



SENSORY SPECIAL

Explore this collection of articles all about supporting sensory needs with ideas and inspiration for creating and using your own sensory space.



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Rachel Gelder and Pamela Hanigan

Rachel Gelder is a SENCo within a mainstream primary school with high levels of special needs. Pamela Hanigan began her teaching career in 1997 and has continued her passion for teaching and education throughout this time, teaching and tutoring children from nursery age to Year 11.

Rachel and Pamela are also both Specialist Dyslexia teachers and in 2014 they formed Lancashire Dyslexia Information Guidance and Support (LDIGS).

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Creating your Calm Corner

by Dr Tina Rae



Creating a Calm Corner or space offers children and young people a place in which they can learn how to safely regulate and develop tools and strategies that help them to remain in their window of tolerance. The Calm Corner needs to be a special place of safety where they can give themselves greater opportunities to be resilient and stay calm and focussed. Developing their self-awareness and with this, greater levels of adaptability, flexibility and independence are the key objectives of such a space.

In this article we will look at how to develop the space and highlight some key tools and resources to support you in the process.

Starting with you.

A vital point to remember - the need to be resilient yourself.

In order to develop your Calm Corner or space to promote the wellbeing of children and young people, you need to firstly ensure that you have found your own calm.

We know that unregulated and stressed adults cannot effectively support and help children and young people who are also unregulated and stressed. It is impossible.

We also know that the direct carers or nurturers of children are most effective in helping them develop self-regulation. They can provide activities that support regulation and are also the most immediate role models for children. The emotional tone of a school or home is dramatically affected by the capacity of adults to regulate themselves. If adults respond to children's distress in a calm but engaged way, they demonstrate an alternative way of managing

stress. When adults respond to difficulties by becoming dysregulated, they replicate the damaging environments that characterised children's earlier or current experiences.

Being the therapeutic adult in the relationship

This is hard work and demands a level of self-care that many of us find difficult to sustain.

We know that the brain develops from the back to the front and from inside to out. When human beings are emotionally dysregulated, the brain stem and limbic areas are activated which results in the deactivation of the frontal cortex, responsible for executive

functions, including attention and impulse control.

Any intervention and support offered by us as adults therefore needs to be primarily targeted at safety and connection (brain stem and limbic system) and not at a cognitive, language-based level. This means that we need to be available emotionally and evidently present in terms of being there to support and nurture the child. This is the key to building a therapeutic relationship.

In order to build such a connection, we firstly need to ensure our own wellbeing is intact and that our own brain needs are met. One means of

judging this is to use the healthy mind platter which promotes self-care to ensure that we can then be emotionally available for others and have the energy and sensitivity to support them in the most therapeutic way possible.

Understanding Trauma

Kolk (1994) described trauma as 'speechless terror' and traumatised children may be slow to develop speech or may struggle to find words to describe their trauma or their feelings. Trauma and stress may also affect the capacity to process verbal information and children can struggle to follow complex directions and may

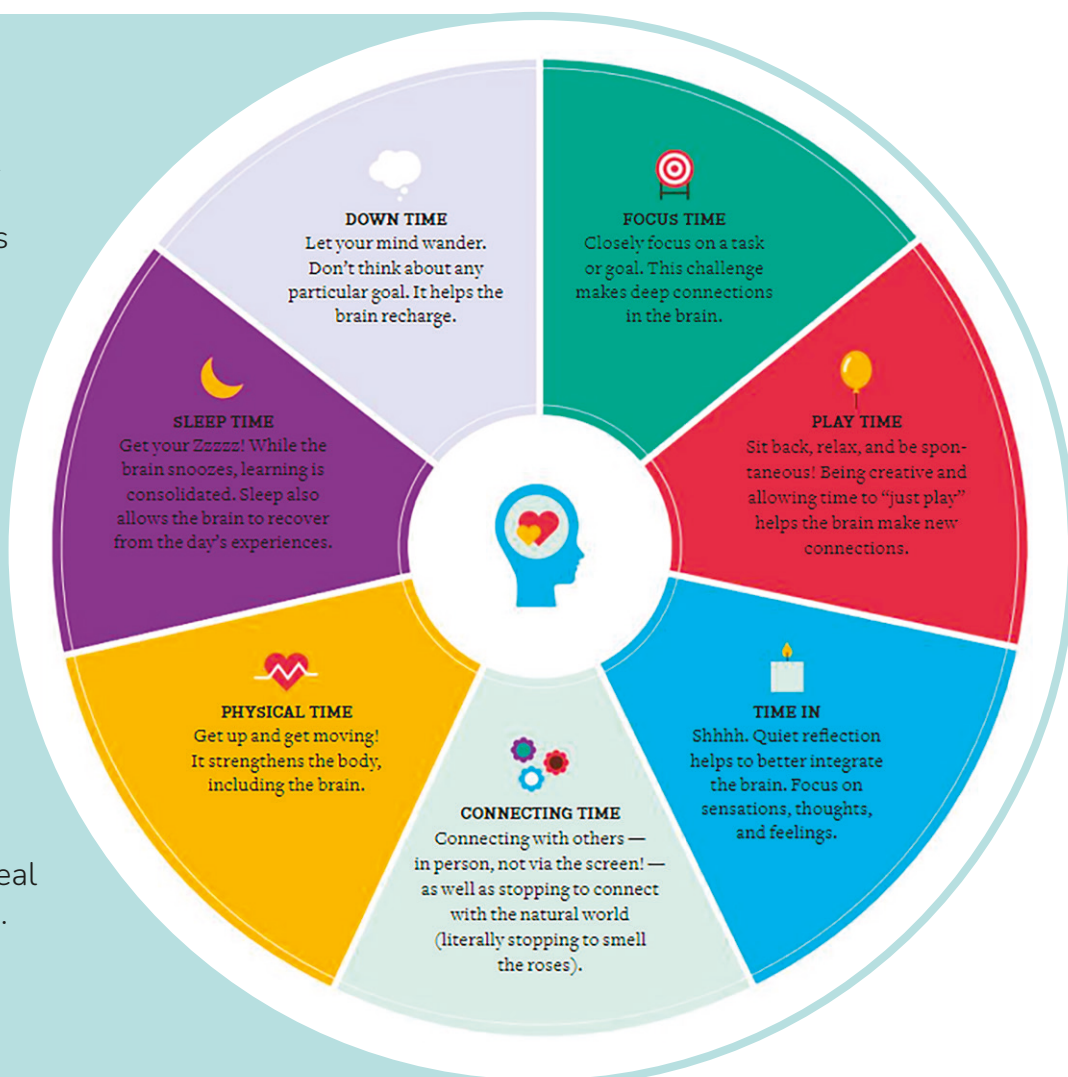
experience auditory selectivity so that only part of a verbal communication is heard. As adults, we can often interpret failure to obey directions or to respond to questions as wilful defiance and react punitively, rather than modifying our own communication to match the children's needs.

So, once again, we need to be careful to ensure that our responses and the systems we put in place both in the home and in school ensure these factors are considered. We must respond appropriately to children and young people who have experienced trauma, stress and anxiety. We need to create safety routines first and to also

The Healthy Mind Platter

The Healthy Mind Platter (developed by Dr. David Rock and Dr. Daniel J. Siegel) has seven essential daily activities that provide the 'mental nutrients' necessary for optimum mental health. By engaging in each of these every day, you allow your brain to coordinate and balance its activities, which helps to strengthen your internal connections and your connections with other people.

The visual provides an essential reminder to us all, as the adults nurturing the wellbeing of children and young people, to maintain a real balance in our own daily lives.



* Illustration based on "The Healthy Mind Platter" by Dr. David Rock and Dr. Daniel J. Siegel. Please see <https://drdansiegel.com/healthy-mind-platter> for more information and resources.

change our own expectations and behaviours.

We all now know that stress and anxiety disorders are an increasing problem for our children and young people and that we do need to therefore work more at a preventative level to support the development of key skills and strategies to manage such issues. Effective stress management and specifically using relaxation strategies can be highly effective for many children. This is the rationale for including a range of such strategies and techniques/resources in your Calm Corner. It is vital that all adults (teaching professionals and parents/carers) can and do model these to the children and young people they nurture.

To achieve this, we need to ensure that we know how to engage in effective self-care and how to manage our own stress and anxiety whilst simultaneously understanding the need to respond in a truly trauma informed way.



The Window of Tolerance

The Window of Tolerance is a model founded in Neuroscience and helps develop good practice for improving and maintaining mental health and wellbeing. It presents us with information as to how we function at our best, in all areas of our lives so that we can manage when emotions become difficult, complex or seemingly overwhelming.

We know that children's emotions fluctuate, particularly at times of stress and crisis and they can find it hard to put their feelings into words. We need therefore to be able to recognise this sense of overwhelm and to know when and why they are struggling with their feelings and emotions. Using the Window of Tolerance provides us with a way to do this.

