



# SBRS ERINOAKKIDS SENSORY & REGULATION

TOOLKIT



# Introduction

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This Toolkit was created by the Occupational Therapy team at ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development. Its purpose is to provide information about sensory processing and no-harm/low-risk strategies that can be introduced in the classroom to support all students. When strategies are implemented to support sensory needs, students can feel more regulated, focused, and ready to learn.

This resource is also designed to provide shared language between therapists and school staff.

In addition to the Tier 1 strategies, this Toolkit also includes a framework and guiding questions to optimize No Name No Face (NNTF) consultations with your Occupational Therapist for students who may require individualized support.

**If you have any questions about how to implement these strategies in your classroom, please reach out to your SBRS Occupational Therapist.**

# What is Sensory Processing and Regulation?

## 8 Sensory Systems:



Vestibular



Tactile



Olfactory



Proprioceptive



Taste



Visual

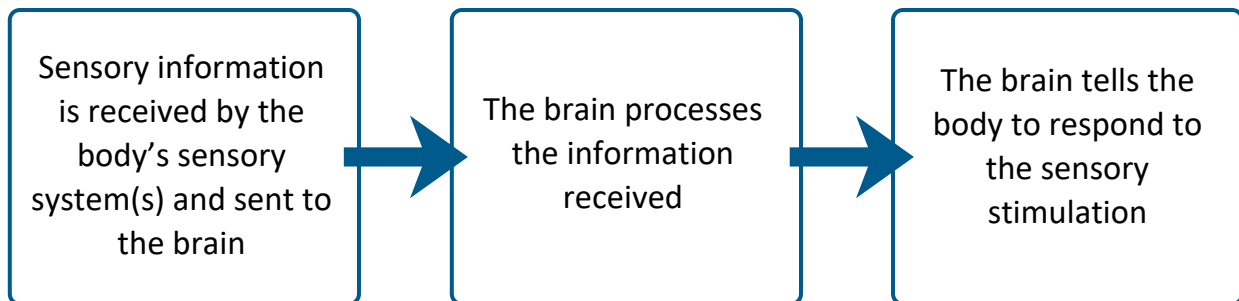


Auditory



Interoception

## Sensory Processing:



## Sensory Regulation:

Sensory regulation is the ability to notice, understand, and respond to sensory information (such as sound, movement, touch, or visual input) in a way that helps us function successfully in different environments.

When sensory regulation is difficult, a student may struggle to respond appropriately to a classroom situation. They may become overwhelmed by noise, need constant movement, or react strongly to touch. Everyone experiences sensory input differently therefore some students' responses may not match what others expect. Sensory regulation plays an important role in self-regulation, attention, and participation in the classroom.

# Processing and Responding to Sensory Information

## Different Ways of Processing and Responding:

We all process and respond to sensory input differently. Some people have difficulty interpreting sensory information, which can lead to differences in how they respond to common daily experiences and how they're able to regulate throughout their day.

There is no right or wrong way to process input. How we process sensory input can change throughout the day or in different environments. For example, you may normally like music in the car but if you're trying to find your destination, you may turn it off to help you focus.

## Understanding Sensory Responses in the Classroom:

There are two “under responsive” sensory types:

- **Low Registration:** Students require large sensory input to notice it in their environment and typically do not actively seek additional sensory information. Ex: may seem disinterested or inattentive to their surroundings.
- **Sensation Seeking:** Students may not process/recognize all sensory information in the environment and may actively seek out sensory input to meet their needs. Ex: may climb, jump, spin, frequently touch items and surfaces.

There are two “over responsive” sensory types:

- **Sensory Sensitive:** Students can feel overwhelmed when processing sensory information and may not actively avoid the overstimulation. Ex: easily distracted, irritable, overly cautious, uncomfortable in bright or loud environments.
- **Sensation Avoiding:** Students can feel overwhelmed when processing sensory information and typically actively avoid the stimulation. Ex: cover ears, avoid touching certain textures, elope from busy environments.

Each of our sensory systems may process and respond differently. For example, a student may be over responsive to noise and under responsive to movement. In this case, the student may need movement breaks built into their day as well as access to noise-cancelling headphones.

