**Sensory Processing Strategies for Early Years Settings**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sensory Area – Tactile/Touch | |
| If the child does this… | It might be the child needs: |
| Avoids holding hands with adult or other children | Use a no-pressure approach and allow child to watch from a distance when their peers are taking part in hand holding games |
| See if the child will tolerate you holding on to their sleeve or arm |
| Expose the child to a variety of different tactile experiences e.g. wiggly toys, water play |
| Withdraws from a cuddle | Build up fun interaction on a 1:1 with the child with no touching involved |
| Experiment with a variety of different touch for example try a firmer hug rather then light touch or vice versa |
| Use objects instead of ‘skin to skin’ contact e.g. roll a ball over their hand/body |
| Finds a ‘light touch’ uncomfortable or play is rough with other children or adults | Use deep pressure massage techniques |
| Provide deep pressure with blankets, weighted toys |
| Create opportunities for rough and tumble play in an area where the child can play safely |
| Strips off clothes | Remove tags from clothes |
| Experiment with different materials |
| Have light shorts and tshirts in case the child is too hot |
| Finds nappy change distressing | Ensure mat is not cool and place a towel underneath the child when changing them |
| Allow the child to play with a toy and use preferred stories or songs |
| Walks on tip-toes | Foot massage with different objects/textures |
| Gentle pressure to the child’s shoulders to encourage them onto the full foot |
| Feet painting |
| Bare feet play in sand, water etc. |
| Avoids messy play | Incorporate familiar toys into messy play. Use a car in the paint tray |
| Do messy play with toys e.g. let bear get messy |
| Build up exposure to different textures gradually |
|  |
| Sensory Area – Smell and Taste | |
| Dislikes smells | Encourage child to smell food related activities e.g. snack time, highlight the smell of the blackcurrant juice and another child’s special biscuits. Make it a positive think “mmm this biscuit smells sweet!” |
| Smells people, seeks out smells | Encourage child to sniff adult’s wrists often this helps to identify the person better due to fragrances worn. It is also more appropriate to sniff here |
| Encourage writing skills by using fragrant pens/crayons |
| Use strong smelling objects, playdough, material with perfume |
| Limited diet | Expose child to lots of different foods but with no pressure to eat |
| Encourage the child to touch, smell and put tongue to the food |
| Eats non-food items or chews on everything | When child attempts to bite into a non-food item intervene and replace with a small food item |
| Use chewable toys |
| Bites people | Use chewable toys |
| Provide ice cubes to suck on |
| Use an electric toothbrush to gently stimulate the gums |
|  |
| Sensory Area - Vision | |
| Holds objects close to his/her eye (Some children find holding their toys closely to their eye helps them to filter out any irrelevant information and focus on what is important to them) | Ensure eye sight has been checked |
| Have a range of visual toys – lights, fibre optic, flashing, spinning and see what the child is attracted to |
| Encourage interaction with cause and effect visual toys |
| Use less visually stimulating environment when trying to engage and teach |
| Avoids eye contact | Sit side by side to talk |
| Gradually encourage the child to look at your chin when talking to you |
| Seeks out spinning toys | Provide opportunities to play with spinning toys |
| Incorporated spinning in play activities gradually expanding activities e.g. roll it down then….spin until less emphasis is on the spinning and more emphasis in on the function the toy should serve. |
| Engage and interact by enjoying the spinning and commenting with simple language |
|  |
| Sensory Area - Hearing | |
| Covers ears or avoids noises | Noise cancelling headphones |
| Introduce very gradual exposure to noise |
| Encourage the child to turn the noise on (often the unpredictability is what causes the anxiety) |
| Provide opportunities for quiet time in a calmer place |
| Reduce language, volume |
|  |
| Sensory Area – Proprioception, Movement, Vestibular | |
| Climbs | Divert child to more appropriate large play equipment when shows a desire to climb |
| reinforcing ‘No climbing here’ with visuals |
| Seeks rocking motion | Engage child in lap play e.g. row the boat, going to the seaside, roley poley song etc |
| Use of a large child sized ball (gym ball) encourage child to lay body over it and push back and forth with feet on the floor to encourage rocking motion. Again use of a song can help to keep them engaged |
| Play games where spinning is part of the fun! E.g. ring a roses, pin the tail on the donkey! Read books with actions that involve swirling around |
| Constantly on the move | Provide child with regular bursts of gross motor play. Use of soft-play/run around in between sit down sessions/bounce on a trampoline. |
| Pulling and pushing activities using appropriate materials e.g. Lycra bands |
| Oblivious to obstacles and people (crashes through and over!) | Place the odd obstacle in the child’s area to allow the child to acknowledge these items and learn to guide himself around them |
| Play games where the child has to negotiate their way around an obstacle course, using stepping stones and different surfaces |
| Play ‘We’re going on a bear hunt’ |
| Incorporate heavy muscle work activities (see below) |

**Proprioception and Vestibular – Heavy Work**

**Wall Stands**

Ask the child to stand with her back and heels against the wall and stand really straight – check if she can keep her back and head against the wall – if not she could be struggling with her vestibular senses – help her to push her back and head against the wall and hold for a few seconds.

**Push the Wall Away**

Tell her the room feels too small today and we need to push the walls away. Facing the wall, take a big step back and place both palms on the wall and push hard for a few seconds, repeat 3 times

**Wheelbarrow**

Holding the child’s feet encourage her to walk on her hands for a short distance

**Weighted Backpack**

Fill a backpack or box with heavy items such as books. Ensure the bag is not too heavy (ie make sure the child can still stand up straight while wearing it or in the case of the box that she is not straining to lift it).

Challenge her to walk to an end point and back (time her if this is more motivating)

Challenge her to carry a box around a set route and pick up items on the way –bag or box will get heavier as she goes

Challenge her to do an activity while wearing the backpack e.g. throw beanbags into a bucket, draw a picture, play skittles etc…

**Delivery Girl**

As above but use the game that she is a delivery girl and must deliver items to and pick up items from certain staff members

**Tug of War**

Use a rope or piece of material and pull either end (make sure there is no obstacle behind her)

**Hot Dogs**

The child lies at one end of a blanket and is rolled up (always ensure she can breathe, her head is out of the blanket)

**Funny Walks**

Practice funny walks - crab walk, frog jumps, army crawl, roll a ball and race to crawl after it

**Row Row Row Your Boat**

Play and sing Row Row Row your boat – encourage her to sit legs apart and move back and forward with the song

**Upside Down**

Encourage her to have short periods of being upside down – support her in a head stand, use the couch to support her legs or hang from a climbing frame



**The following activities stimulate the vestibular and proprioceptive senses but require equipment**

Trampolining – bouncing

Swing – swinging

Climbing frame – climbing, hanging from hands, hanging **upside down**

Space hopper – bouncing

Weighted blanket, scarf or cushion – deep pressure

Sensory Compression Blanket or sensory body sock – self regulation

.