Each person's window of tolerance is different. Those who have a narrow window of tolerance may often feel as if their emotions are intense and difficult to manage. Others with a wider window of tolerance may be able to handle intense emotions or situations without feeling like their ability to function has been significantly impacted.

When a person is within their window of tolerance, it is generally the case that the brain is functioning well and can effectively process stimuli. That person is likely to be able to reflect, think rationally, and make decisions calmly without feeling either overwhelmed or withdrawn.

During times of extreme stress, people often experience periods of either hyper- or hypo-arousal.

- **Hyper-arousal**, otherwise known as the flight/fight response, is often characterised by hypervigilance, feelings of anxiety and/or panic, and racing thoughts.
- **Hypo-arousal**, or a freeze response, may cause feelings of emotional numbness, emptiness, or paralysis.

In either of these states, an individual may become unable to process stimuli effectively. The prefrontal cortex region of the brain shuts down, in a manner of speaking, affecting the ability to think rationally and often leading to the development of feelings of dysregulation. This may take the form of chaotic responses or overly rigid ones. In these periods, a person can be said to be outside the window of tolerance.

So, what can we do?

It is possible for individuals who have become dysregulated to use techniques to return to their window of tolerance. Grounding and mindfulness skills and techniques are considered beneficial by many mental health experts. By focusing on the physical sensations currently being experienced, people are often able to remain in the present and calm and soothe themselves enough to effectively manage extreme arousal.

Many children and adults are able to widen their window of tolerance and, by doing so, increase their sense of calm and become able to deal with stress in more adaptive ways.

Therapeutic relationships and trauma informed contexts and spaces can provide a safe space for people to process painful memories and emotions and make contact with their emotions without becoming so dysregulated that they cannot integrate them. Increasing emotional regulation capabilities in this way can lead to a wider window of tolerance and prevent dysregulation.

Working in the Calm Corner and in the classroom

There are 2 types of interventions that we can all make use of to support a child or young person to return to their window of tolerance in both the Calm Corner and in the classroom too.

This ensures they can develop their self-awareness and with this, greater levels of adaptability, flexibility and independence. These are called Process Interventions. We can teach these skills and provide the opportunity for children and young people to practise them within the context of the Calm Corner.

We can also give them external supports and strategies, such as adapting the environment (e.g. sensory accommodations); building in predictability (e.g. visual timetables, structure, routines); and / or providing keyworker support. These are the Compensation Interventions which we can also ensure as part of the Calm Corner intervention.



So, how can we support children and young people in our contexts?

What is important to remember is that one size does not fit all and that building the toolbox of wellbeing and increasing the window of tolerance will be different for each individual. We need to ensure the intervention is bespoke and that a wide range of resources are made available so that through the process of trial and error the child can identify what works best for them.

At the outset, it is vital that they feel safe and nurtured knowing that they are accepted for who they are and are not judged for displaying symptoms of anxiety or previous trauma.

Also, these skills need to be practised frequently when the young person feels relatively calm. They will then be able to eventually transfer these skills to those moments of more heightened stress and emotion – thus becoming more empowered and in control.

You will need to consider which resources are appropriate for the development of your Calm Corner alongside identifying and furnishing the space appropriately.

5 Keys to Setting up your Calm Corner

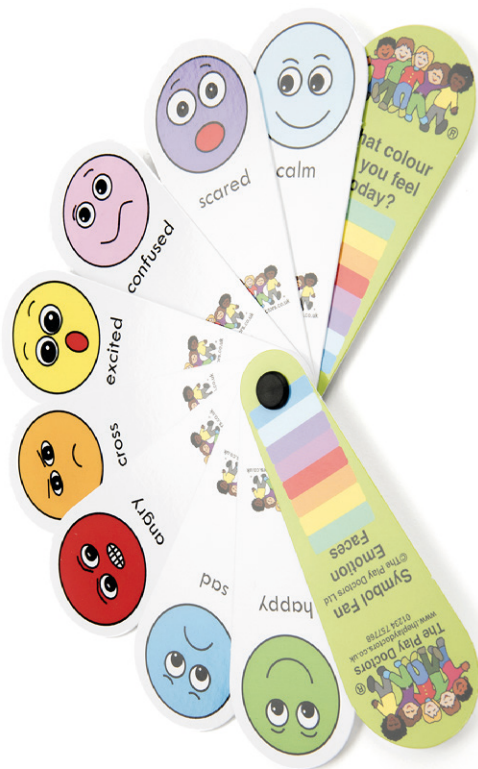
Key 1 - Location

It is important to carefully consider where you will set up your calm corner. For example, you may choose a space in the back of the room, so students using it do not feel self-conscious. The best option of course is to have a dedicated room, but this is a luxury for many in today's current climate. Ask yourself:

- Does the space have enough room for a chair, small sofa, bean bag or possibly a small table?
- Does the space seem semi-private?
- Can children easily access the space?

Key 2 - Furniture

Furniture is another key factor in creating your calm corner. The size of the space will determine what you can include. At a minimum, you will need an adequate seating area which includes a chair, bean bag or small sofa. A small desk or table will also be useful for any self-reflection or recording activities as will a listening booth for access to music tapes, relaxation tapes or online calm down resources.





Key 3 - Meaningful Visuals

You will need to provide children with visual displays and resources to help them self-regulate and manage their emotions. For example:

A poster with breathing techniques.

- A poster asking students to rate their “emotional temperature.”
- A list of things they could do in the Calm Corner.
- A resource with strategies for problem solving in a stepped way.
- A resource with strategies for using key tools from Mindfulness such as visualisation of my calming place or grounding of my feet to the floor.

Key 4 - Calm Down Tools

A calm corner is not complete without the physical and tactile tools children can use to help themselves regulate their emotions and return to their window of tolerance. These might include the following:

- Glitter Jar
- Squeeze Ball
- Expandable Ball
- Playdough
- Kinetic Sand
- Timer

Key 5 - Teach Your Children

All the children and young people will need to be taught about the Calm Corner and why it is such a helpful and essential intervention for our wellbeing. Why do we need this? What does it help us to do? What are the resources in the corner and how do we use them? When and why? Spending some time as a whole class to reinforce the purpose and practicalities is obviously an essential.



The following tools and strategies are all worth considering when developing your space and interventions.

Moving from hyper-arousal to the Window of Tolerance



- **The Power of Best Breathing** - Our breath is an essential in terms of regulating emotions, especially when used with movement. However, not all children will respond well to using breathing techniques. If you think a focus on breathing may be useful to the child, then consider how you can build in some exercises as a proactive measure, e.g. at the start of every school morning and afternoon, at home before they leave for school or as part of the regular routines in your Calm Corner or Nurture provision/area.
- **Breathing Balls** - Cheap breathing balls are very useful and readily available. As children breathe in, the ball expands. As they breathe out the ball closes. They can repeat as necessary.
- **Diaphragmatic breathing** - This is also known as belly breathing or abdominal breathing. The belly rises on the in-breath and lowers on the outbreath. This allows effective use of oxygen as it reaches the lower parts of the lungs. Children can practise by placing a hand on their belly and feel the movement. A younger child could practise by lying on their back with a soft toy on their belly – giving the toy a ride as the belly goes up and then lowers.
- **Finger breathing** - This is sometimes called star breathing (using a star instead of a hand). With fingers outstretched, use the index finger of the other hand to trace around the thumb and fingers of the outstretched hand whilst breathing. From base of thumb to tip breathe in; from tip of thumb to base on the other side breathe out and so on. This can then be repeated on the other hand.
- **Tracing and breathing** - The child can draw a shape on a piece of paper. As they breathe slowly in and out they continue to trace the shape without lifting the pencil from the paper.
- **Visualisation tools and ideas** - Provide a range of scripts for visualisation and work with individual children to make up their own scripts. For example, 'Picture yourself...':
 - gathering the emotions, scrunching them up, and putting them into a box.
 - walking, swimming, biking, or jogging away from painful feelings.
 - imagining your thoughts as a song or TV programme you dislike, changing the channel or turning down the volume — they're still there, but you don't have to listen to them.
- **Weighted blanket** - Deep pressure stimulation of the body gained from use of a weighted blanket can increase the release of the 'feel-good' neurotransmitter serotonin in the brain.



