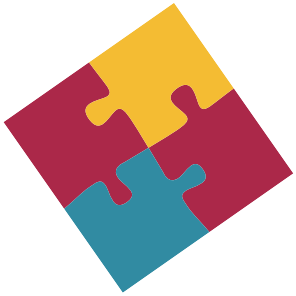


Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit



THE OT TOOLBOX.COM

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit
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Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

Fidgeting Tools for the Classroom

Fidgeting with items can help with attention, regulation, and focus. Try these fidgeting options in the classroom:

- A chain of paper clips
- Pipe cleaners and beads attached to the pencils topper
- Pipe cleaners and beads made into a desk-top fidget tool
- Key chains linked together
- Balloons filled with a small amount of flour, play dough, dry beans, rice, or slime
- Cotton glove made into a weighted fidget toy
- Strip of sticky-back velcro inside or under a desk
- Small rubber bands and a shower curtain loop
- Soft kneaded eraser
- Nuts and bolts
- Slice of a pool noodle
- Bead keychain crafts
- Bubble wrap
- Binder clip attached to a pencil
- Pipe cleaners wrapped in a loose ball
- Plastic straw
- Coil keychain ring
- Craft stick with rubber bands
- Fuzzy craft pom pom
- Koosh ball
- Small sqeeze ball
- Stress ball
- Silly putty
- Pencil grip
- Bendable string (Wikki Stix)
- Chewable pencil topper
- Chewable jewlery
- Belt buckle fidget tool
- Strip of buttons or zipper cut from an old shirt
- Shoe laces threaded with beads and tied in a loop
- Bean bag
- Stretchy toy
- Wrist weight
- Mermaid fabric
- Slap bracelet
- Tape stuck to the desk
- Mini erasers
- 3-4 small LEGO blocks
- Rubber band looped through the belt loops of the child's pants or a button hole on the shirt
- "Jelly" bracelets or rings
- Rubber bands wrapped around the pencil (Use them as a pencil gripper, too)
- Zipper bracelets
- Beads laced on the shoes
- Marble sewn into fabric
- Stickers
- Post-it note pad
- Bendable toys

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

Adapted Seating in the Classroom

Adapted seating can be a sensory strategy that helps with fidgeting as well. Sensory needs can overflow to wiggling, poor posture, slouching, and decreased focus. An altered seating system is sometimes used to address a weak core strength and resulting inefficient posture as well. Try these sensory-based seating ideas:

- Wobble seat
- Inflated disk cushion
- Inflated textured cushion
- Inclined cushion
- Foam cushion
- Picnic chair covers
- Stadium seat warmer
- Bean bags
- Intertubes
- Therapy balls
- Wedge seats
- Support added to the seat
- Partially inflated beach ball
- Therapy ball
- Large ball placed in a milk crate
- Lounge chair
- Milk craft with soft cushion topper
- Large floor pillows
- Camp chairs
- Body pillows
- Rocking chair
- Kneel on a pillow
- Plastic storage bin with half of lid cut off (the child can work, sitting in the bin and use the half-lid as a desk surface
- Prone on floor with clipboards
- Standing at an easel
- Standing at a raised table
- Inside a cardboard box
- Inside a tent
- Attach bungee cord or therapy tubing to chair legs
- Pedal bike under desk
- Pool noodle attached to seat surface for a border
- Swivel chair
- Chair on wheels
- Memory foam cushion
- Carpet squares
- No-slip shelf covering on seats
- Rocker board at a high desk
- Bungee lounge chair
- Stand on a foam cushion
- Therapy band and pool noodle on desk legs
- Bungee cord threaded through tennis ball(s) and attached to desk legs
- Stretchy fabric over lap and legs while sitting
- Fabric bean bag seat cushion
- Textured back rest
- Adjusted seat height
- Scooter board under feet

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

Self-Regulation in the Classroom

For the child who struggles with sensory processing disorder or is challenged with impaired responsiveness, interventions in regulation can be used in the classroom. Self-regulation allows students to manage their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions so that they can successfully learn and navigate their environment. Try these self-regulation activities in the classroom:

