



Learning Services

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Sensory Spaces: Guiding Principles for Effective Use **PPEPP Model**

In order for sensory rooms to be regulating and used effectively, consider the following:

Purpose – Plan – Engage – Pressure / Proprioception

Purpose: what is the goal of going to the sensory space? REGULATION!

- Return to classroom or activity and be able to actively participate and engage
- What environment will help meet that purpose? The gym or the spa?
- If the space/activities are not meeting the needs for the student, they are not going to leave in a regulated state.

Plan: always enter the sensory space with a plan.

- Personalized to the student and their regulation needs
 - What inputs/activities are most calming/regulating for this student?
 - What state are they in when they enter the room?
- Structure
 - Free choice does not always equal regulation
 - Balance choice with structure
 - Visuals can be helpful
- May need a Plan B or C.

Engage: connect with the student.

- Co-Regulate
 - Shared experience with a safe and trusting person is regulating
- Therapeutic Use of Self
 - We are a part of the sensory experience.
 - Our state of regulation, energy level and tone of voice can impact the sensory experience.

Pressure / Proprioception:

- Deep pressure and proprioception have a very calming effect on the nervous system
- Therefore, when we can, it is always best to try to include some type of heavy work or deep pressure into the sensory room activities to promote regulation.
- Deep pressure and heavy work: Decreases cortisol, increases oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin and can release endorphins
- See Universal Sensory Strategy Package 2 – Deep Pressure and Heavy Work Strategies [here](#)
- When choosing between deep pressure or heavy work (proprioception). Always consider the profile of the student:

HEAVY WORK (proprioception)

- Student not touched by adult
- Physical activity that requires effort
- Consider: Intensity, duration, frequency (like a gym workout)
- Students must have ability to follow instructions or imitate (model, visuals and/or videos can help)
- Examples: obstacle course, sensory path, classroom tasks, running laps, animal walks

DEEP PRESSURE (passive input)

- Indirect (bean bag, howda hug chair, weighted lap pad) OR
- Direct pressure applied by adult using a soft object OR their hands (hands on “squishes” to hands/feet, arms, shoulders etc.)
 - Parent & child’s consent REQUIRED
 - Typically for developmentally low students who still require 100% co-regulation

Parent Consent: Prior to exploring direct deep pressure with a student, support teacher and/or classroom teacher should speak directly with family about what and why (share above handouts with them). Ask them if there are any concerns/reasons why exploring wouldn’t be a good idea (trauma informed). Ask them about what works at home. Refer to any reports on file for strategies that have worked in other settings.