- **Music to soothe** - Using the sense of hearing with rhythm can relax both the mind and body. It can be used to accompany breath work and movement. You can grade the music from a higher tempo to lower tempo to gradually regulate. Personalise this for the child or young person - some people like the sound of the sea, a stream, a crackling fire, blackbirds, etc.
- **54321 Grounding** - Using the 5 main senses for bringing attention – 5 things they can see; 4 they can feel; 3 they can hear; 2 they can smell (or imagine) and 1 they can taste (or imagine) is a very helpful grounding strategy and easy to teach and model to children.
- **Sensation or Feelings Area** - A Sensation or Feelings wall is an area you can create in the Calm Corner with words that describe sensations or feelings. This can be helpful as language is difficult to access when we are dysregulated, but a child could use the visuals and point to the sensation they feel in the body. Remember that the 'language of the brain stem is sensation'.



Moving from hypo-arousal to the Window of Tolerance

Anything that stimulates the senses can be included in a list of strategies/resources that proposes to do this for a child.

- **Sensory tray** - Our sense of smell is the fastest way to the thinking brain. Making a sensory tray with a range of different smelly objects can be a fun activity – lavender, basil, soap, handwash etc.
- **Chewy, crunchy food** - Crunchy foods wake us up because we have to work harder to consume them, and that satisfying crunch engages the ears as well. Like crunchy foods, chewy snacks can help a child feel more alert simply because of the effort it takes to consume these foods.
- **Sensory Rain Stick Bottles** - Rain stick bottles use the calming effect of the sound of rain to soothe the child's troubles away, and can be made from a huge array of household items such as dried rice, beads or buttons. Support the child to add their chosen objects to fill around half of the container, secure the lid and then engage with the soothing sounds.
- **Sand play** - If you have the space then providing a sand play area is also extremely useful. If not, then a mini sand tray will suffice.
- **Worry Wiper** - Purchase a mini paper shredder and provide children the chance to shred their worries while spending time in the Calm Corner!
- **Stress, squeeze balls and slime** - Stress balls are excellent tools to relieve stress and release anxiety. They also improve motor skills, loosen muscles, promote blood circulation, and strengthen the hand grip. It is worthwhile investigating in a range of these to resource the Calm Corner as they are relatively cost effective and





many children and young people find them easy to use both in the corner and in the whole class context.

- **Calm down jars** - To make your own calm down jar, start by mixing glitter glue with hot water and adding a few drops of food colouring. Whisk until the glue 'melts' and mixes properly with the water. Next, add additional glitter, whisk vigorously one more time, transfer the mixture into your clear jar, and top the bottle up with water so it's completely full. Allow the water to cool to room temperature before securing the lid with glue to ensure it is properly sealed and won't leak. Shake when you need to calm down.
- **Feet on the floor** - Feeling the soles of the feet on the floor or the body sat on a chair, noticing how the body is supported is a key grounding technique. The Soles of the Feet practice enables the individual to divert attention from an emotionally arousing thought, event or situation to an emotionally neutral part of the body.
- **Dance and music** - The calming effects of music are evident as is the use of dance to express emotion and increase endorphins, so having the opportunity to dance to a tape is something you may also wish to consider for some children as a part of this intervention.



- **Gently sitting or bouncing on a therapy ball** - Gently bouncing a sitting child on a therapy ball offers increased vestibular input and this activity helps to raise a child's arousal levels when they are feeling sluggish or slow. It brings about eye contact with the person in front of them in addition to alertness and awareness of one's own body in space. In the same sitting position, if the therapy ball is rocked front and back, it enhances the balance and postural control of the child while providing vestibular input.

Slow bouncing or slow rocking on the therapy ball for a period (specific to each child) brings about a calming effect on the child. On the other hand, fast bouncing or rocking on the therapy ball brings about alertness in a child. Bouncing can be done in a distraction free environment such as the Calm Corner with rhythmic music or rhyme that enhances the child's response to his/her surroundings.



- **Sensory trays/bins** – To make a sensory bin/tray all you need is a storage container (can be as small or as big as you would like) and material to fill the bin. You can use any of the following: sand, oatmeal, rice, dried beans, dried split peas, lentils or any combination of these. You can then take small toys such as little people, farm animals, matchbox cars, pompom balls, etc. and hide them in the bin. To find the hidden items, the child can use tools like spoons, shovels, trowels, or forks. This allows them to experience different textures with their hands and to develop skills with utensils.



- **Finger painting** - This is a good activity for developing fine motor strength, finger isolation, fine motor coordination, and for helping a child who is sensitive to messy textures. For the child who is sensitive to having his or her hands messy, offer a paper towel or rag to allow the child to wipe his or her hands as much as they need to. Finger painting does not have to be limited to just using paint; you could use pudding, sauce, peanut butter, foaming soap, shaving cream or any substance that is easily spread with fingers.



A final note

I hope that you have found this article helpful and that it will support you in setting up and effectively resourcing your Calm Corners or wellbeing spaces.

Taking the time to learn and develop your own self-regulation skills are clearly an essential as stated at the outset of this article, so please do not lose sight of that. Self-care is an essential for all of us who nurture children and young people so take the time to reflect on your own window of tolerance and keep it intact. By doing so you will then be best placed to ensure that your children and young people can do likewise.



- **Finger tracing** - Collect a series of labyrinth pictures for children to trace around. They can make up their own folders and also include some Mindful colouring activities if these are considered age appropriate.
- **Rocking chair or rocking horse** - If you have enough space for this, it can really enhance the provision and has similar effects to bouncing on the therapy ball.



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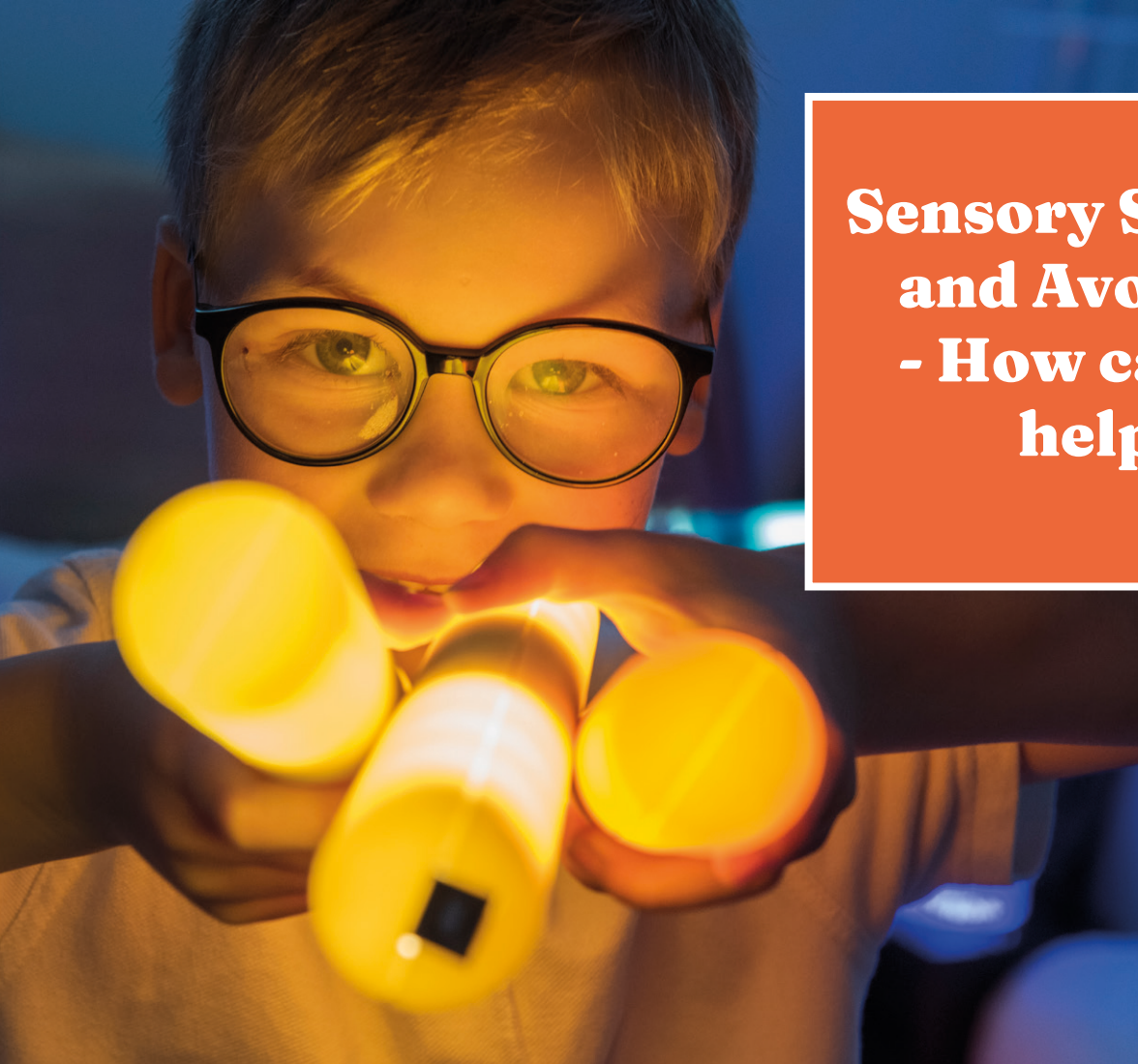
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Sensory Seekers and Avoiders - How can we help?

by Beccie Hawes

Have you ever woken up and felt not quite right? You might not be able to quite put your finger on what's going on but you probably know that you need something to achieve a feeling of balance. If we are feeling a bit flat, we might drink coffee and play the stereo in the car at its loudest to perk us up on our way to work. If we are feeling a little too bouncy, we might go for a run or stand up to do our work to use up that extra energy. Subconsciously, you could argue that we are moderating our arousal levels with some sort of sensory input. Sometimes we seek a sensory experience and sometimes we avoid. This helps us achieve a personal balance so that we are in a good place to become available for what the day throws at us.

