. Often the need for inclusion onto the programme is identified by a visiting occupational therapist however the key person may identify the need, and this can be acted on by either implementing the programme or seeking further advice from an Occupational Therapist.
- The responsibility for setting up and putting away any equipment should be given to one person.



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Space:

- In an ideal world, the circuit will be permanently set up in an appropriate size space where there are no interruptions or distractions. In practice the hall or spare room is often used, and the equipment is stored away each day so that the room can be used for other purposes. Disruptions and distractions should be a strong consideration when deciding on space.
- Utilise outside space and use equipment such as the trim trail, climbing frame, swings and bicycle.
- Ensure that any equipment used is stored safely, easily retrieved and accessible.

Equipment:

You don't need any special equipment to get started as a few bits of PE equipment and a setting bench will do. However, over time it will be useful to build up a store of equipment. Ideas include:

- Hula hoop
- Rugby ball
- Gym mat
- Trampette
- Play tunnel
- Large gym ball (55 or 65 cm)
- Weighted blanket
- Space hopper
- Theraband
- Peanut ball
- Wobble board

Useful websites for purchasing equipment:

www.rompa.com

www.sensorydirect.com

www.tts-group.co.uk

www.physiosupplies.com

Safety:

- The responsibility of arranging regular equipment safety checks according to the setting risk assessment policy and to undertake individual risk assessments for each child participating in the programme is normally given to the SENCO.



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- For children with epilepsy and other chronic conditions, in addition to the risk assessment, always seek parental permission and seek medical advice.

Training and advice

- Further information and advice can be obtained from emailing the Occupational Therapy Advice Service at oxl-trOTadvice@nhs.net or by contacting the ASD Outreach Service.

Further reading

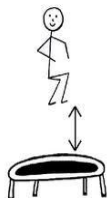
Jane Horwood's book, 'Sensory Circuits A Sensory Motor Skills Programme for Children' provides further explanation and reasoning for establishing this programme.

How to sensory circuits for beginner's tutorial on YouTube

Take a look at this video on <https://youtu.be/4EpBSD3dJnM>

Activity Ideas

ALERTING - These activities wake up our senses and usually involve head movement e.g. jumping, bouncing, jogging, skipping, spinning. The use of music during this part of the session can assist the child to jump and move to rhythm and provide additional alerting input. However, avoid dance music at all costs and ensure that the volume does not drown out any communication.



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Jumping Jacks

Supported sitting or lying over a large gym ball

- Bouncing on a trampette
- Bouncing on a space hopper - follow a route whilst bouncing
- Star jumps
- Crawling through a play tunnel or along a setting bench
- Stepping on and off a setting bench.
- Cross jumps along a setting bench
- Bunny hops along a setting bench
- Spinning around standing up (supervised) or lying on a spinner.
- French skipping



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ORGANISING - These activities help organise our bodies in space and require more coordinated movements. Music can be continued during this session at a slightly reduced volume.



- Walking along a balance course or trim trail. The course can include stepping stones, carpet tiles, a ribbon or bench and can be adjusting to walking heel to toe depending on ability
- Log rolling - lie in a straight line, hands clasped above head and roll across the room and back several times
- Hula hoop
- Cross crawls - touch left elbow to right knee whilst standing
- Throwing and catching games
- Obstacle course
- "Simon says" activities
- Balancing on a wobble board
- Gymnastic ribbon exercises

CALMING - These activities help us to focus our minds and bodies and usually involve some resistance or pressure on the joints and muscles. If music is used, reduce the volume or use relaxation music.

- Ball squash - place the child lying down on their back and gently rolling a large gym ball over their body
- Using peanut shape ball and gently rock back and forth putting arms weight through arms and legs
- Pile up with beanbags and cushions
- Theraband exercises
- Wall push ups
- Arm and leg push ups with another person.
- Slow rocking
- Deep breathing exercises