Occupational Therapy Service for Children and Young People

A Guide to Sensory Circuits

The following advice sheet is aimed at mainstream primary schools however the advice is also relevant for the home environment too.

Many children will benefit from engaging in a short Sensory Circuit at the beginning of the school day and/or after lunch. Sensory circuits will help anyone that presents with any of these behaviours and difficulties:

- Fidgeting and changing position a lot in class
- Slow to start work and missing verbal cues (needs alerting)
- Difficulty organising themselves
- Lethargic (needs alerting)
- Poor coordination & balance
- Known sensory processing difficulties (requires help with regulating these)
- Rocking
- Poor attention and concentration
- Over-alert and appear hyper (needs calming)

A Sensory Circuit is a short plan of physical activities that enables children to achieve an optimal level of alertness. It lasts 10-15 minutes and consists of 3 sections: Alerting Activities, Organising Activities and Calming Activities. It is vital that the activities are done in this order and that sessions are structured.

This advice sheet provides information noted in the following book;
Sensory Circuits: A Sensory Motor Skills Programme for Children (Paperback) Jane Horwood

The circuit needs to incorporate three stages;

1. Alerting,
2. Organizing
3. Calming

For children with low arousal (appear tired/dazed) you will concentrate mainly on alerting activities and for children with high arousal (appear hyper/active/over-anxious), concentrate on calming activities.

1. Alerting Activities

The aim of the alerting activities is to provide vestibular and proprioceptive stimulation within a controlled setting.
This prepares the brain for learning.

Vestibular

Vestibular input is the sense of movement, centred in the inner ear. Any type of movement will stimulate the vestibular receptors, but spinning, swinging, and hanging upside down provide the most intense, longest lasting input.

Here are a few examples of activities you could put into the alerting section of a sensory circuit:

- Bouncing 10 times on a mini trampoline/ trampette
- Bouncing 10 times on a space hopper.
- Going on a scooter / scooter board
- Jumping on the spot / jumping jacks
- Running / shuttle runs
- Rolling forward and back over a peanut ball
- Bouncing up and down while sitting on a peanut ball

2. Organising Activities

This section includes activities that require motor sensory processing, balance and timing. The child needs to organise their body, plan their approach and do more than one thing at a time in a sequential order.

Here are a few examples of activities you could put into the organising section of a sensory circuit:

- Balancing on a beam
- Log rolling
- Climbing wall bars
- Throwing bean bags into a target
- Arm push ups against the wall
- Blowing bubbles or blowing a paper ball to a target
- Wobble boards for balance work

These are skills that may increase a child’s focus, attention span and performance within the classroom.

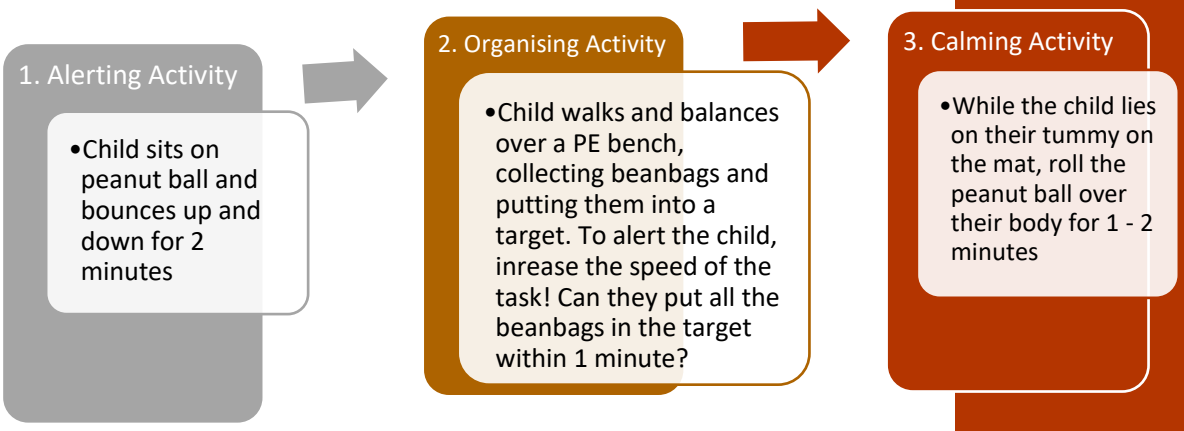
3. Calming Activities

Finishing the circuit with calming activities ensures that the child leaves the circuit (or returns to the classroom) feeling calm, centred and as ready for the day as possible.

Here are a few examples of activities you could put into the calming section of a sensory circuit:

- Lying under weighted blankets
- Having peanut/physio balls rolled over their back while lying on the floor face down
- Hot-dogs (rolling child up tightly in a blanket).
- Spending a few minutes in a lycra dance sack / body sock
- Calming fidget toys – soft textures.

Example of a Sensory Circuit to ALERT a young person: (includes increased movement which is more alerting)



Example of a Sensory Circuit to CALM a young person: (includes more proprioceptive input/heavy-work, which is calming)