This can often be what the pupils in our classroom do but perhaps not in such a sophisticated or socially acceptable way. Some of our pupils might rock, flap, make high pitched noises, stamp their feet and seek pressure or withdraw when touched, cover their ears and look at things using their periphery vision. Often this might be in the middle of a whole school assembly, the dining hall or a lesson. If they don't have the opportunity to self-regulate their sensory needs in order to be 'available' for learning, then we get behaviour as the pupil becomes 'full' and struggles to cope.

Here are some ideas that may help your sensory seekers and avoiders matched to their senses so that they remain available for learning:



**For Sensory Seekers
- you could offer:**

**For Sensory Avoiders
- you could offer:**

Smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of herbs and spices to smell. • Preferred smells using diffusers or fragrance samples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to preferred smells such as a sample size of perfume or aftershave. • Spaces to avoid areas that have utilised strong smelling cleaning products.
Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A kaleidoscope. • A 'Where's Wally?' book or books illustrated with lots of detail. • Fabric swatches containing small, detailed patterns. • A magnifying glass. • A mini-torch. • Different coloured overlays to look through. • Things to spin and watch such as toy cars and airplanes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardboard tubes (to look through to block out visual stimuli). • Plain fabric to drape over visually stimulating displays/resources. • Cardboard with different sized windows to look through.
Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rain maker. • Percussion instruments. • Access to personal music devices/apps that play different sound effects. • Noise making apps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ear defenders. • Ear plugs. • Earphones with noise cancellation options. • Personal music devices to block out other sounds.
Taste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of tastes and textures to explore. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaning style plates to avoid substances touching each other. • Liquidised food. • A choice.
Tactile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources for deep pressure, such as weighted resources or stretchy fabric. • Fabrics of different textures to touch and explore, e.g. velvet, silk, cotton, fleece, satin and leather. • Small objects that have different textures such as smooth pebbles, low grade and low sand paper. • The chance to learn self-massage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gloves. • The opportunity to wear looser clothing and to remove tags and labels. • Space so that the pupil is not as likely to be touched by others.
Proprioception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy work activities such as pulling the lunch box trolley. • Weighted lap pads and blankets. • Movement breaks. • Self-massage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quiet, low arousal space. • Time and space to move around so that they are less likely to bump into others or objects.
Vestibular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive swinging and bouncing activities, such as bouncing on a therapy ball or using a swing. • Opportunities to move in a variety of different ways, such as obstacle courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quiet, low arousal space.

With all of these activities, it is important to remember to:

- Consult your school's health and safety policy and risk assess as appropriate.
- Model what each experience is and discuss how and why it might help.
- Check if the pupil has any allergies or health conditions that the activity may not support.
- Offer experiences flexibly, at the right time to achieve the right state.
- Encourage the pupil to self-advocate so that they learn to recognise their own sensory needs and develop independence in matching and executing a sensory experience/activity to achieve the right personal balance.

How To Set Up A Calming Or Sensory Space In A Classroom

by Ruth Lue-Quee

The ability to deal with sensory information is a neurological process which occurs in our brains and usually happens automatically. It allows us to respond to sensory stimuli in a purposeful manner and forms the foundations for learning and behaviour. Although for a child with sensory processing difficulties their sensory systems such as their eyes and ears work as expected, they won't be able to process the information from their environment correctly in their brain. This means they can over or under respond to sensory stimuli resulting in their brain adapting their behaviour in response to the stimuli they are getting from the immediate environment. This can result in sensory seeking or avoiding behaviours.

For anybody to be available to learn, the environment both how they feel in it and how it is set up has to be conducive to learning. Maslow's hierarchy of needs also play a big part as if children haven't got their basic needs met, they won't be able to learn. For children with sensory processing difficulties, ensuring the sensory environment is 'just right' is a basic need that has to be met for them.



A sensory space

Having a sensory space within your classroom provides a safe place where children can go if the classroom environment gets too much. It doesn't need to be a separate room, and many schools don't have the budget for this. It's actually more inclusive to keep the child within the classroom but provide the additional tools and space they need to stay regulated and ready to learn. For some children, this could even be something simple such as having a sensory muff to hand with sensory items inside, dependent upon their individual needs.

As with anything, you could have the best all singing and all dancing sensory space in the world, but there's no point in having this if the adult in the room doesn't understand the 'why' behind it. It's crucially important for the adult to understand the benefit and use of the sensory space to be able to support the child using it appropriately and see impact. It shouldn't be used as a 'baby sitting area', it shouldn't be a space where an adult is directing what the child should do in it and it shouldn't be a corner with nothing in it. So, what should it be?

Let's break it down and explore sensory spaces further

Why should I have a sensory space?

A sensory space enables you to create a safe space where a child can explore the sensory environment to suit their individual needs. They may be sensory seeking or sensory avoiding and the resources in the space will help them to self-regulate, relax and develop skills through sensory exploration. A child with sensory difficulties in the classroom may struggle to focus, be fidgety and display impulsive behaviours which can impact on their learning process. Equally, a child could withdraw from the environment as it all becomes too much. A sensory space in their classroom can help these children feel focussed, comfortable and ready to learn by addressing their sensory needs.



Things to consider

- If your sensory space is to be used by more than one child, then make sure the elements within it are accessible for all children.
- You want this space to have impact on the child's well-being and motivation to learn. Therefore, the environment you create within the space should be flexible to allow you to adapt to the different needs of the child over time. Consider how are you going to be able to adapt it to meet the changing needs? This may be as simple as rotating or changing the resources in the space as required, but it's important to not view it as something fixed and be aware that changes may be needed.
- Does the child understand what the sensory space is for? Do they know how to access it? Do they know where to discover sensory items in the space? Does the child know what to do if they are struggling to self-regulate? All of these questions need to be rehearsed when the child is in a calm and regulated state, so that they then have a process to follow when / if they are in fight or flight mode and struggling to regulate.
- How will you monitor the length of time that a child spends in the sensory space? Sand timers can be a great way to monitor this, but again it will vary each time dependent upon why the child is currently using the sensory space.
- What are the triggers from the main learning environment that causes the child to need their sensory space?
- Always come back to your why – think what the purpose of this sensory space is for the individual child.



Step by step guide to setting up a sensory space

1. First of all, consider the location within your classroom. A sensory space would typically be in a quiet area, a corner of the classroom may work well, ensuring the teacher can always see the child and that the area is free from clutter.
2. Think about the 5 main senses and source products, furniture and resources that will appeal to these.



Furniture:

You want the space to be relaxing and calming so soft furnishings will help. This doesn't have to cost a lot of money. Blankets, rugs, cushions and bean bags will make it cosy. I love the large bean bag from TTS as it can be used both indoors and outdoors. If you have a larger space then soft play type furniture works really well too and is also great for physical development and children who have difficulties with their proprioception and vestibular senses.



Lighting and sound:

Ideally, a sensory space would be in a quiet area but this is not always possible in a classroom. However, you can provide noise cancelling headphones to help children block out sounds while they are in the sensory space, if this suits the needs of your unique child. The lighting would also be dim and calming, if not dark. Again this is not possible in a classroom, however a TTS pop up sensory den is the perfect solution to this as you can have it in your sensory area for children to use if they need a space with minimal light. You could also provide sunglasses or dark den making material to create a darker space. The sensory den from TTS is also portable so can be used indoors or outdoors and even taken on school trips if your child needs a sensory space when out of the classroom environment.

Mirrors add an excellent dimension to any sensory space. I love the TTS circular coloured mirrors as again they can be used indoor or outdoor and your children will love exploring the reflections and looking at themselves in them. Remember to always position items at the correct eye level for a child rather than the adult fitting them.

You could also use peg lights to turn on in your sensory space. They are fabulous because they have a peg on where you could clip sensory bits of material for your child to touch, visual cues, or photos that mean something to the child and make them feel happy. The materials you clip on could be fragranced to smells that appeal to their sensory memory – for example a familiar perfume of someone special.



