



Sensory circuits in schools: A guide for staff

Introduction

Sensory circuits are structured physical activities designed to help students regulate their sensory input to improve focus, attention, and readiness for learning. They are based on principles of sensory processing and integration and use movement and sensory experiences to support arousal and concentration levels.

Purpose of intervention

The primary purpose of sensory circuits is to help children achieve an optimal level of alertness for learning. They can help children who struggle to process sensory information, particularly those with conditions like autism spectrum disorder or sensory processing difficulties.

Target audience

Sensory circuits can benefit a range of students, including those who:

- Exhibit fidgeting or restlessness in the classroom.
- Have difficulty focusing attention and concentrating.
- Appear lethargic or have low energy levels (need alerting).
- Are over-alert or appear hyperactive (need calming).
- Demonstrate poor coordination and balance.
- Have diagnosed sensory processing differences.

Who can deliver the intervention

While specialised Sensory Integration Therapy should be delivered by qualified professionals such as occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, or physiotherapists with specific post-graduate training, sensory circuits in schools can be effectively delivered by:

- Teaching Assistants (TAs)
- LSAs (Learning Support Assistants)
- HLTAs (Higher Level Teaching Assistants)

It is crucial that staff delivering these interventions receive adequate training and support to understand sensory processing differences and effectively implement sensory circuits.

Session structure

A sensory circuit typically follows a **three-part structure**, with activities progressing in this specific order to maximize effectiveness:

- **Alerting Section:** Aims to "**wake up**" the brain and body through stimulating **vestibular** (balance and movement) and **proprioceptive** (body awareness) input. Examples include jumping, skipping, or bouncing activities.
- **Organizing Section:** Focuses on activities requiring **motor skills, balance, and timing**, demanding the child to **organize their body and plan movements sequentially**. Examples include balancing on a beam, log rolling, or crawling through tunnels.
- **Calming Section:** Emphasises activities **providing deep pressure and heavy muscle work to help the child calm, centre, and prepare for classroom learning**. Examples include wall push-ups, squeezing activities with weighted objects, or being rolled gently with a gym ball.

Frequency and duration

Sensory circuits are ideally conducted regularly, either at the start of the school day or after lunch break, when children may benefit most from settling down or energizing for further learning. Each



session typically lasts between 15-20 minutes, with approximately 3-5 minutes spent on each activity station. However, the duration and specific activities can be adjusted based on the individual needs and tolerance of each child.

Key principles

- **Individualization:** Every child has unique sensory needs. Sensory circuits must be tailored to address the specific needs of each participant. The intensity, duration, and type of activity should be modified according to whether a child needs alerting, organizing, or calming.
- **Structured and Fun:** A well-structured circuit with clear transitions helps children to organize themselves. Making activities enjoyable increases engagement and participation.
- **Safety and Supervision:** All activities must be conducted under adult supervision to ensure safety and prevent injuries.
- **Observation and Feedback:** Monitoring children's responses and gathering feedback from them and teachers is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of the circuit and adjusting activities as needed.

Training and implementation

- **Training:** Staff delivering sensory circuits should receive training on sensory processing and integration, understanding different sensory profiles, and how to adapt activities for individual needs. Online resources and training programs are available for school staff, [such as those from Sensory Integration Education](#).
- **Assessment:** Before implementing, assess each child's individual sensory needs and preferences to personalize their circuit. Consider using [Sensory Suggester](#)
- **Environment:** Designate a suitable space within the school for the sensory circuit. Consider using visual cues or task strips to guide students through the activities.
- **Resource Management:** Gather necessary equipment, such as trampettes, space hoppers, gym balls, beanbags, and weighted items, as appropriate for the activities.

Feedback

Regularly gather feedback from students and teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of the sensory circuit. Ask students questions like, "What do you think the sensory circuit helps you with?" Observe and document changes in behaviour, focus, and engagement. Half-termly review meetings can facilitate discussion and adjustments.

Further information and resources

- ["Sensory Circuits For Schools: Free Guide"](#) from Sensory Inclusive Schools
- ["Sensory Circuits"](#) information sheet from Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- ["A guide to sensory circuits"](#) from Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- ["Sensory Circuits Activities for SEN Children"](#) from Pentagon Play
- ["10 Sensory Circuit Activities for Teaching Assistants"](#) from Twinkl