



How to Help Your Child with Sensory Circuits at Home

Sensory Circuits is a series of exercises that can prepare children to engage effectively with the day ahead. It is a great way to energise or settle children ready for a day at school and, with some children, it can have a noticeable impact on anxiety levels, helping them to enjoy their day more. The exercises can be performed anywhere, with and without resources, and can be completed at home before coming to school or at school.

Particularly, as children grow older, and get ready to start secondary school, we find it useful for them to develop a routine of exercises that they can complete at home to get them ready for the school day. There is some equipment that it is useful to have, but it is not essential to buy lots of things to help your child in this way. At school, we develop our programmes using the book 'Sensory Circuits: a sensory motor skills programme for children' by Jane Horwood (published by LDA). This is an excellent book (although written for a school setting) and will provide additional information for you, if you need it. However, it is not essential to own the book to support your child with developing their own Sensory Circuits programme. Further information can be gained from looking at the books listed at the end of this document.

Sensory Circuits programmes involve using three types of exercise, each of which is followed in a specific order. The first types of exercise are Alerting. The idea is that by allowing the fluid in the ears to move around, by jumping and head movements, your child will feel more awake. Alerting exercises are followed by Organisational activities. These exercises provide challenge to your child by using multi-sensory processing (balancing and moving or throwing and balancing at the same time). These activities get your child's brain working effectively, helping them when they are learning. The programme is completed by finishing with Calming activities. These exercises either use heavy muscle work or deep pressure touch to help your child to feel calmer and ready to start learning.

Although it is important that some exercises are completed from the alerting, organising and calming sections of the programme in that order, it is important that the exercises are adapted to each child – their preferences, but also their needs. For example, a child who needs support to 'get going' in the morning will need more alerting than calming exercises. Another child, who becomes anxious quickly, may benefit from fewer alerting exercises and more calming activities. It is important that your child enjoys the exercises and they can be adapted easily to make sure that it is a fun time for everyone. Feel free to use the exercise ideas as a starting point, rather than a list of things you must do every day. However, it is recommended that you always finish with the calming exercises, or your child may become overstimulated.

In addition to the organisational activities included in the Sensory Circuits book, there are a number of others we use in school:

- Throwing and catching (beanbags, balls, scarves) by yourself or to a partner. How many can you do without dropping it?

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- Throwing objects (beanbags, scarves, balls, toys) into a target (a hoop, bucket, bowl). Who can get the most in the target? Did you get more than yesterday?
- Rolling a hula hoop. Can you get it to come back to you?
- Spinning a hoop on your arms. Can you pass it from one arm to another? And back again?
- Picking up small objects (dried beans, beads, raisins etc.) with tweezers and putting them into a container. How many can you get in on your first attempt? How many in a minute?
- Posting objects (envelopes, beads, toys) through a slot. How long does it take you to post them all? Is it faster or slower than yesterday?

To start with, your child would benefit from you doing the Sensory Circuit exercises with them and encouraging them to understand why they are doing the different types of exercise. At school we might say, “Let’s do some jumping jacks – they will help you to wake up.” or “If we do ten wall pushes it will help you to feel calmer.” Sensory Circuits can be beneficial to your child in the long term, and if they know what helps them, they can use them when they are at secondary school, or beyond into adult life, to help them to regulate their mood.

If you have any questions regarding Sensory Circuits and potential routines to use then ask at the office to speak to Mrs Newington, who would be happy to help.

Further Information

Sensory Circuits – A sensory motor skills programme for children, Jane Horwood, LDA (2009)

Sensorcises – Active Enrichment for the Out-of-Step Learner, Laurie Glazener, Skyhorse Publishing (2014)

Sensory Strategies – Practical ways to help children and young people with autism learn and achieve,

Corrina Laurie, The National Autistic Society (2014)