# The Vestibular System



## Definition:

The vestibular sensory system is located in the inner ear and provides information to the brain about movement and head position. It contributes to our balance and our sense of spatial orientation.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

- For students who are vestibular seeking:
  - Appearing to need or crave movement more than peers. For example: rocking, fidgeting, wiggling while seated, spinning without becoming dizzy
  - Engaging in risk-taking behaviour such as jumping from heights.
- For students who are vestibular avoiding:
  - Feels movement more intensely than peers. For example: become fearful when feet are not on the ground, avoids spinning, or becomes dizzy easily
  - Preference for sedentary activities, may be less active than peers

## Classroom Strategies:

Seeking	Avoiding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Offer a “movement zone”, a small space for quick, structured sensory movement.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate movement breaks into lessons whenever possible.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Have a movement activity built into the routine before seated tasks.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Assign classroom jobs such as wiping tables, handing out paper, stacking chairs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give warnings before standing, lining up, or changing locations.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide stable, supportive seating that allows feet to touch the floor.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> During movement-heavy lessons (dance breaks, action songs), offer choices for how students can participate.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Offer a calming space for students to access when feeling overwhelmed.</li></ul>

## Comments:

# The Tactical System



## Definition:

The tactile system is the sensory system responsible for detecting and processing information through touch in the environment.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

- For students who are tactile seeking:
  - Frequently touches/engages with clothes, objects, surfaces, and/or peers.
  - Prefers messy play.
- For students who are tactile avoiding:
  - Avoids messy play and/or certain textures. For example: holds objects with fingertips and avoids using palm of hand
  - Sensitive to clothing or certain fabrics.
  - Reacts unexpectedly to touch

## Classroom Strategies:

Seeking	Avoiding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide tactile stations with: fabric swatches, sandpaper, Velcro, tactile bins (beans, rice, pom-poms).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate tactile learning opportunities. For example: when practicing letters, have multi-sensory activities such as paper-pencil, Playdoh, sand tray, finger painting, etc.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Have a fidget bin available for all students to choose from to support listening.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow alternative options/barriers. For example: gloves, tongs, paint brush, or a substitute (tape instead of glue).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Use objects or visuals to define students' spaces to encourage adequate space between each person. For example: carpet squares or tape on the floor to mark a student's space.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Have paper towel available for students to wipe hands during messy play.</li></ul>

## Comments:

# The Olfactory System



## Definition:

The olfactory system is the sensory system responsible for detecting smells in the environment.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

- For students who are olfactory seeking:
  - Seeks out objects/items to smell in the classroom such as peers' hair or scented soap.
  - May want to smell odours that others find unpleasant.
- For students who are olfactory avoiding:
  - Avoids certain items/foods in the classroom.
  - Becomes distracted by smells or notice scents that others do not.

## Classroom Strategies:

Seeking	Avoiding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate mild scents into play. For example: within sensory bins, scented markers.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Encourage safe smelling of objects such as flowers, scented Playdoh.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Create smelling containers/sacks that students can keep in their desk or pocket by placing spices or other objects with a preferred smell inside.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Maintain a scent-free environment.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Be mindful about where garbage and recycling bins are being kept in the classroom.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Create an alternative snack area such as near a window or away from trash bins.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow students to choose seating during snack time to allow them to avoid non-preferred smells.</li></ul>

## Comments:

# The Proprioceptive System



## Definition:

The proprioceptive system is located in our joints and muscles. It is the internal feedback system that tells us where our body parts are in space and how much effort to use.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

- For students who are proprioceptive seeking:
  - Jumps, bumps, or crashes into items or peers.
  - Leans on peers and objects when sitting or standing.
  - Seeks out squishes or hugs from items and people.
  - Claps hands, stomps feet, or walks on their tiptoes.
  - Frequently on the move by leaning, pressing, and pushing to help their body know where it is in space.
- For students who are proprioceptive sensitive/avoiding:
  - Becomes tired easily after activities that require muscle effort such as sitting upright.
  - Appears uncoordinated in their movement.
  - Uses too little force on objects such as light pressure when writing or holding materials.
  - Appears uncomfortable with tight spaces.

## Classroom Strategies:

Seeking	Avoiding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Offer flexible seating options including bean bag chairs, floor chairs with a back.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate heavy work activities into movement breaks such as chair push ups, squats, animal walks, static yoga poses.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate movement jobs with resistance such as stacking chairs, carrying books, pushing carts.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow students to leave class late/early to avoid crowded halls.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide visuals to define clear personal space at desk, carpet, cubby, line up.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide a calming space for students if they feel overwhelmed.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide stable seating to support their posture.</li></ul>

## Comments:

# The Taste System



## Definition:

The taste system is the sensory system responsible for detecting and processing information through taste in the environment.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

- Picky eating is the most commonly seen sensory profile related to taste in the classroom.

