

RESOURCE NINE

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH SELF-REGULATION & SENSORY INTEGRATION DIFFICULTIES

Student emotional and psychological wellbeing can have a considerable impact on learning engagement and academic performance. For students who have experienced trauma, fostering a calm, predictable and flexible classroom environment is critical.

Trauma can impact the capacity of students to regulate their emotions and impulses, particularly when under stress. This can lead to emotional outbursts and challenging behaviours in classrooms and in playground settings with peers.

Students with conditions such as neurological damage in-utero (such as that caused by Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder), Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and/or Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) may also have trouble regulating their emotions and behaviours. It should be noted that the prevalence of formally diagnosed disorders, disabilities and impairments among students in care has been found to exceed population norms, in particular rates of diagnosed ADHD and ASD (Corrales, *forthcoming*).

Calming and regulation strategies

The strategies provided below may be useful additions to a student's Behaviour Support Plan, particularly to help prevent or de-escalate behaviours.

- **Breathing Exercises** – *to slow the heart rate and reduce arousal levels*
 - Make a 'Breathing Wand' with younger students
 - Try 'Feather Breathing' and 'Belly Breathing'
- **Incorporate planned movement** – *to regulate and prepare the student for learning*
 - Bounce and throw balls in a contained space
 - Go on a classroom walk outside
 - Try desktop drumming
- **Sensory experiences** – *to assist emotional regulation*
 - Allow the students to use fidget toys
 - Make a calm box or 'quiet area' in the classroom. Consider things like kinetic sand, thinking putty, a stuffed toy, a soft blanket or a sand timer

- **Meditation and Mindfulness** – *to provide opportunities for relaxation and to help students develop body awareness*
 - Try the web and App-based 'Smiling Mind' Program
 - Provide quiet time with soothing music
 - Teach progressive muscle relaxation
 - Use a bell for 'mindful minutes' in the classroom
 - Use 'glitter jars'
- **Predictability** – *to provide routine and reduce anxiety*
 - Use visual schedules and timetables in the classroom
 - Pre-warn students of any changes in routine
 - Have clear rules and be consistent
- **Check-in** – *to be aware of your own emotional state, your tone and body language*
 - Use a soothing, calm and neutral voice.
 - Follow the three R's to care for yourself – Reflection, Regulation and Relaxation
- **Tune-in** – *to be aware of the student's feelings and be empathetic*
 - Focus on the present
 - Be available
 - Observe – be sensitive to changes in a student's mood.
- **Art** – *to provide opportunities for creative expression and reduce stress*
 - Introduce individualised drawing journals, which encourage the safe expression of feelings
 - Try mandalas and Zentangles
 - Colour-in mindfulness books and mindfulness dot-to-dot picture books for older children, which can be purchased from book stores
- **Emotional Literacy Activities** – *to help students identify, name and express their feelings appropriately*
 - Use role-play, songs and storybooks
 - Teach 'feeling' words and help children to label their emotions
 - Incorporate discussion about feelings into your daily practice