Resources:

Within your sensory space you need resources suitable for the sensory needs of your child to freely explore in the space. Some of my favourite TTS items in addition to the ones above are:

- **Mark making mirror trees** – you could put these on one of the walls in the sensory space and they would act as both something tactile to do as well as a visual with the light and reflections.
- **Threading pebbles** – not only do they provide an activity for the child to explore, they also help develop fine motor skills and concentration. Use a variety of different types of pebbles for an added sensory element.
- **Weaving numbers** – As above, your child may enjoy threading the ribbon in and out of the numbers.
- **Sensory worry stones** – These are great to hold whilst doing a calming down or breathing activity.
- **Round liquid floor tiles** – These are my absolute favourite and should be on the floor of all sensory spaces! As your child steps on them or touches them the liquid dances around and it's just magical.
- **Lap buddy / calming cat** – Having a weighted soft toy for your child to stroke or place on their lap helps ground them and calm them down.

You could also include a range of sensory items such as fidget toys, lights, playdough and squeeze balls.

Visual cues:

Provide prompts and visual cues to support children whilst in the sensory space. You may have self-regulation strategies or prompt cards to help them to independently calm themselves or develop skills and explore the sensory space.

3. Once you have set up your sensory space, make sure you talk through with your child how they can use the space. Discuss a personalised plan in order to help them maintain an appropriate level of alertness. This is important so that both the child and the adult knows exactly what is expected of them within the sensory space.

Creating a sensory space provides a safe and accessible space in the classroom for children to regulate, help maintain an appropriate level of alertness and be ready to learn!

Raiding the Fridge: Sensory Resource Matching

By Beccie Hawes



Have you ever fancied a little cheeky snack whilst marking a class set of maths books but was not quite sure what the snack should be? Whenever this happens to me, I usually find myself raiding the fridge. This usually involves a delicate and scientific process of shovelling at least one large mouthful of just about everything available in the fridge into my mouth until I find the thing that satisfies my snacking urge. Although I get there in the end, there are drawbacks to this approach. The main one being that it is usually the last thing I eat that satisfies my snacking urge. This is not great because my fridge is usually full of food and results in a lot of unnecessary eating, frustration and disappointment whilst I explore and increase my calorie count to arrive at... 'just the thing'. So how does this snack based analogy link to sensory resources?



Often, in my advisory teacher capacity, I get asked about which sensory resources are needed to help pupils meet their own sensory needs. This conversation often centres around a pupil who is driving their class teachers bonkers because they fidget a lot or mess with resources when they should be sitting still, not touching and listening. Often, the school has already tried offering a sensory object that they can fiddle with during lessons, but things have not quite gone to plan. School staff have found that:

- The child has stopped using the prescribed sensory object and the unwanted behaviours have become worse.
- The sensory object worked initially but appears to have stopped working now – sometimes it has turned into something to throw!
- Everyone is a little more frustrated as nothing has changed.

When we give a child a sensory resource we always do it from a good place. We want to give the pupil something that will help them to regulate their sensory needs so that they are able to access learning. If it works well everyone, including the child’s class, teacher feels better – case solved! However, for many reasons such as resource budget, time constraints, resource availability and perhaps a limited understanding of what the deeper need that the pupil is trying to meet is, we have a one size fits all approach. We give a generic resource such as a tangle. The pupil initially likes it, but soon the novelty wears off, the pupil stops using it and nothing is different.

So, what do we do? The answer lies in allowing the pupil to metaphorically raid the fridge.

Here are some things to reflect upon that will help you to help your pupils achieve the right balance and get the most from the sensory resources that we provide:

1. We need to understand what underlying need the pupil is attempting to satisfy with a potentially sensory based behaviour. Talk to the pupil to gain an understanding of their needs and explore when and where the sensory behaviours take place to look for patterns and triggers. For example, if the pupil is constantly fiddling with something, perhaps fidgeting, tapping or making their own noises, could this be a way of keeping their body busy so that they can concentrate on the teacher’s instructions?
2. What are we trying to achieve from the introduction of a sensory resource? What do you and the pupil want to be different? How do they want to feel when they use the resource?
3. It is important to develop a hypothesis in partnership with the pupil and test this by providing a range of sensory resources that might meet the pupil’s sensory need and reflect upon what we learn from the introduction and impact of each resource. Are things better or worse? What does the pupil seem to prefer?
4. Consider timing. When is a good time for the pupil to use that resource so that it has the greatest impact?
5. Provide variety and choice so that the ‘novelty’ factor can be utilised to encourage use.



The most important thing to remember is to let the pupil ‘raid the fridge’. Ask them to experiment with different options to find what works best for them and when to use it. Be willing to try out a number of different types of the same resource. After all, we may like a cheeky nibble on a slice of cheese but, on some days and we may not know it at the time, only a slice of ham will do!





Sensory Spaces and Calming Areas

By Rachel Gelder and Pamela Hanigan

Calming Cube

Our school, like many others, is seriously lacking in available spaces for children with sensory or behavioural needs to be able to 'escape' from the overload they can frequently feel within a busy, working classroom.

The 'Pop-Up Sensory Space' from TTS – or the 'Calming Cube' as it has affectionately come to be known at Lytham CE Primary School – has provided a welcome and effective solution to this need.

The 'calming cube' should ideally be located in an area of school which is away from classrooms and, if possible, corridors. As this is a 'pop-up' solution, it can be easily moved to fit in with the changing needs of children within school. We opted for the white version of the cube as this blended far more easily within our school

environment.

When placing the cube, consideration should be given to providing somewhere that affords the child using it some privacy and reduced stimulation, but also ensures that any disruption to other children is kept to a minimum. Our 'calming cube' is now an essential multi-use and valuable resource which supports, not only sensory needs, but also acts as a nurture area. This appealing and comfortable space also provides an area where additional learning can go on, such as small phonics groups.

Resources

The 'Emotions Faces Interactive Rug' from TTS provides a great base for our 'calming cube'. We have also placed a selection of cushions of different textures within this. Emotions cushions could also be used as an alternative. Lighting has also been added, however is not used with all children as although it can be calming for some, it can act as a stimulant for others.

We have put together a number of resources to support children who use the calming cube. These are in the form of a series of boxes kept in a storage unit nearby. They each have their own unique function and related resources. For us, these are: calming, emotional regulation and frustration/anger. Obviously, these can be adapted for the needs of your own setting and often resources are transferable.



Calm in the Classroom

Due to the success of the calming cube in our school, we have developed 'calm areas' within each classroom. These are a 'potted' version of the calming cube and follow the same principles and use the same resources. Additionally, we have found that using a Sound Field System, which filters out background noise, has contributed to the calm 'feel' of the classroom.

Whilst the 'calming cube' has provided a space saving solution to our need as a school for a sensory space, the principles behind it have had a wider impact, helping us to create a 'calm school'.



Creating a Sensory Space: More Than a Beanbag and a Bubble Tube

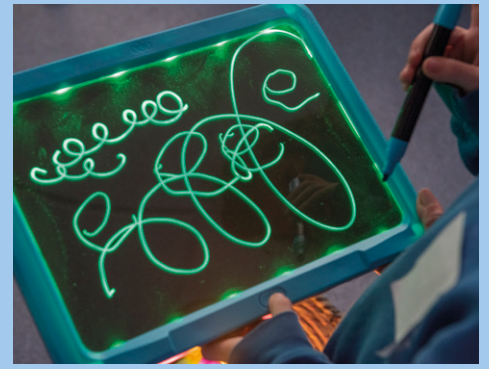
by Beccie Hawes



A well designed and used sensory room can offer many benefits such as:

- Providing a calming, safe space for a pupil to self-regulate their sensory needs and emotions.
- Offering a fun space in which pupils can explore and learn through their senses.
- Creating an environment in which pupils can filter out and retreat from the many distractions and busyness of a school setting.
- Offering a range of sensory experiences to help a pupil who is feeling a bit flat to 'perk up'.
- Becoming a valuable, immersive teaching tool and stimulus for learning by providing different environments for a pupil to experience.

A purpose built sensory room is a real luxury item and can be an extremely valuable tool in your arsenal for being able to provide pupils with a safe haven and a dedicated space to learn. When I say sensory room, I am thinking about those amazing discrete rooms we will have seen in glossy catalogues. Those with amazing resources such as interactive lighting and sound options, a bubble tube, beanbags, projections, fibre optics, smells, textured wall panels, a swing and so much more!



However, it could also be argued that a sensory room can have limitations and drawbacks linked to its set up or how it is viewed.

