



# Sensory Calming Strategies

We all have different sensory preferences, for example; smells we like better than others, movements we like doing to “calm us down” or “energise us”, things we like the feel of, music or sounds we prefer to listen to, etc. For students, depending on their sensory preferences, they may over or under-react to senses in their environment which can impact their behaviour in the classroom (Larcom & Sims, 2013). A unique repertoire of sensory strategies can be developed for students to assist them in their daily self-regulation. Generally, these sensory strategies are classified into two types: calming strategies and alerting strategies.

**Keywords:** *sensory, calming strategies, self-regulation, sensory diet, sensory activities, sensory integration, sensory processing disorder, sensory therapy*

## What is the goal of a calming strategy?

Calming strategies assist students to lower the amount of sensory input they are receiving in order to control and organise overwhelming sensory feelings. This allows increased engagement in class. The main goal of implementing a calming strategy is to help students achieve self-regulation. Self-regulation occurs when students can:

- Adapt during daily routines.
- Organise mind and body during structured and unstructured tasks.
- Attend and concentrate for sustained periods of time.
- Complete tasks efficiently and on time.
- Self-monitor and change behaviour in light of the situation.

Achieving the “just right” sensory levels requires identifying the effective duration, frequency and intensity of sensory experiences for the student.

## What are some considerations when implementing calming strategies?

- Work with parents and additional education staff, as well as the occupational therapist and physiotherapist, to involve all integral participants in the student’s sensory strategies.
- Be sure to include activities from a range of sensory systems as required. The student may need calming strategies from proprioceptive, vestibular, tactile, auditory, visual and taste input.
- Calming strategies will depend upon each student’s individual sensory preferences or needs. For example, if music is known to calm a student, this would be an appropriate calming strategy to implement. However, if music is known to excite a student too much, it would not be considered when developing a list of calming strategies.



### When should calming strategies be used?

- During “meltdowns” – when a student is feeling overwhelmed in his/her environment
- When a student is “overactive” in the classroom, leading to:
  - Difficulty with following instructions in the classroom
  - Difficulty with expressing ideas, thoughts and feelings using language
  - Difficulty engaging in meaningful interactions with peers
  - Poor planning and sequencing
  - Poor executive functioning
  - Poor working memory
  - Poor attention and concentration
  - Poor organisational skills
  - Difficulty with gross and fine motor skills
  - Behavioural difficulties
  - Poor play skills

### What are some sensory calming strategy activities and ideas?

#### Touch/Deep Pressure

Fidget toys, weighted lap belt or blanket, vibrating toys (pens, etc.), sensory bin with rice or sand for hand play, warm bath or shower, both hands on head with fingers interlocked and pushing down, weighted blanket, lycra blanket, weighted stuffed animal, pushing on walls with back, bottom, hands, head or shoulders, back/neck rubs, cuddles, bear hugs

#### Movement/Proprioception

Slow swinging, rocking, crawling, walking, playground slides, seat cushions, therapy ball, rolling, “heavy work” such as carrying heavy bags, lifting weights, moving furniture

#### Listening/Auditory

Listen to favourite music, humming, whispering, using earplugs, safe space with no sound, listen to audio book

#### Visual

Look at mobiles, lava lamps, etc., avoid fluorescent bulbs, consider coloured texts and backdrops, look at picture books, look at nature, watch a short video, use sunglasses outdoors, trial different hats

#### Smell/Taste/Oral

Burn essential oils and candles, smell flowers and other scents, chew gum, suck lollipop, suck through a straw, chewy pendants or bracelet, deep breaths



### Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please contact Speech and Language Development Australia (SALDA). SALDA provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or [hello@salda.org.au](mailto:hello@salda.org.au)

Website: [www.salda.org.au](http://www.salda.org.au)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SALDAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SALDAustralia)

### References

- Cheng, M., & Boggett-Carsjens, J. (2005). Consider Sensory Processing Disorders in the Explosive Child: Case Report and Review. *The Canadian Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Review*, 14(2), 44–48.
- Larcom, J., & Sims, R. (2013). C.A.L.M: Strategies to manage sensory processing disorder and children's behaviour. *Educating Young Students: Learning and Teaching in the Early Childhood Years*, 19(3), 35–36.
- Lynch, S.A. & Simpson, S.G. (2016). Sensory Processing: Meeting the Individual Needs Using the Seven Senses. *Young Exceptional Children*, 7(4): 2-9.