

Sensory Ideas to Support Learning at School or Home

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Fall is here and due to COVID-19, parents have more to contend with than ever before. Whether you have opted to send your child back to school for face-to-face learning, are keeping them home to learn online or some hybrid of the two, one thing is the same: Supporting a child's learning is more important than ever.

Sensory input is a wonderful way to help children of all abilities focus on their schoolwork by helping them become what we call "regulated." This means they are calm, organized, attentive and better able to meet environmental and social demands.

And what's even better ---- there are tons of fun ways to help a child move their body and maximize learning. Here are some suggestions for home, some for school and some that help in both environments.

- Create obstacle courses using household objects such as pillows, sleeping bags, office chairs, stuffed animals, etc. to help kids gain proprioceptive (muscle and joint activation) and vestibular (movement) input to support their organizational needs.
- Take frequent sensory breaks in between tasks, for example, walking like different animals around the house or doing simple exercises like squats, planks, jumping jacks, arm circles and running in place.
- Strengthen fine motor skill development, including pencil grasp and dexterity skills, by engaging with small manipulatives like beads, pom poms, cotton balls or coins. You can also use the pieces to explain math concepts.
- Support handwriting skills with fun themes such as writing out scavenger hunts for siblings and parents around the house, writing pen pal letters to friends or completing Mad Libs.



- Use tactile (touch) experiences to help with learning new skills, such as drawing shapes, lines or letters in play dough, shaving cream or sand.
- Do exercises like push-ups against a wall or with a chair to improve the upper body, which benefits fine motor skills and task performance.
- Improve focus with a "move 'n sit" cushion or therapy ball, which provides movement input during seated activities. Deep pressure provided by weighted lap pads can be very calming.
- Give kids helper jobs that include pushing or pulling heavy items across the room, such as carrying books at school or moving laundry baskets at home. These types of heavy work activities can help kids feel centered.
- Take fun sensory breaks by playing familiar card games that can be combined with motor activities. Try playing UNO but assign each number or color an activity to complete when the card is played.
- Use a visual timer and schedule to assist with task completion and setting expectations for kids. This allows for predictability, which helps with task participation and follow-through.

We hope these suggestions help as you and your children face school this fall. In times of uncertainty and change, sensory input is always a benefit for kids!



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