This could include:

- If the setup is 'fixed' meaning that you can't always create the environment that is required to exactly match a child's immediate needs.
- The room itself can be expensive – budget is a barrier.
- Availability and staffing sometimes means the room is not available when it is needed, or a member of staff may not be available to facilitate use.
- The room can be hijacked to become an intervention space ... suddenly a phonics poster appears!
- Underuse - curriculum and teaching time demands can make it difficult for staff to allow children to withdraw to the sensory room.
- Staff confidence or knowledge about how to use the room can make it inaccessible.
- Misconceptions about how the sensory room is used may mean that it is deployed as somewhere to send the 'naughty' pupils or when children are angry and need to calm down. This does not fully utilise its potential.

Offering a discrete place with perhaps the obligatory beanbag and bubble tube is a positive start but does not always fulfil the needs of our pupils. Consequently, some sensory rooms can become a bit of a white elephant that gathers dust – a wasted opportunity.

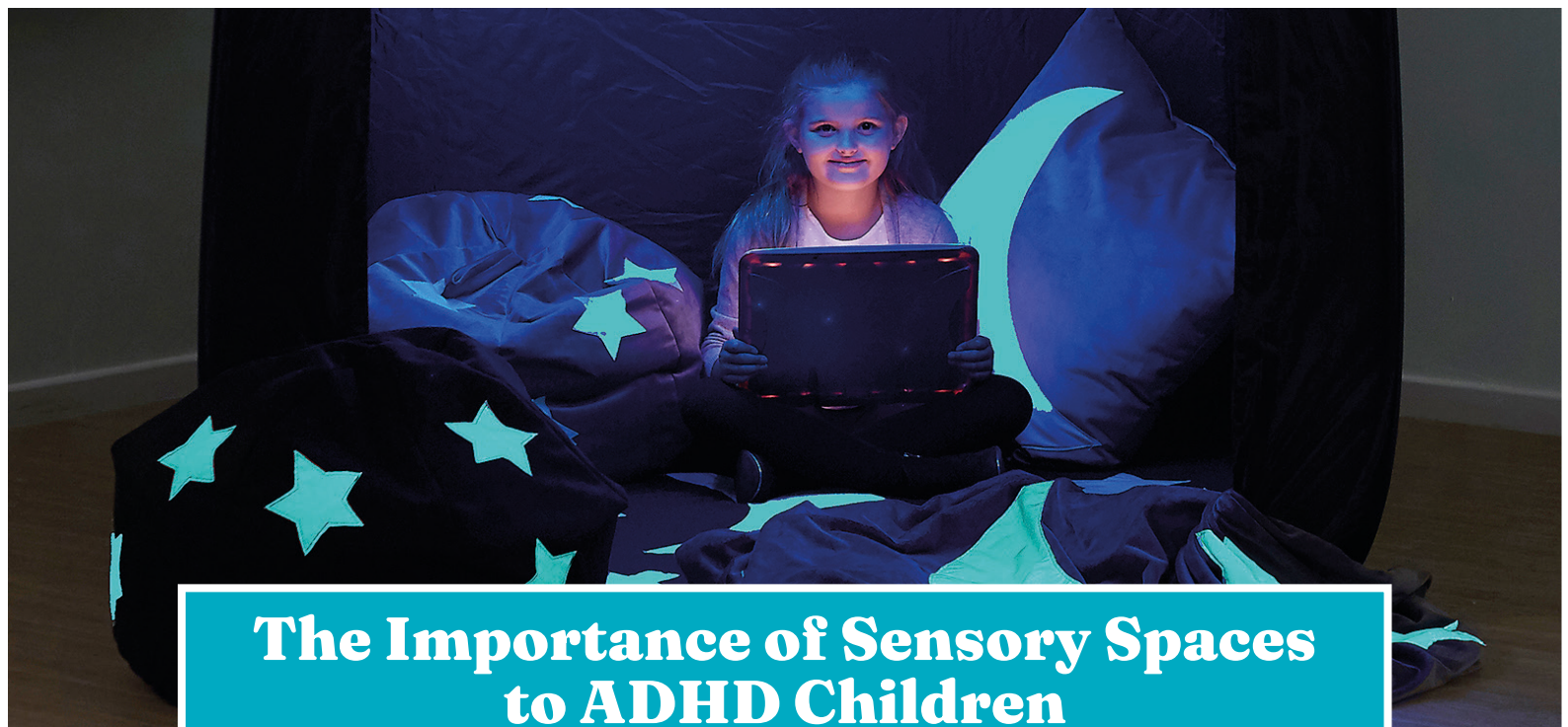
Perhaps, when we think that we would like a sensory room, we should consider developing

a flexible, moveable sensory space that offers a buffet of sensory experiences as opposed to a fixed sensory menu.

When we create a sensory room or space we should give careful consideration to the following:

- **Benefits and experience** – What experience do we want our pupils to have? What do we want our pupils to get out of using the space? Ultimately, how will it help them?
- **Flexibility** - How flexible, portable and easy to assemble/disassemble is the space?
- **Location** – Ensure the space is easy to access for the pupils and in terms of supervision, as appropriate.
- **How and when the space will be used** - Can pupils access it as and when required, or will they need permission or an agreed time?
- **Staff confidence and knowledge** - what do staff need to know and understand to ensure that the right pupils access the space at the right time, in the right way and with the right resources?
- **Teaching and learning opportunities** - Is the space purely to support sensory needs or to offer a different way of accessing the curriculum or is it even both?
- **The senses** - Are all of the senses catered for?
- **Choices and options** - Does the space offer choices so that pupils can explore to find out what best meets their needs?

Whatever you use and however you create your sensory space we should always remember that it is the pupil's needs and experience of the sensory space that counts.



The Importance of Sensory Spaces to ADHD Children

By Andrew Whitehouse

As an ADHD adult, I have all too many memories from my childhood of feeling the need to hide away from the sensory experiences that might be thrown at me any given day. I used to take solace in the strangest of places. It could be the cupboard under the stairs, the long unused coal bunker, or my absolute favourite, I would get all my pals (Jacko the Monkey, Action Man, and a few random teddies), climb into bed and pull the nylon sheets over my head to create a calm and reduced sensory environment. Here I felt safe and the rest of the world couldn't get to me.

Nowadays, I work with ADHD children, their teachers, and their families, and I find myself recommending similar strategies to the ones I employed as a child. You see, often one of the most prominent features of ADHD is hyperactivity, and one of the major difficulties with hyperactivity is that it is a 24-hour situation. It is unerring and relentless. So, this means that we need to find strategies for children to access, not only during the daytime, but during the night-time as well.

So, let's start with what happens during the daytime.

During the day, most children find themselves at school and when they are at school, however happy they are, they are in an alien environment. It is not their home, it's full of other people, and is potentially quite loud and hyper stimulating. As a result, some of our more vulnerable ADHD children need time out during lessons. This often involves going to sit in a corridor to calm down, going to another classroom or spending time with a trusted adult. All of which are a break for them, of sorts. But in some cases, something quite special needs to be put in place.

A sensory space, where effective movement breaks can happen.

So, what does a good sensory space look like?

Well, we've come a long way since disused coal bunkers, and there are lots of fantastic resources available on the market. But before we start, we need to find a place to create the space. This preferably needs to be a quiet area in the school (or home if that is the case), and you can then put in a pop-up sensory space or pod.



The smaller sensory pods are great for one child, maybe one who prefers to relax on their own, whereas the larger sensory space can accommodate two or more children. A very useful resource if you have an ADHD child with a peer mentor, or one who simply just needs company during their time out or movement break.

However, just having a space is not enough for an ADHD child to reduce their anxiety and hyperactivity, and therefore experience a state of calm. You see, hyperactivity in ADHD is all about doing, and so we would need to put some tactile, and sensory resources in place to fully meet their physical and neurological needs.

Suitable resources could include something really simple like a colour changing sensory cube. Obviously, these can just be running in the background, or can be used as an interactive resource. I once saw a child cutting up paper fish and sticking them to the cube to create an aquarium. It completely transfixed him.



Sensory balls to create a ball pit can also be fun. In a non-challenging and safe environment, your ADHD child can dive into the balls, throw them around, and burn off some of that hyperactive energy in a controlled way.

And how about a giant bean bag too. These great resources are fabulous for letting off steam. You can roll on them, fall onto them, lie face down or relax face up. And again, crucially, make the most of that all important movement break.

But what about bedtime?

ADHD is a 24-hour condition, and hyperactivity doesn't go to sleep at bedtime, and quite often, neither does the child. But ADHD children (and adults), still get tired like everybody else. One of the pieces of advice I give is to make the bed into a sensory space. If you can't sleep ... rest your body. But for an ADHD child to lie there and relax, they are going to need something to focus upon. This could include a vibrating cushion, peg lights, or a glow

in the dark comfort blanket. All things that you can float off while looking at.

**The key... be creative.
You will be astounded
at some of the things
you can achieve for
an ADHD child with a
sensory space.**

The limits are limitless!