- Guided visualization of appropriate responses
- Refocusing activities
- Relaxation exercises
- emotional regulation activities
- Stop and listen impulsivity exercises
- Schedules and warnings before transitions
- Impulse control strategies
- Printable impulse control journal
- A quiet space or corner of the classroom
- The Alert Program to teach and promote self-regulation
- The Zones of Regulation program to help students recognize and address self-regulation needs
- Listening activities
- Simon Says
- Slowly count to ten and stretch
- Yoga break
- Brain breaks (keep them themed to learning topics)
- "Draw How I Feel exercises"
- Red Light, Green Light game
- Teach individual goal planning
- Guided imagination
- Self-motivation by working toward individual rewards
- Stop and Check: self-monitor strategies
- Peer guidance
- Self-reflection at the end of the day
- Model self-regulation through self-talk in difficult situations
- Teach students to identify emotions and how to respond to them in the classroom setting
- Deep breathing exercises
- Teach self-monitoring strategies
- Create a calm-down bin with sensory tools
- Teach mindfulness exercises
- Stop, Drop, and Stretch
- Provide extra time on the playground
- Calming oral proprioceptive input (blow bubbles, chew fruit leather, deep breathing through pursed lips, chew a plastic straw)
- Jaw squeeze and stretch mouth open

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

105 Calm Down Strategies for School

The classroom is an environment that is a place where over-responsiveness can easily interfere with learning, self-confidence, or social emotional development. Try these calm-down activities in the classroom:

- Use a predictive schedule
- Limit close seating
- Minimize auditory stimulation
- Increase space between children
- Movement breaks
- Sensory seating
- Provide a calm down zone
- Weighted lap blanket
- Try tactile tools at the desk
- Decrease visual distractions (trifold, work standing at an easel, single color bulletin boards)
- Use a visual schedule for transitions
- Provide a warning before fire drills or bus evacuation drills
- Plan an accomodate for school-wide assemblies
- Provide a calm down portion of the day build into the schedule with deep breathing and soft music
- Overhead arm stretch
- Stretch before desk work or tests
- Catch weighted ball in learning tasks
- Water bottles with a straw at each desk (ask parents to send in sports bottles)
- Bean bag chair reading center
- Utilize earbuds
- Try sound-minimizing headphones
- Whisper phones for quiet work and test-taking
- Wall Push-Ups- Show the student how to push against the wall while doing "push-ups" from a standing position. This is a great "brain break" activity that provides proprioceptive input for heavy work for improved focus, calming, and self-regulation
- Chair Push-Ups- Allow the child to push up from the seat with his arms, keeping the elbows strait. Pushing up through the arms provides proprioceptive heavy work through the upper body
- Move desk/furniture
- Erase the chalkboard, Smartboard, or dry erase board
- Carry milk crates or plastic bins full of books or supplies from center to center around the classroom or from room to room in the building

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

105 Calm Down Strategies for School (Continued)

- Allow gum during tests or quiet work time
- Quiet fidget toys
- Movement learning with the whole classroom
- Shoe laces fidget- Add a couple of beads to the child's shoe laces for a fidget toy that can be used discretely while sitting in floor circle time or during desk work.
- Allow student to use the manual pencil sharpener
- Carry a backpack from room to room or to specials
- Staple paper onto/remove staples from a bulletin board
- Air cushion seating or other alternative seating option
- Place chairs on rugs
- Hallway March between classrooms
- Sports bottles for drinking
- Movement breaks in the classroom
- Push mats in the gym
- Headphones for limiting auditory stimulation
- Visual picture schedule
- Simon Says Spelling
- Use play dough in math
- Use a kneaded pencil eraser for a hand exercise
- Chewy snacks for calming input
- Sensory bin for math or sight words
- Vibrating pen rainbow writing for sight word or spelling practice
- Jump/move/hop in hallway
- Roll a ball between the legs
- Hopscotch Math
- Graph Paper Writing
- Make a desk sensory diet box
- Wash desks with spray bottles
- Cut classroom decorations or projects from oaktag
- Body squeezes
- Therapy band or bungee cord tied to the chair legs
- Hand gripper exercises
- Weighted vest or lap pad
- Provide visual organization strategies such as simplified instructions, colored folders to organize subject matter, or a daily schedule
- Provide a separate desk space area with visual borders such as “walls” created by classroom furniture to reduce visual distractions during desk work
- Provide extra space to prevent incidental touch by others
- Weighted lap pads