## Classroom Strategies:

- Encourage preferred food to be sent to school.
- Provide a predictable routine for snack and lunch as this can reduce stress around mealtime.
- Encourage students to drink between bites of food to clear the mouth.
- The taste and olfactory systems are closely linked. Consider incorporating olfactory strategies listed above.

## Oral Motor Seeking

Students may seek oral motor input due to their developmental stage or as a regulation tool regardless of whether they are under or over stimulated.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

- Explores objects with their mouth. For example: toys, clothing, books, Play-Doh.
- Chews on pencil or other writing materials.

## Classroom Strategies:

### Seeking

- Redirect by modelling how to explore items using play. Social stories may be helpful.
- Have a water bottle in close proximity for easier access. Water bottles that require sucking provide a strong oral motor input. I.e. through a straw or high resistance spout.
- Encourage snacks that are crunchy or chewy such as carrots, celery, pretzels, granola bars, dried fruit. Allow availability throughout the day.
- Offer activities that use oral motor muscles such as blowing bubbles, pinwheel, blowing up balloons, musical instruments.
- Provide items that are intended for biting/chewing such as gum.

# The Visual System



## Definition:

The visual system is the sensory system responsible for detecting and processing visual information in the environment.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

- For students who are visual seeking:
  - Looks around to see what is going on, have difficulty visually focusing on work.
  - Stares at or becomes excited by bright lights, flashing colours, or spinning objects.
  - May engage in stimming behaviours at eye level.
- For students who are visual avoiding/sensitive:
  - Covers or closes eyes in the classroom when artificial lighting is on.
  - Squints or is bothered by bright light. May avoid recess on a sunny day.
  - May avoid eye contact or look at things through peripheral vision.

## Classroom Strategies:

Seeking	Avoiding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide items during break time with high visual interest such as glitter bottles, flashing lights, spinners, etc.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate high contrast visual input in classroom activities and tools.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Limiting visual input in the environment can help students focus on the task.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow student(s) to sit away from windows and doors to limit distractions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Use more natural rather than artificial light.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Limit visual information in the classroom, on desk, and on worksheets to reduce overwhelm.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Encourage wearing a hat or sunglasses when outside or in brightly lit environments.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow student(s) to sit away from the windows or doors to reduce visual overwhelm.</li></ul>

## Comments:

# The Auditory System



## Definition:

The auditory system is the sensory system responsible for detecting and processing information through sounds in the environment.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

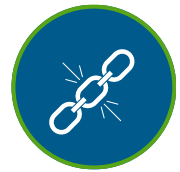
- For students who are auditory seeking:
  - Engages in activities that produce sound such as making vocalizations, tapping objects.
  - Loves noisy material such as crinkly paper, Velcro, instruments, squeaky toys, etc.
  - Prefers to have constant background noise such as listening to music.
  - Has difficulty focusing on a task without humming or making noise.
  - Talks loudly without realizing it.
- For students who are auditory avoiding/sensitive:
  - Prefers quiet areas in the classroom.
  - Covers ears in noisy environments or during unexpected sounds.

## Classroom Strategies:

Seeking	Avoiding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Build listening/auditory input into routine. For example: centres with a variety of sounds to explore, music for transitions/clean up, incorporate sound/music into body breaks.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Teach students the difference between quiet, whisper, indoor, and outdoor voice levels.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow students to listen to music during independent work when possible.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Limit noise level in the classroom. Consider using a noise meter as a visual.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Place noise dampeners on the feet of all chairs.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide warnings ahead of loud sounds such as bell or announcements.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow access to a quiet corner or break from the classroom as needed.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Have noise-reducing headphones available for any student to access.</li></ul>

## Comments:

# The Interoception System



## Definition:

The interoception system is the sensory system that allows the brain to sense, interpret, and integrate signals from inside the body.