Table 1. Calming and regulation links

<p>BREATHING EXERCISES</p>	<p>Breathing wand instructions https://kristinamarcelli.wordpress.com/2014/05/10/make-your-own-mindful-breathing-wand/</p> <p>Breathing relaxation exercises from the Australian Childhood Foundation http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCIQFjABahUKEwi7k-pug98XIAhVIHKYKHeqZDVw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.childhood.org.au%2Ffor-professionals%2Fbring-up-great-kids-programs%2Fbugk-kits%2F~%2Fmedia%2F141B0709F8184834AB32E1943C7A1506.ashx&usg=AFQjCNFtzqkASrDfqSV3xJ-KUmsEE4CmLnQ</p>
<p>MOVEMENT</p>	<p>VIDEO: Dr. Bruce Perry from the Child Trauma Academy explains the benefits of physical movement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-MpzjxEVBU</p> <p>VIDEO: An example of desktop drumming: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-MpzjxEVBU</p>
<p>SENSORY EXPERIENCES</p>	<p>Fidget toys can be purchased from a number of specialist stores, and online retailers</p>
<p>MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS</p>	<p>Smiling Mind (a free Australian web and App-based meditation program) http://smilingmind.com.au/?gclid=CPbXsNiDxsgCFUwGvAod0R8AF</p> <p>VIDEO: Progressive muscle relaxation instructions for children https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaTDNYjk-Gw</p> <p>Mindfulness: Information and resources for teaching mindfulness in schools http://www.mindfuleducation.com.au/</p>
<p>CHECK-IN</p>	<p>Further information on the 3R's for self-care in 'Calmer Classrooms' (pp: 26-27) http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf</p>
<p>ART</p>	<p>Article: 'Calm Down and Get Your Zentangle On' by Cathy Malchiodi https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/arts-and-health/201403/calm-down-and-get-your-zentangle</p> <p>Free printable colouring mandalas: http://www.printmandala.com/</p>
<p>EMOTIONAL LITERACY ACTIVITIES</p>	<p>Centre on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: A range of teaching resources and activities available at http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#teachingskills</p>

Students with Sensory Integration Difficulties

Difficulties integrating sensory information can also impact student learning and behaviour. This appears to be more prevalent amongst students with developmental or mental health conditions (e.g. ADHD, ASD and mood disorders) and for students with a history of trauma.

Calming or Alerting?

It is important to consider whether sensory strategies are likely to have a calming or alerting effect. Students who appear overly aroused, fidgety or who are keen to be 'in motion' are likely to need calming strategies. Those who appear to have difficulty paying attention, appear uninterested or who are overly tired are likely to need alerting strategies.

Responses to sensory activities are individual, thus it is a good idea to trial strategies with students to see what suits them, their interests and personality. All activities should be first introduced and explained when the student is calm, rather than when they are already aroused/elevated or inattentive.

Classroom strategies

The implementation of sensory strategies in the classroom can improve student concentration, attention and self-regulation, and decrease feelings of stress.

Fidget toys

These can be made by the teacher, or purchased from specialty stores. For optimal results in the classroom, ensure they are relatively small, quiet, safe and able to be used without distracting others. Use them for short periods and when they are most needed. Teachers can attach fidget toys to a safety lanyard if students are likely to throw them.

Sensory tools

Sensory tools and activities can be adapted for the classroom, often as calming strategies. They can make particularly useful additions to designated 'quiet areas' in a classroom. Use of quiet areas is a good pre-emptive and de-escalation strategy if students are beginning to feel agitated or overwhelmed, and need a space to feel calm and safe without being excluded from the class.

Classroom management ideas

Teachers can support students' sensory needs by considering the overall classroom environment and incorporating sensory experiences into daily routines. The resource on *Behaviour Support Plans* also provides further strategies.

Table 2. Sensory integration ideas for the classroom

FIDGET TOYS	SENSORY TOYS	CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress/Squeezy Balls • Fidget bracelets or rings • Chewy pencil toppers • Stretchy or bendable toys • Soft pipe-cleaners/brain noodles • Blu-tac • A ball of rubber bands • Velcro strips (can be placed on or under desk) • Large stretchy bands placed around chair leg for students to pull with their feet • Fidget floor mats • Thinking putty • Small coils • Tangle toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glitter jars (there are many examples on how to make these online) • Weighted lap bags • Sand timers • 'Soothing ooze' • Lava lamps • Kinetic sand • Play dough • Sensory cushions • Soft blankets • Soft toys • Headphones with calming music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A calm and well-organised classroom. Minimise visual distractions and excessive clutter • Provide many activities and opportunities for movement (e.g. brain breaks, skipping in line, chair push-ups, stretching, yoga) • Give students active jobs (e.g. taking notes to office, erasing board, helping arrange desks, sorting out bookshelves) • Have a 'quiet space' in the classroom which can be used if students are feeling overwhelmed • Monitor your own voice and activity level • Use hands-on manipulatives to support learning

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