

Strategies To Try Video Script

Welcome to the GGC Occupational Therapy service video about sensory strategies. This video will tell you about changes you can make to the environment to help your child or young person. This could make it easier for them to join in with activities they want or need to do. You can watch our other videos which explain sensory processing and our 8 senses.

There are lots of different strategies which might be useful. We will talk about a few which might be useful for each sense.

Vision:

If your child doesn't like bright lights try letting them wear sunglasses or a hat to help them filter out light. Schools can try special light diffusers for strip lighting and you can experiment with different types of lighting to see what helps. If your child is distracted by lots going on around them, think about what changes you can make to the environment. Having an area at home or at school with no clutter or distractions can be useful for doing homework or playing. If your child need lots of visual input, try using bright light or coloured paper to help them focus.



Hearing:

If your child is very upset by the noise of washing machine or Hoover, it can be helpful to tell them before you are going to do it. This gives them time to move away or cover their ears. To begin with, it might be easier to do it when they are not at home.

If they become upset by an unexpected noise when you are out, give reassurance. Let them know you understand they are finding things difficult. You can also do this if they become overwhelmed by background noise when you are out and about. It's always best to have a plan for these situations. Have a think about what might help before you go out. Listening to music they like or putting their hands over their ears can help. Try to have things with you that your child likes. This could be chewy or crunchy food, a favourite piece of clothing or a toy. This will hopefully make them feel safe and help them cope with the noise and help them enjoy the activity.



It is good to have opportunities to get used to different noises. This will help your child to take part in lots of different activities. Think about the purpose of your visit. If you need to go to the supermarket can you shop without them or shop online? If this is not possible try going at a quieter time. Check with the supermarket if they have quiet hours. Plan shorter outings only to experience different noises. You can then leave if you need to without the stress of trying to shop at the same time. Going into a room first and letting noise build up around us or going in last can help. Remember, having a plan of what you are going to do for tricky times is important. It can help make these times less stressful for you both. Start with things they are comfortable with and introduce them to different experiences gradually. The more successful these experiences, the more confident you and your child will be to try new things. This will help them develop, make progress and stay healthy.

Touch:

Some people process touch differently. We can help by giving lots of opportunities to play with different textures. We can cut labels off clothes or wear socks inside out if seams are uncomfortable. You can also try seamless socks. If hair washing or cutting is difficult you could try using massage or deep pressure before the activity. You can try distraction with a sensory strategy your child or young person enjoys for example chewing on something, or use music or watching something until the activity is finished. Having a definite beginning and end can be helpful so telling your child or young person you will be finished by the time you count to 10 or by the time you finish singing a song. You could also use timers so that they can 'see' time passing. Many children don't know how long 1 minute is so using a visual support can help them with this.



Taste and smell:

If we process taste differently we can help support our child or young person by making sure we offer foods we know they will eat or 'safe foods'. We can then offer them the opportunity to try different foods at meal and snack time. Eating meals together is also helpful. Your child can see you eating and enjoying different foods. Involve them in meal preparation and serving food without pressure to eat the food. If smell is an issue, making sure your child has a hankie with a preferred smell can help. Or have preferred smell on an item of clothing. This takes lots of time and patience and change doesn't happen overnight. There is more information on the KIDS website.



Proprioception:

Some people process proprioception differently. Giving extra feedback to the muscles and joints through pushing and pulling can be good. This helps to activate or 'wake up' the muscles and joints. This could be carrying a shopping bag, or get them to do warm up exercises like pushing against a wall or push ups. Some children hold their pencil too tightly. Try playing with play dough or theraputty before writing activities. If they are too rough when playing with a friend, sibling or pet it's important to show them when they get it right.



Wearing a backpack with some weight (but not too heavy!) can give extra feedback or sitting with a heavier toy or weighted lap pad can also be useful. Make sure these are not uncomfortable and your child or young person can easily move them if they need to. Telling them they are 'too rough' is not helpful as they need to learn what the right amount of force feels like. This will take lots of practice and need support. Some children chew things like the end of a pencil, their water bottle or clothes. They might be looking for more feedback from the proprioceptors in their mouths. It is important we don't tell them to stop unless we give them a suitable alternative. Drinking out of a water bottle or drinking a thick liquid like a milkshake through a straw can help. Eating crunchy or chewy foods can also help. Some people use a chew toy which you can buy online. This is made for people who need to chew and might be useful. There are lots of different types and you can wear some as necklaces or bracelets. Try giving extra time to complete a task. This gives them extra time to process the information. Proprioceptive input helps to organise the sensory system. These strategies can help you either be more alert or to help calm and relax so are good to use any time.

Vestibular

Some people process vestibular information differently. If they have a high threshold, they need lots of opportunities to move during the day. You can get movement from walking running or jumping. You can also bounce on a trampoline or space hopper. Some children sit on an air filled cushion in class or to do homework. This gives them movement when sitting. You can buy these online but some of schools have them to try. Going to the park is a great way of getting lots of different vestibular input. Having a safe place at home where your child can bounce or run about is also good.



Interoception

There is lots of discussion about what strategies help with processing interoceptive information. We would suggest that taking time to notice how the body is feeling at different times can be helpful for example if you have been outside you might comment that you notice your skin feels hot or cold and talk about what you could do about it. You can take time to notice the body signal (for example tummy is rumbling or feel shaky), talk about what this might mean to help them connect it (e.g. this might mean they are hungry) and then talk about what they can do (e.g. eat something). If children have difficulty processing interoceptive information they might not make this connection and we need to check they understand. You can also try mindfulness activities like body scanning. These activities take practice and will be unlikely to work first time. Practice for short periods of time (e.g. a few minutes). Try to do at the same time every day. This can make it easier to fit into a busy routine so you are more likely to keep doing it. This might be before bedtime or first thing in the morning. Whenever suits you and your family best.

Remember, your child or young person is working hard to process sensory information. Making changes to the environment can be helpful. Give your child or young person time to relax when they come home. Have areas at school they can choose to go to if they need a break. They are more likely to be able to do what they need to do after this as their sensory systems will not be overwhelmed. Being overwhelmed and stressed makes it difficult to learn or take part in activities.

Different strategies work for different people. It is important to work together with your child to try out different strategies. Please don't expect big changes overnight. It can take several months for sensory strategies to work. Try to use the strategies you think work best for you and your child regularly for 3 months.

We want to make sure that we are giving information in the way you learn best so that it makes sense and you can use it at home. We know there is a lot of information to take in. You can watch the videos again and read the information on the KIDS website. If you live in the GGC area you can also contact the OT Advice Line to talk to an Occupational Therapist. We also have an online OT session to discuss sensory strategies with an OT and other parents and carers. You do not need to do all these- just think about what suits you best.