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

105 Calm Down Strategies for School (Continued)

- Designate spaces for circle time (e.g., carpet square or taped area of the floor)
- Approach the child from the front and warn the child before touch
- Use firm touch and avoid light touch
- Minimize other possible overwhelming environmental stimuli by using natural lighting and curtains over the windows
- Shut the classroom door and blinds during periods of the day
- Use rubber bottoms on the chair and desk legs to reduce auditory impact
- Ensure a firm, supportive seat and that the desk and chair fit appropriately
- Sharpen pencils with manual pencil sharpener
- Staple paper
- Stack chairs
- Isometric exercise breaks
- Allow student to stand at their desk
- Wheelbarrow walk breaks
- Provide Calm Down Breaks
- Stress Ball at each desk
- Squeeze Pencil Gripper
- Standing in Line exercises
- Paper clip chain at desk as a counter tool and fidget tool.
- Teach students to identify emotions
- Drawing
- Use a visual timer
- Discovery bottles
- DIY stress balls
- Scented sensory bin for matching tasks
- Graded hand squeezes
- Classical music during quiet reading
- Deep breathing
- Stick masking tape to a desk so students can peel it off during listening tasks
- Worry stones
- Green plants to water
- Calming sounds: water running, rain, beach, thunderstorm audio
- Quiet reading
- Lead students in joint compressions
- Doodle
- Listen to a story
- Lava lamp with lights turned down low
- Rocking chair
- Lavender play dough for math or writing
- Rainstick
- Shoulder shrugs
- Student draws letters/words on another's back

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

Chewing Tools for Classroom Sensory Needs

Chewable jewelry and tools come in a variety of textures and toughness to meet sensory needs of students. In the classroom setting, chewable tools are helpful for sensory needs because the discreteness and the variety of styles on the market. Use chewable items in the classroom to meet sensory needs. Here are types of chewable items that may be used in the classroom:

- Pencil toppers
- Coil bracelets
- Coil necklaces
- Hand-held chew items
- Chewable necklace charms
- Chewable bracelet charms
- Chewable ring
- Chewable beads
- Chewable tube
- Plastic straw of various widths
- "Chew stick"
- Oral desensitization brush
- Toothbrush
- Fabric necklace
- Fabric bracelet
- Cord bracelet
- Chewable charm attached to keychain and looped to shirt collar
- Break-away necklace with chewable charm
- Chewable utensils for lunch time

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

Organization Strategies for Classroom Sensory Needs

Studies show that individuals with a small or underdeveloped frontal lobe of the brain tend to have difficulties with organization, poor memory, emotional reactions, and they tend to become overwhelmed by simple tasks. These individuals will have trouble keeping themselves organized in tasks. Often times, organization challenges are a result of difficulty with planning and prioritizing tasks.

Try these tips to help organize students in the classroom:

1. Develop routines and stick to them. Morning routines can involve unpacking a backpack, planning homework into correct bins, putting away items needed for the day, sitting at the desk, and starting on morning work. Maintain a consistent routine.
2. Develop routines for different parts of the student's day. Social stories, picture schedules, story stones, and physical routing minders can help.
3. Use a simple Schoolwork Folder system. Create a system for paperwork that needs to come back to school and what can stay at home. A simple 2 pocket folders works best for this. Adding extra pages or parts to the folder creates too much visual input. Add a bright sticker to one pocket for "Keep at Home" and a bright sticker for the pocket to "Bring Back". A plastic folder is more durable. Older students can use color coded folders for each subject.
4. Clear document folders in different colors can be used to coordinate with each subject's color.
5. Create a container system for lockers. Use one container for hat, gloves, scarf, and one container for books. The container can be emptied into the backpack at the end of the day. Add pictures to the locker for a visual cue for where the coat, lunchbox, and backpack should hang. Add shelves if needed.
6. Picture Symbols. A visual cue is a great way to break down tasks. Create a series of pictures for desk morning tasks, lunch tasks, or end-of-the-day tasks. Pictures can be printed off in a strip and the strips replaced as the day goes by.