## What you might observe in the classroom:

### For students who are under responsive:

- Hunger/thirst cues are missed. For example: eats very little/not at all, leading to irritability. Doesn't drink unless reminded, may drink large gulps once offered.
- Toileting signals are missed/delayed until the last second. May not initiate bathroom breaks without prompting.
- Misses fatigue signals. For example: overextends during play, difficulty stopping, looks excited when actually tired, big emotional reaction later in the day.
- Misses internal temperature cues. For example: may not dress appropriately for the weather, doesn't notice when too hot or sweaty.
- Limited emotional awareness. For example: struggles to name feelings, escalates quickly because early signs weren't recognized.

### For students who are over responsive:

- Frequent body complaints that interfere with participation. For example: aches and pains, requests to call home often, requests to opt out of activities.
- Becomes distressed by hot or cold weather, may avoid going outside.

## Classroom Strategies:

- Take students for toileting on a schedule.
- Do check-ins with students to prompt them to think about how their body is feeling.
- Model to students how your body is feeling throughout the day.
- Engage in mindfulness activities such as progressive muscle relaxation or deep breathing.
- Provide prompts throughout the day for eating and drinking.
- Use visuals for dressing for the weather.
- Consider the use of a self-regulation program in the classroom.
- Build in proactive strategies such as drinking water after gym or recess.

## Comments:

# Universal Strategies

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## Routines:

- Reference a visual schedule regularly throughout the day. Visual schedules are beneficial in providing structure and increasing predictability in the classroom.
- As much as possible, be consistent with the classroom routine.
- Use "First \_\_\_\_, next \_\_\_\_" visuals and verbal cues to inform students of what activity is first and next.
- Offer increased prompting and flexibility for students new to the classroom as they learn routines and expectations.

## Transitions:

- Use a visual timer to help students understand how much time remains in an activity and prepare for upcoming transitions.
- Provide advance reminders to students that an activity is ending using a consistent cue. For example, count down the activity or play the same song prior to a transition.
- Consider having students help with tasks or give them an item to hold or carry. This helps to give purpose and structure to transitions, such as helping to carry a ball to bring for outdoor playtime.

## Classroom Set-up:

- Design a visually organized classroom by prioritizing meaningful, relevant visuals on the walls.
- Use clearly defined classroom zones with an intended purpose to support routines, expectations, and independence. For example: work area, play area, etc.
- Offer choices in activities and materials so students can engage and show their learning in ways that work best for them. For example: hands-on materials, visuals, flexible seating.
- A calming corner in the classroom can be beneficial for students who require breaks throughout the day.
- An active corner may be beneficial for students who require short bursts of movement to support with focus/attention to tasks and to meet sensory needs.

# Classroom Movement Breaks

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## What Are Movement Breaks?



Movement breaks are short intentional pauses in the day that give students a chance to move and release energy to support attention, engagement, and self-regulation throughout the day. They can be used with the whole class or individualized to meet a student's specific needs.

Movement breaks often consist of 3 parts:

- **Alerting activities:** burn energy, elevate heart rate.
- **Heavy work activities:** work against resistance and organize the sensory system.
- **Calming activities:** relaxation and calming to support transition back to routine.

## Why Are Movement Breaks Beneficial?

- Regular, short movement breaks can help students stay on task, improve thought processing, and enhance overall learning.

## When Should Movement Breaks Occur?

### Specific Times of the Day:

- Arrival to school
- During long instruction time
- Before learning

### As Needed:

- Students in the class are dysregulated
- Outdoor breaks have been cancelled

## Where to Start With Movement Break Ideas?

Incorporating movement breaks in the classroom can be simple and flexible. Small changes and short activities can make a big difference. The examples below offer easy ways to get started:

- [3-Activity Movement Break](#)
- [6-Activity Movement Break](#)

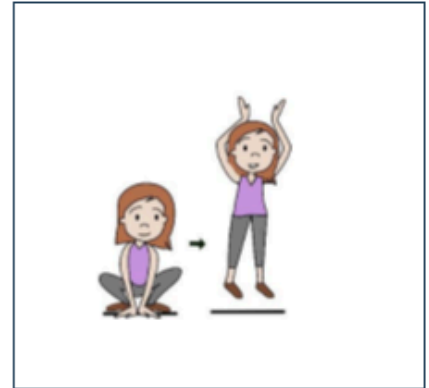
If you need additional help integrating movement breaks in your class routine, or if a student requires individualized support, please speak to the Occupational Therapist supporting your school.

