

Activities to Improve Focus

Some children are "sensory seekers" and become more organized and attend better to a task if they receive periodic movement input. Some ideas:

- Allow a child to sit on a baffled camping pillow filled with a small amount of air. This allows for movement without leaving the desk.
- Suggest five minutes of swinging or climbing prior to a focused activity
- Suggest some rhythmical, sustained movement (e.g., marching, wiping off table, or bouncing), which can be organizing to the central nervous system.
- Ask the child to run to get mail, retrieve items from another room, to allow him to get some extra movement.
- Use a rocking chair or sit & spin for periodic "pick-me-ups."
- If child is very sensitive to noise, use headphones and soft music
- It does not work to discipline a "sensory seeker" by taking away privileges or recreational activities— you will intensify the random movements, fidgeting, and outbursts. Providing more appropriate substitute activities is the key!

Some children also need extra sensory input to their mouths and hands in order to organize their behavior, such as:

- Drinking from water bottles with squirt tops (wash before refilling).
- Chewing on a straw, a coffee stir stick, or rubber tubing placed on the end of a pencil.
- Fiddling with something in their hands (keep a bucket or fanny pack of "squeezies" handy; a "squeezie" is a small object that is soft and can fit in the hand, such as a soft ball, a "stress ball," or a koosh ball).
- Hanging by the arms on the monkey bars for 20-30 seconds at a time.
- Pushing/carrying heavy objects (e.g., carrying books, moving boxes, or "pushing" against walls).
- Carrying a backpack weighted with books or bags of dried beans (this should be worn for only 15-20 minutes at a time, with an hour or two between wearings).

A reading corner with a bean bag chair makes a wonderful place to escape from too much stimulation and get ready for more focused work. Children might enjoy reading or sitting under the bean bag chair more than sitting on it.

Whole Body Deep Pressure Activities

Whole body proprioceptive activities can be tremendously calming. The key is providing this input before an outburst!

Pizza Game: Have child lay on the floor. Take a physioball (large exercise ball) and put it on top of your child. Start at the lower legs. Push down on top of the ball, so that it provides deep pressure. Hold for 5 seconds and roll 10 inches up legs, press again. Repeat up to chest area. Have child turn over and repeat. Ask child if they want more pressure or less. You can also roll the ball up and down the child's body while pressing.

Blanket Roll: Have child lay on the edge of a heavy blanket with arms overhead. Roll child up in heavy blanket with arms and head free. Some children will prefer having their arms inside the roll, but start with them out so they don't feel trapped. Have child unroll themselves out of the blanket.

Toaster Game: Sit on the floor. Have child sit between your legs with his legs tucked in a ball hugging his legs. Wrap your arms around around his whole body, legs and all, and squeeze while counting to 10. At 10, the child pushes and pops out like a piece of toast.