Outdoor Calming and Sensory Spaces

By Ruth Lue-Quee

A sensory space is a practical and effective way to provide a calming and safe space for children with autism and other special educational needs. Sensory spaces are often thought of as being a room inside. Many schools and classrooms have a sensory space, however an outdoor sensory space is less common and yet the outdoors in itself provides an amazing sensory experience.

Historically, being around nature and outdoors is how we as humans lived our lives. Our grandparents, great-grandparents and ancestors spent so much more time exploring, working and enjoying being outside. Even today when we are outside, we are surrounded by telephones, technology and not switching off. As a generation up to 90% of our time is spent indoors. This means we are only giving 10% of our time to be outdoors.

Being outdoors has many benefits for all children.

It is vital to improve well-being, it is calming, peaceful, and allows us to tune in with ourselves and the world around us. For our children it is vital for supporting their brain development. By exploring with their senses, for example touching flowers, listening to the birds, feeling droplets of water and smelling the fresh air, they are strengthening the connections in their brain. A sensory space and experience allows children to become more aware of one's self, promotes mindfulness, self-regulation and builds resilience as well as many cognitive benefits. A sensory space outdoors can spark both sensory experiences that the child creates themselves by interacting with something, or can be a constant sensory experience that is

heightened by the sensory properties of being outdoors.

In addition to the benefits above, for children with SEND a sensory space outdoors can help them to feel calm and provide a safe space to gain rest and respite when the environment within the classroom gets too much.

When setting up a sensory space, the key question to ask yourself is why? Why am I setting this up? What do I want my child to gain from being in this space and how will it support them?

Each space, school and student is unique and the sensory space you create should also be unique to the individual children in your care. Ultimately you want to create a space that gives children the freedom to explore the environment for themselves, using all of their senses.



This summer I had the pleasure of working with TTS Special Direct to create a calming sensory outdoor space and I'm going to share with you below my top tips to follow to create your own!

I wanted to create an area that would stimulate all the primary senses - sight, touch, smell, sound and taste but also provide a calming retreat to be in. It's important to highlight that having a sensory space is fantastic, but it's what happens in the space that is really important for supporting our children and young people. The role of a skilled and understanding adult is crucial - knowing when to step in, when to observe, when to reason and talk and equally as important, when not to do these things in the sensory space.

Sight

Light is a big factor in creating any sensory experience, but with being outdoors you have the added bonus of natural sunlight to really hone in on this sense.

- To add light into the sensory area I used a range of coloured mirrors, which I attached to the shed at different heights. They create a gorgeous reflection and my little boy absolutely loves running up to them and spotting himself.
- I also used old CDs which I hung from a tree. When these are hung, they make the most gorgeous reflections in the trees. By painting them and adding sparkly bits again adds another sensory dimension. You could place some lower down on a wall or glue some to a wooden board to make something tactile with light for your child to explore.
- I added TTS peg lights which are brilliant for creating a stimulating area on a grey day. I also clipped on different sensory bits of material to take off and explore when in the sensory space.
- You don't have to, but I wanted to put a theme to the outdoor sensory space and really enhance the woodland area so I put up a woodland fabric backdrop and added little toadstools and fairy houses into the borders to inspire and ignite my child's imagination too.

Tactile

The use of sensory resources can help children to develop a range of skills such as hand-eye co-ordination, fine and gross motor skills, and communication. Having something to feel, touch and do in the sensory space is also key for self-regulation.

Being outdoors in the sensory space boosts well-being which is vital for social and emotional mental health, and this coupled with the carefully selected sensory resources make for a perfect combination!

The items I used to stimulate touch were:

- Mark making mirror trees which children can draw on as well as see their reflection in.
- Wooden leaf mark making boards.
- Sensory floor tiles – these were amazing and I loved walking over them myself!
- For a DIY hack I also created a sensory board. This was simply a piece of wooden board which I glued items on to that I had around the house or from the DIY store.

Sound

Depending on whether a child is sensory seeking or sensory avoiding sound, the sensory space created caters to both. It is in a secluded, outdoor area with very little noise other than natural elements such as trees blowing or birds. This makes it the perfect environment for a child who is sensory avoiding as it is calm and quiet. However, I also included resources which would suit a child who was sensory seeking sound.

- I used the funky junkyard music frame, which is a big hit with my little boy who loves making his own sounds using the frame.
- I also created a music wall using wind chimes, recycled crates and pipes, boomwhackers, as well as pots, pans etc.
- Water is really calming and a great sensory play. It also makes a very relaxing sound so I created a water wall to go in the sensory space. A child can listen to the water trickle down, watch it or simply play with it.

Smell / Taste

In order to ignite this sense in the sensory space, I planted a variety of scented or edible plants. Herbs are particularly beneficial as they can have real effects on the body and mind when their scents are inhaled, such as rosemary can help ease fatigue and lavender helps you relax. Plants I recommend for this are lavender, mint, rosemary and basil.

Also... consider seating and soft furnishings

In addition to the above, I think it's really important to have a range of calming seating and lying down areas within the sensory space.

- The large beanbag from TTS is perfect for providing a cosy place for children to lie down and relax.
- If children prefer to be sat up right, or want to perhaps draw or write something I used old cable reels to create a DIY table and chairs and decorated them as toadstools to stick with the woodland theme.





Having an enclosed space is also important for children who may wish to have a smaller area, feel more enclosed, or be in darker light. The willow hut is perfect for this as is the portable sensory den. I added some sensory lights into the den to provide an additional sensory element, but this could be added or removed dependent upon the needs of your child.

Anything else?

As I mentioned previously, having a space with wonderful things is brilliant and children have the freedom to explore everything around them, but it's also important to provide mini tactile sensory items for your child to use whilst in the space. I therefore set up an outdoor box which contained threading pebbles, weaving numbers and sensory worry stones, that can all be taken out and used as required.

Setting up a sensory space can seem a really daunting task, but once you get started you will see all the opportunities around you in nature. Focus on the five primary senses and use the space you have to incorporate as many different sensory areas as you can.

Sensory Spaces: Design, Plan and Create

by Catherine Jewkes



We all know the numerous benefits of a well-equipped sensory space, from helping children to calm and regulate to offering a space for important skill development. They are becoming increasingly popular, but it can sometimes be tricky to know where to start and what to include.

The important thing to remember is that there is no 'set' sensory room. It needs to be a space that works for you and is based on the needs of the children who will visit.

At TTS, we recently had the opportunity to collaborate with a school to design, plan and create their new sensory environment. This article explores the approach that we took which will hopefully help you if you are on a similar journey.

1. What is the purpose?

Just as we do with most things in school, we had to understand the 'why' (the intent) for the space before we moved on to 'how' we would do it. So, we needed to find out:

- Why does the school want a sensory space?
- What do they want children to gain or benefit from when using the space?

Staff were clear. They wanted an integrated space within their nurture provision for children to calm, regulate and use their senses to explore and develop new skills such as communication and social skills.

2. Where will the sensory space be?

Next, we set off looking for the perfect location. It needed to be accessible, quiet, cosy, offer privacy but also offer enough space for multiple children to experience and learn together.

We decided on a corner within the nurture provision so that children could use the space both during and outside of their nurture sessions.

3. What furniture do we need?

After deciding purpose and location, we then moved onto decisions about furniture. To help us, we kept in mind how we wanted children to use the space. For example, did they need a table and chair to sit at? Did they need soft seating? And would we need a dark den?

We thought about:

- Tables and chairs
- Soft seating, such as beanbags or cushions
- Rugs and floor coverings
- A sensory den or pop up space
- Storage including baskets or bookcases for self selection

We started with a huge wish list and then put the resources in priority order. We all know things can be quite costly and creating a sensory space can often be a project over time.



4. What resources do we need?

This was definitely the most exciting part of the process. We wanted to create a space with resources that prompted interaction, exploration and offered lots of different sensory experiences.

So, we considered:

- Light and Colour – From low level lighting to bright lighting, we included lots of different visual and light experiences, such as a hurricane tube, fibre optics, a sparkle rug, light up cushions, glow resources, and illumi light up writing boards. By offering a range of both bright and neutral resources, staff and children could tailor the sensory experience based on individual needs and preferences.

- Sound and Texture – Different textures were added through soft furnishings, seating and tactile resources, such as fidgets, so that there was a choice for children. For some children sound can be a really important aspect of their sensory experience, so we considered resources that could be used to create different sounds, such as instruments, rainsticks, etc.

- Weight and Vibration – We know the benefit that weighted resources can bring and how calming they can be for some children, so we included weighted lap buddies and vibrating cushions to add more opportunities to explore.

As well as considering the sensory aspects above, we also ensured there were resources for collaboration, interaction and that would support communication and social skills.

