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THE LEARNING DISABILITY EXPERTS

SENSORY DIET FOR THE SENSORY SEEKING OR AVOIDING CHILD

What is a sensory diet?
Just as a child needs food through the day, his/her need for sensory input must also be met. A "sensory diet" is a personalized activity plan that provides the sensory input a person needs to stay organized and focused throughout the day.

Each child has a unique set of sensory needs. Generally, a child whose nervous system is "running high/too wired" needs more calming input, while the child who is more "low/sluggish" needs more arousing input.

The effects of a sensory diet are usually immediate and cumulative. Activities that perk up your child or calm him/her down are not only effective in the moment; they actually help to restructure a child's nervous system over time so he/she is better able to:

- Tolerate challenging situations
- Regulate his alertness and increase attention span
- Limit sensory-avoiding and sensory-seeking behaviors
- Handle transitions with more ease and less stress

Proprioception refers to the sensory system that provides us with information from inside our body (sensations perceived in muscles, skin and joints). Proprioception makes us aware of our body's movement, as well as the position of our body in space. Any activity that makes muscles work against resistance ("heavy work") will have a calming/organizing effect. Organizing effects of proprioceptive input are said to last two hours.

Examples of Proprioceptive Activities:

- Carry heavy items (laundry basket, backpack, groceries)
- Push/pull a loaded wagon, vacuum, stroller
- Receive/give a "bear" hug
- Jump on a trampoline
- Take out the trash
- Hit a punching bag
- Do housework (mop, dust, carry a watering can to water plants, transfer wet clothes)
- Do yard work
- Play Twister
- Crash into pillows
- Tumble (long roll, forward rolling)
- Play Hopscotch
- Swim

Vestibular System detects movement and changes in the position of the head. This system tells us exactly where we are in relationship to gravity, whether we are moving or still, and in what direction we are moving. The vestibular system organizes postural and balance responses, and helps us to integrate other sensations. The effects of the vestibular input can last four to eight hours. Different types of movements/sensations tend to produce calming versus alerting responses. For example, calming movements include; slow, smooth, gentle, and rhythmic sensations. Alerting movements include; fast, sharp, twirling, and unexpected sensations.

Examples of vestibular activities include;

- Swinging
- Rocking in a chair
- Playground equipment (seesaw, slide, merry-go-round, etc.)
- Dancing
- Riding elevators or escalators
- Rough playing (upside down play, log rolling)
- Sit-N-Spin
- Hippity-Hop ball
- Riding a bike
- Funning
- Roller Skating/skateboarding
- Rolling over a large ball

Sensory Field Trips a child may enjoy:

- Sports Fusion
- Powder Valley
- Boat House-paddle boars
- Swimming pool
- Water Park
- 6-Flags
- City Museum
- Sky Zone
- Meremac State park
- Go-carts
- Elephant Rock
- Bumper boats
- Upper Limits