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

Organization Strategies for Classroom Sensory Needs (Continued)

7. Use checklists. Make checklists that the student can mark off tasks as they are completed. Using a checklist is a great way to incorporate handwriting skills into the routine. Marking a check mark or "x" in a small box allows for precision of motor movements.
8. Eliminate dropping of the pencil. Students with organizational problems often times have difficulty with fidgeting, sensory issues, fine motor skills, attention. Dropping the pencil can create a break in attention that allows for further disorganization. Tie the pencil to the desk to prevent dropping: Tie a string to the eraser end of the pencil and tie the end of the string to a suction cup . Attach the suction cup to the desk surface.
9. Homework assignments should be written in the same place on the blackboard each day.
10. Allow time at the beginning of the class or day instead of at the end to write down that day's homework.
11. Teachers can sign off in an assignment book after the student writes down the day's homework. Provide a space for parent sign-off after homework has been completed.
12. Reward systems. Set up an incentive or reward system for appropriate organization of folders, backpack, locker, or homework completion. These can be tailored to the student's interests.
13. Use a second set of textbooks at home to eliminate the need to bring books back and forth between school and home.
14. Break long term projects into smaller tasks with deadlines.
15. Color code notebooks, folders, book covers, and workbooks. Books and notebooks can use prefabricated book covers or you can use colored paper to create book covers in a variety of colors. Add a small colored dot on homework assignments that correspond with the color of the subject's book. Use markers or small stickers to color code homework.
16. Use a zippered pouch for pencils, erasers, calculators, etc in the backpack. This will reduce the items "floating around" in the backpack.

Classroom Sensory Streategies Toolkit

Organization Strategies for Classroom Sensory Needs (Continued)

17. Parents can be provided with a small list of students in the class that can help with homework assignment questions. These students or parents can be called if there are questions about assignments.
18. Place a checklist of what needs to be brought home each day in the locker or in the desk.
19. Use a monthly calendar to keep track of long-term assignments and weekly classes like gym or library.
20. Develop a written contract of organization tasks with the student, teacher, and parent, along with choices for the student.
21. Mailed homework. The parents would need to provide a self-addressed, stamped envelope and the teacher can mail the next few week's homework assignments.
22. Clear plastic, gallon-sized bags in the backpack to hold items like gloves, gym clothes, etc.
23. Email parent permission slips.
24. Breakdown worksheets by folding the paper into sections that can be completed before moving on to the next section.
25. Reduce distractions in the classroom to prevent distractibility: place desk away from windows, doors, and the pencil sharpener.
26. Provide concise and concrete directions.
27. Use a classroom peer as an organizing mentor.
28. Provide a daily class checklist.
29. Mark pages in a book or workbook with a paperclip so that the student can turn to the correct page more easily and quickly.
30. Help the student clear their desk of all items except the items they should be using. Work on getting the student to be independent in this task by using visual and verbal cues. Provide a 10 second "Clear Off" time before starting a new task to allow time for the student to clear his work space.
31. Turn in completed assignments immediately and provide a space for completed work with clear label. A bin, file, or tray works nicely for this.
32. Mark off spaces inside the desk for items like books and pencil box using masking tape. The items should be "parked" in their correct space unless they are being used.

Classroom Sensory Strategies Toolkit

Organization Strategies for Classroom Sensory Needs (Continued)

33. Provide a low cardboard box inside desks with compartments for organizing supplies.
34. Provide a clear plastic bin or shelf for the student's items instead of using a desk or locker.
35. Use a triangular pencil grip to keep pencils from rolling off desks.
36. Provide velcro for students to attach their pencil to the desk surface or inside the desk.
37. Try an eraser ring to prevent losing large erasers inside desks.
38. Use a kneadable eraser. It can be stuck inside the desk when not in use and makes a great fidget toy.
39. Use a digital clock in the classroom or timers for competing tasks.
40. Conduct daily, weekly, and monthly clean-ups of desk, locker, and backpack.
41. At the end of the day, help the student prepare his work space for the next day.
42. Provide a small movement break between tasks.
43. Allow for self-monitoring of systems.
44. Provide tools for fidgeting.
45. Try using an Impulse Control Journal.