5. Set it up, step back and see the impact

After setting up the space, the most rewarding part was definitely taking a step back and watching as staff and pupils came to visit for the first time. We saw the children smile, engage and become completely engrossed in the space and resources.

With one pupil, let's call him B, the moment was best summed up by his speech and language therapist:

“We often don't really know how B is feeling, but today we knew for certain that he felt safe, content and happy ... to see him slowly explore the environment and interact with his peers was incredibly moving.”

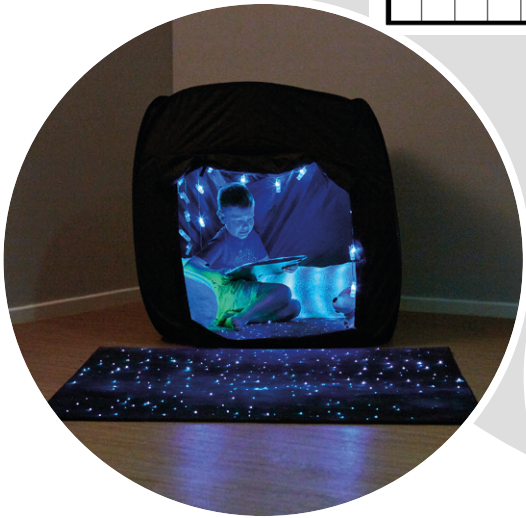
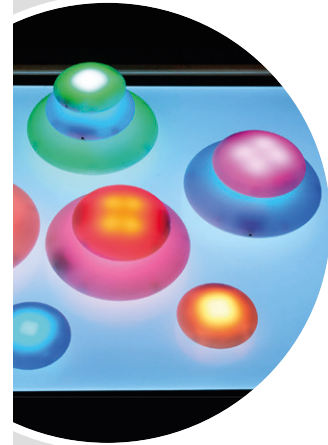
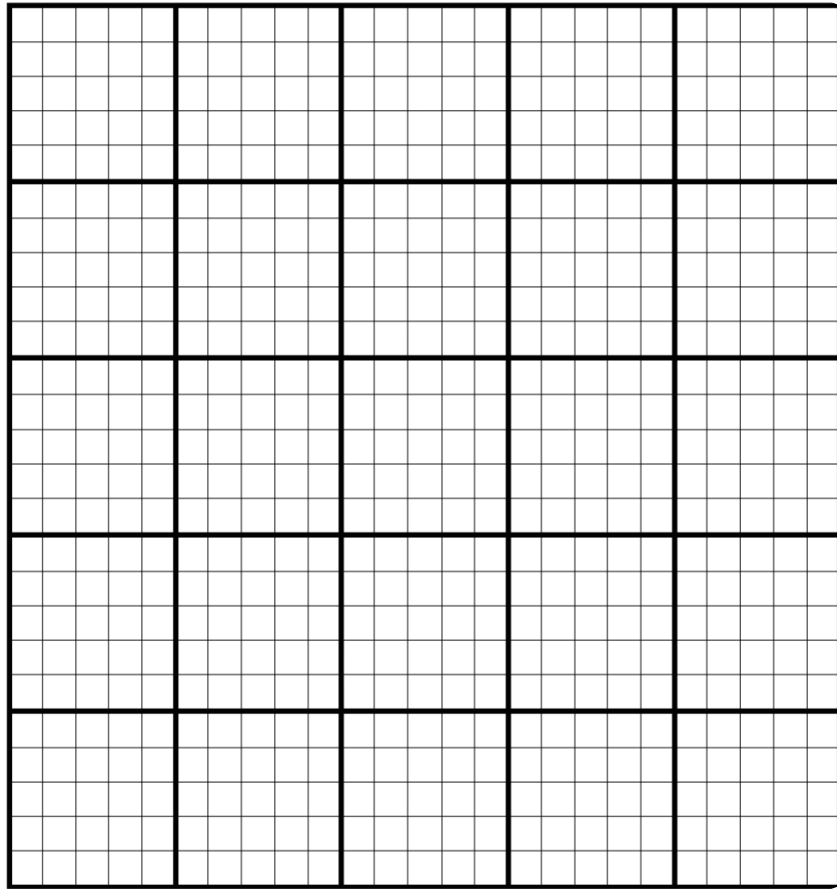
The power of a sensory space is so hard to explain in words, but when you see how the children explore, grow in confidence and feel calm, that is the magical moment when you see the real potential.

Here are a few words from the school staff that hopefully express the impact that a space like this can have:

“Thank you so much for giving the children such a wonderful sensory experience.”

“I absolutely can't wait to use the equipment. It will give us so many opportunities to communicate and learn.”

“The resources will make such a difference to the lives of these children, to us as a staff and to their families. Thank you, seems such an insignificant word to use, but ... thank you so much.”





Sensory Needs - Self-Monitoring and Regulation

By Beccie Hawes

Are you alright?

We often ask this simple question as part of our greeting. We ask it to show interest and be polite. To point out the obvious, for the question recipient to successfully answer if they are alright or not, we are relying on them being able to know how they are feeling and have the vocabulary to express themselves. We are also placing upon them the responsibility of knowing how to manage that feeling independently perhaps by deploying some sort of self-management strategy. This is self-monitoring and regulation. Self-monitoring is checking in with yourself so that you can recognise how you are. Self-regulation involves acting upon your findings from self-monitoring and then responding in order to control your own feelings, emotions and behaviour. They require the ability to pay attention to relevant stimuli and then respond accordingly.

Pupils who have developed the ability to self-monitor and regulate are often able to:

- Remain calm in their response to stimuli,
- Remain more focussed,
- Manage their own behaviour,
- Demonstrate task organisation, maintenance and completion skills,
- Have sound self-knowledge,
- Have self-efficacy,
- Be more resilient,
- Delay gratification – show self-control,
- Be emotionally literate.



If we are unable to self-monitor and regulate effectively, we may perceive that something is threatening which can force us into survival mode. Our pupils might then show us this by entering into a state of:

- Fight – an angry, aggressive response to stimuli,
- Flight – running away and withdrawing from a situation,
- Flock – seeking like-minded others to form a tribe. There is safety in numbers,
- Freeze – not being able to do anything and disassociating from the situation.

When we put this into a sensory context, our pupils may find that they need to seek or avoid sensory experiences in order to feel 'right' or to filter their learning environment. This is about managing their arousal levels so that they can concentrate on learning. This can impact upon behaviour. We use our senses to survive. If we feel that our senses are out of balance, we enter survival mode and our behaviours can alter accordingly. So, to avoid this we need to think about how we can help our pupils to:

- Develop the ability to recognise where they are at in the moment.
- Recognise when their feelings, thoughts, behaviours and responses to stimuli are beginning to change by spotting early warning signs.
- Know their own triggers.
- Have a vocabulary to share how they are feeling.
- Have a range of well-rehearsed strategies that can be deployed independently.



To achieve this, we need to remember that everything that we explore around self-monitoring and regulation must be taught and regularly rehearsed when the pupil is having a good day, is calm, happy and ready. The analogy that it is too late to teach a drowning person to swim is helpful here!

This is where a very simple self-monitoring and regulation chart, developed in partnership with the pupil, can be really helpful. Depending on the pupil's sensory needs it might look something like this:

	How are my senses?	Looks like	Feels Like	I can
Not Okay	Mixed up – I have too much energy and I can't concentrate! I have stopped hearing what other people are saying to me.	I am out of my seat and I am touching everything whilst I move around the room. I am flapping my hands – lots!	I'm a police sniffer dog. I need to move and touch everything but fast. I feel like there is a washing machine in my tummy and my heart is beating super-fast.	Do ten big star jumps. Run on the spot for three minutes. Visit the sensory space.
Changing	I need to move more and it might get out of control.	My legs are jigging and I am tapping my pencil on the table.	There are ants crawling on and in my body. I am accelerating like a sports car.	Use my weighted lap pad. Complete my special slow breathing activities.
Okay	They feel just right.	I am doing my work like the rest of the class.	Smile and enjoy it!	Keep checking in to spot if something is starting to change.

The most important part of this kind of chart is supporting the pupil to recognise that their response to a stimulus may be beginning to change: self-monitoring. This is so that they become proactive in independently deploying a strategy before the big responses kick in: self-regulating. Finally, it is good practice to:

- Personalise and develop strategies in partnership.

Each column of this chart should be tailored to the pupil, their perception of their sensory response, how it makes them feel and strategies that work.

- We should use the vocabulary that the pupil prefers so that it is meaningful to them.
- Praise all attempts to try to spot when things are changing and to act accordingly.

- Share with the pupil's permission so that everyone can offer support.
- Be prepared to try a range of strategies to see what works best.
- Keep the chart as visual as possible with pictures and colour.
- Have the chart visible to the pupil at all times.
- Check in regularly