# Classroom Movement Break

1

## Frog Jumps

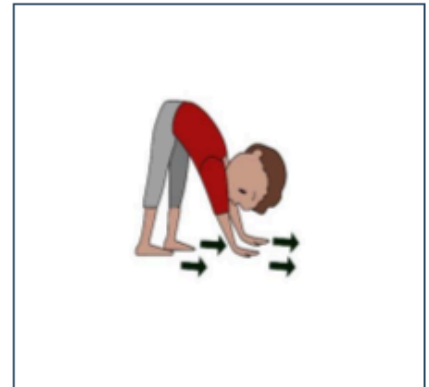
Crouch down low like a frog, then jump forward using strong legs. Try to land softly and keep your balance!



2

## Bear Walk

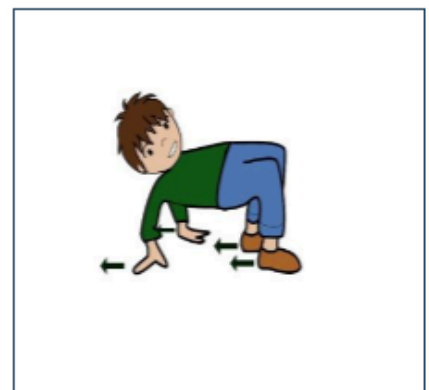
Hands and feet on the floor, bottom up high like a bear. Walk forward slowly keeping your knees off the ground.



3

## Crab Crawl

Sit on the floor, hands and feet on the ground. Walk backwards like a crab while keeping your hips lifted.



## Classroom Movement Break

1

### Plank

Hands and toes on the floor. Body straight like a board.



2

### Bird Dogs

On hands and knee. Lift one arm and opposite leg – hold for 5 seconds. Switch.



3

### Wall Sit

Back against the wall. Knees bent. Hold like sitting in a chair.



4

### Toe Touch

Stand tall. Slowly reach to the sky, bend and touch your toes. Hold and breathe.



5

### Tree Pose

Stand on one foot, place your other foot above or below your knee and balance for 30 seconds.



6

### 5 Finger Breathing

Trace up a finger and slowly breathe in, trace down your finger and slowly exhale.



# NNNF Process

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## 1) Is there a concern with accessing the curriculum ?

Are their sensory or regulation concerns impacting participation?

YES, there are concerns

## 2) Have you consulted past recommendations?

Check OSR for previous reports and recommendations.

Ask parent, student, or previous teaching team for their perspective if appropriate.

Implement what was helpful in the past and track effectiveness.

YES, there are still concerns

## 3) Have you tried universal classroom strategies?

Refer to Universal Strategies and Classroom Movement Breaks strategies in the toolkit.

YES, there are still concerns

## 4) Have you tried universal sensory strategies?

Refer to the sensory strategies included in the toolkit.

YES, there are still concerns

## 5) Set-up NNNF consult with your OT through SERT/ISSP

See next page for questions that can guide the conversation with the OT.

# NNNF Consultation With OT

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## Student's Abilities and Concerns

- What are your main concerns about the student's ability to participate in the classroom and access the curriculum?
- How does the student interact with peers during structured or unstructured times?
- How does the student communicate their needs?

## Behaviour and Patterns

- What does the challenging behaviour look like?
- Are there specific triggers that seem to escalate the behaviour (ex: transitions, noise, demands, etc.)?
- Have you collected any data that can be shared?

## School Environment

- What is happening in the classroom environment (ex: what optimizes the student's engagement and participation)?
- What toys, materials, or visuals are available for the student to access?

## Strengths and Preferences

- What are the student's strengths?
- What does the student enjoy doing?
- What sensory inputs do they seem to enjoy? How are these incorporated into their daily routines?

## Supports and Resources

- What supports or strategies have been tried so far? What has helped and what hasn't?
- Which strategies have been most successful to date?
- Are there strategies documented in the OSR? Were these trialed, and were they successful?

**These are sample questions your OT may ask you during your consultation.**

# NNNF Consultation with OT

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**Student's Abilities and Concerns**

**Behaviour and Patterns**

**School Environment**

**Strengths and Preferences**

**Supports and Resources**

**Use this template as a brainstorming tool to support your  
NNNF consultation with your SBRS OT**

**ERINOAK**KIDS  
*Centre for Treatment and Development*

The logo for ERINOAK KIDS features the word "ERINOAK" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, followed by "KIDS" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. Below the text is a horizontal green brushstroke that tapers at both ends. Underneath the brushstroke, the tagline "Centre for Treatment and Development" is written in a smaller, blue, italicized sans-serif font.