



Supporting Sensory Needs in the Classroom and at Home

VCU ACE Lunch and Learn

May 13, 2021

What We Will Cover



- Why?
- Specific Observations of Sensory Behaviors
- What sensory system those behaviors are likely tapping in to
- Suggestions of replacement behaviors
 - Ideas for children
 - Ideas for adults
- Discussion/ Questions

****Disclaimer: What you see is not only a sign of one sensory system****

Why?



- ▶ Why is the individual doing this behavior?
 - ▶ Are they overstimulated by the environment?
 - Busy environment
 - Distinct smells, sights
 - ▶ Are they understimulated and trying to increase their alertness?
- ▶ Why do you want to replace the behavior?
 - ▶ Is the behavior interfering with their ability to engage?
 - ▶ Is the behavior interfering with their interactions with other people?
 - ▶ Is the behavior interfering with other individuals in the environment?

What I see



Seeking

- ▶ Rocking in place
- ▶ Intense swinging

Avoiding

- ▶ Avoiding changing head position in space
- ▶ Resistance to swinging, tumbling

Vestibular System



- ▶ Why do you need to provide an alternate?
- ▶ Replacements:
 - ▶ Rocking Chair/ Swing
 - ▶ Swivel Stool
 - ▶ Balance board Hover skateboards



What you see



Seeking

- ▶ Turning lights on and off
- ▶ Flicking fingers by eyes
- ▶ Spinning objects/parts of objects close to face

Avoiding

- ▶ Closure of eyes, squinting
- ▶ Turning off lights/ avoiding spaces with fluorescent lights
 - ▶ Pay attention to environments with reflective or glossy features (hallways with glare)

Visual System

- ▶ Why do you need to provide an alternate?
- ▶ Replacements:
 - ▶ Shaded/ colored glasses
 - ▶ Light strands
 - ▶ Bubble tubes
 - ▶ LED lights
 - ▶ Hat/ visor

What you see



Seeking

- ▶ Banging items
- ▶ Playing loud music
- ▶ Generating sounds
- ▶ Self-generated noise: Humming, singing

Avoiding

- ▶ Covering ears
- ▶ Self-generated noise: Humming, singing

Auditory System



- ▶ Why do you need to provide an alternate?
- ▶ Replacements:
 - ▶ Ear plugs
 - ▶ Headphones
 - with/ without music, calming sounds
 - Noise cancelling
 - ▶ Ear flap hat (Ushanka)
 - ▶ Playing instruments: drums, piano

What you see




Seeking

- ▶ Heavy Steps
- ▶ Banging on surfaces
- ▶ Pushing hard on items: Breaking pencils
- ▶ Toe Walking
- ▶ Jumping
- ▶ Bumping into walls

Avoiding (very rare)

- ▶ Avoiding hugs
- ▶ Avoiding heavy pressure

Proprioceptive System

- Why do you need to provide an alternate? 
- Push and Pull, Heavy weight
- Replacements:
 - Weighted blankets
 - Smaller spandex clothing
 - Heavy work: carrying objects from one place to another, weight lifting
 - Placing weights on or in items
 - Jumping jacks/rope
 - Donkey kicks, chair push ups
 - Weight lifting

What you see



Seeking

- ▶ Rubbing objects between hands: sand, rocks, eraser bits
- ▶ Picking up objects and dropping them repeatedly

Avoiding

- ▶ Doesn't touch messy objects, shaving cream
- ▶ Won't use fingers to eat

Tactile (Touch)



- ▶ Why do you need to provide an alternate?
- ▶ Replacements:
 - ▶ Kinetic sand
 - ▶ Shaving cream activities
 - ▶ Fidget rings
 - ▶ Textured clothing/ pants
 - ▶ Velcro under desk
 - ▶ Pebbles

What you see



Seeking

- ▶ Inhaling scents
- ▶ Smelling hair

Avoiding

- ▶ Refusal to enter space
- ▶ Aggressive behaviors
- ▶ Covering nose
- ▶ Gagging

Gustatory (Smell)



- ▶ Why do you need to provide an alternate?
- ▶ Replacements:
 - ▶ Scented lotions, perfume/ cologne
 - ▶ Aroma therapy: essential oils
 - ▶ Face masks
 - ▶ Vaseline under nostrils
 - ▶ Spicy, sour, minty, bitter

What you see



Seeking

- ▶ Wet neck of shirts
- ▶ Wet sleeves of shirts
- ▶ Drooling
- ▶ Mouthing objects
- ▶ Chewed pencils/ objects

Avoiding

- ▶ Picky appetite
- ▶ Extra long use of bottle

Oral



- ▶ Why do you need to provide an alternate?
- ▶ Replacements:
 - ▶ Thick beverages: milk shakes, adding thickener to liquids, using a smaller straw (coffee stirrer)
 - ▶ Increased texture: pretzels, nuts
 - ▶ Increased resistance: now and later's, starbursts, gum
 - ▶ Jewelry: necklaces
 - ▶ Chewy Tubes, Zibe
 - ▶ Crunchy, chewy, mushy, combination

