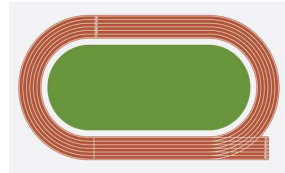


## **GREENWICH AUTISM OUTREACH SERVICE**

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### **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 school 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:

## GREENWICH AUTISM OUTREACH SERVICE

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- **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.

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 school day. What is most important is that there should be half termly reviews in order 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 school?**

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

#### **Staffing**

## **GREENWICH AUTISM OUTREACH SERVICE**

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- 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 class teacher or LSA 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.

### **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 school 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

## GREENWICH AUTISM OUTREACH SERVICE

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Useful websites for purchasing equipment:

[www.rompa.com](http://www.rompa.com)

[www.sensorydirect.com](http://www.sensorydirect.com)

[www.tts-group.co.uk](http://www.tts-group.co.uk)

[www.physiosupplies.com](http://www.physiosupplies.com)

### **Safety:**

- The responsibility of arranging regular equipment safety checks according to the school risk assessment policy and to undertake individual risk assessments for each child participating in the programme is normally given to the SENCO.
- 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](mailto:oxl-trOTadvice@nhs.net) or by contacting the ASD Outreach Service.

### **Further reading**

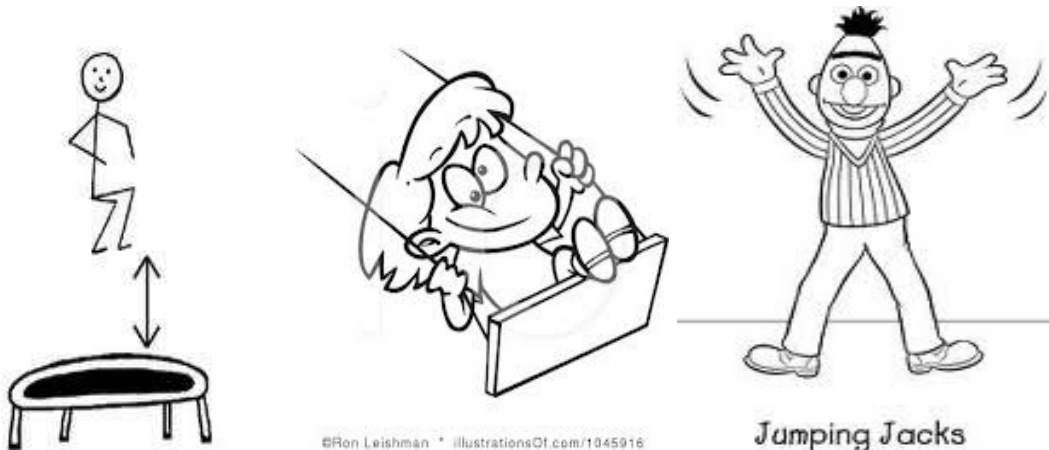
Jane Horwood's book, 'Sensory Circuits A Sensory Motor Skills Programme for Children' provides further explanation and reasoning for establishing this programme.

## GREENWICH AUTISM OUTREACH SERVICE

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### 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.



- 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 school bench
- Stepping on and off a school bench.
- Cross jumps along a school bench
- Bunny hops along a school bench
- Spinning around standing up (supervised) or lying on a spinner.
- French skipping

## GREENWICH AUTISM OUTREACH SERVICE

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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.

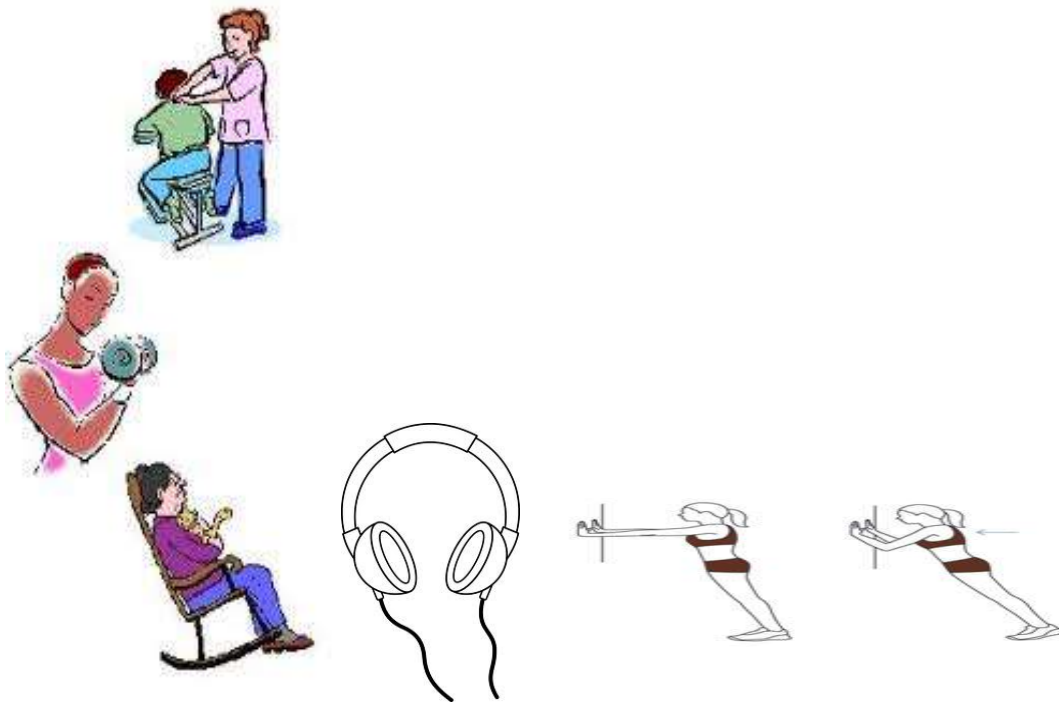


- Walking along a balance course or trim trail. The course can include stepping stones, carpet tiles, a ribbon or bench and can be adjusting to walking heel to toe depending on ability
- Log rolling – lie in a straight line, hands clasped above head and roll across the room and back several times
- Hula 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.

## GREENWICH AUTISM OUTREACH SERVICE

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- Ball squash – place the child lying down (alternating back and front) 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