

SENSORY CHALLENGE EDUCATIONAL SERIES FOR SCHOOL

Strategies

to help children cope with
Sensory Challenges

Sensory Challenge:

Vestibular

3. Difficulty Sitting Still



ToolsToGrowOT.com

Strategies to help students cope with Sensory Challenges

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INSTRUCTIONS:

The **Does Your Student?** Section offers educational information about characteristics of students with the above mentioned sensory/behavior challenge. Your child may present with one or many of these characteristics.

The **Try This!** Section offers simple strategies for helping your student cooperate and develop skills. Not all suggestions are appropriate for every student and school. Only use strategies that apply to your child's age, developmental level, and situation. It is suggested to use this checklist while consulting with a professional who has explained and is monitoring these strategies.

Does Your Student?

- When expected to sit still, he/she may constantly wiggle, slump, squirm, lean on furniture, and/or fall out of their chair.
- He/she may sit on the edge of their seat.
- He/she may look weak.
- He/she may hold his head up using his hands.
- He/she may stand more than sit.

Try This!

Modify & Examine Your Student's Desk & Chair

- One size does not fit all- your student may need a foot rest for proper support or may need their desk legs adjusted. This is a very common problem; many children cannot adjust to a chair and desk/table that does not fit their body.
- Slice an X pattern through two tennis balls. Place one on the front leg of child's chair and the other ball on the rear leg on the opposite side of the chair. This will allow your student to rock while remaining seated.
- Partially inflate an inexpensive plastic beach ball. Place it on the seat of his/her chair. This will allow your child to move and shift position while remaining seated. Commercially produced chair cushions that provide movement while sitting in a standard chair are available. See the school Occupational Therapist.
- Make a Hug-Chair. Place a large long sleeve shirt over the back of child's chair. Stuff the arms with dry beans and tie tightly at the bottom of the sleeve. The student can wrap himself with the arms when he needs extra sensory input. This may help him/her stay seated.
- Use a small wedge on the seat of the chair. This helps improve the posture of a child who rounds the small of their back. The highest part of the wedge should be at the back of the seat.
- Rather than use a standard chair, if safe to do so allow child to sit on a large ball while at a table. There are commercially available ball chairs and balls with bases that are more stable. See the school Physical or Occupational Therapist.
- "Tummy-touch-the table." Be sure your student has physical contact with the table on his belly and his feet are flat on the ground.
- Consider allowing your student to turn their chair around! He/she would then have their legs straddling the back of the chair and leaning their torso against the back of the chair. Although unorthodox for most schools, students may prefer this for short periods and re-focus.
- Secure "Theraband" around the student's chair legs. The child may use their feet to push to kick against the tubing.

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Try This!

Try Chair Exercises:

- Occasional breaks for mini-exercises may boost sitting tolerance and concentration while minimizing restlessness.
- Demonstrate to your child how to use his/her own hands to push down firmly on his thighs. Repeat until student appears less restless.
- Show your child how to bring both hands to chest level. Next, push both palms together. Repeat until student appears less restless.
- Demonstrate how to place each hand on the “seat” of the chair while pushing down to perform a “chair push up.” Repeat until student appears less restless.

Other Ideas:

- Allow for movement breaks in between periods when prolonged sitting is necessary.
- Provide crunchy or chewy food or sucking liquid with a straw. This may reduce restlessness while required to sit. Be sure to consider the child’s diet, oral motor skills (chewing and swallowing), and developmental level when offering snacks.
- Allow opportunities throughout the day for movement. A child who has difficulty remaining seated needs lots of gross motor play at “non-sitting” time.
- Let the student stand- If the student will be more attentive, productive, and compliant when standing for intervals.... Give that a try! You certainly can learn while standing.
- Offer hand fidgets- Be sure the fidget does not have excessive sensory features. If so the student may over focus on the fidget rather than the classroom lesson/task.
- Weighted materials- Lap pads and shoulder wraps can help regulate a restless student. See the school Occupational Therapist.
- Provide opportunities for heavy work such as pushing desks, moving chairs, carrying heavy boxes, etc.
- Preferential seating-Seat the student away from the door, windows, or distracting classmates.
- During quiet, solitary work offer noise reducing headphones to block out distracting sounds.
- Get out of the chair-children can learn and be productive while standing, kneeling, cross legged sitting on the floor, or on their bellies.