**This is what you can do...**

Think of it like this.  A sensory diet is like when we eat meals.  We have a main meal three times a day, and in between we have snacks.  At school, there is one of those main meals and times for snacks between.  Sensory activities can be organised, available and monitored with this in mind.

**A Sensory Diet**

A. The **Sensory** **main meal** is a main activity that helps the child **regulate**their sensory systems so that they feel calm and alert enough to engage with the rest of the school day demands.  This could be activities like:  (these are examples, there are tons of ideas that might be suggested).

* a break somewhere quiet
* a walk around the schools grounds
* some oral-motor activities
* physical activities such as a sensory circuit
* time wearing a weighted jacket

This may mean that a teaching assistant takes the child out of class for anything between 5 minutes and 1/2 hour whilst the activity takes place.  The aim is for the child to have the sensory input or sensory break their system needs so that they have the energy, focus and calmness to continue with the demands of the day.

**B. Sensory snacks** can happen through the day and should be available or the child to use at any time.  These can be -  (again, just a few examples)

* headphones to shut out noise overload
* fiddle toys
* knobbly cushions on their chair
* "Chewelry" and oral motor toys
* calming smells
* weighted cushions

When choosing what activities to put in place then look at the list you have been given in the report.  Speak to parents and the child to gather which activities might already be familiar and working well with the child.   Then choose one or two at a time and experiment to see what helps the child and what doesn't.  If it doesn't, cross it off the list and use another of the ideas.  Involve the child and get them to say what they'd like to try (give visual choice boards if needed) and have the child comment on whether the activity makes them feel okay, better and able to join in class learning activities.  Try and record what works and what response the child gives so you have evidence for any follow up or review.

 

Widgit symbols (C)

​If you timetable the 'main meals' in to the child's visual timetable (see picture) then the child knows it is happening and can build that into their expectations of the day.  I have known children who can wait more patiently because they know when the activity is coming.  They also need to know that it's okay to have their 'snack' activities **WHENEVER**they need it.  If a child is struggling with noise, then telling them to wait for their headphones isn't going to help them.  They will need to know it is okay to use them whenever they need them.    Don't be worried that some children might use these activities to 'opt out' regularly.   If the sensory diet is doing its job, then they will feel calmer more often and naturally will join in learning activities.   At first it is usual that children use their 'snack' activities often.  That is good.

The aim of all sensory diets is to help the child learn to "self-regulate".  They should be taught about their sensory systems and how the environment and maybe other people (noise, touch etc) does upset their sensory systems…and that it isn't their fault.  We need to help children know what helps them feel safe, calm and able to engage with the environment, learning activities, and with people.  This takes a long-term approach.  They are likely to need support throughout their school lives.   As a class teacher you are not expected to be an Occupational Therapist.  That's okay.  These tips are here to help you implement the advice of a sensory assessment in ways that you as a teacher can organise and manage.

 

**Here are some further reading resources that you might find helpful.**

Chapter 6 of my book "[How to support children with Autism Spectrum Condition in primary school](https://www.ldalearning.com/product/communication-and-interaction/autistic-spectrum-condition/teaching-resources/how-to-support-pupils-with-autism-spectrum-condition-in-primary-school/agmt13773). (LDA)

[The Out of Sync Child by Carol Stock-Kranowictz](https://out-of-sync-child.com/books-overview/)

[How to support children with sensory processing needs](https://www.ldalearning.com/product/sensory-and-physical-needs/sensory-processing/how-to-support-children-with-sensory-processing-needs/avmt13783) by Lois Addy (LDA)

***And to explain sensory processing to children this book is excellent:***

[Max and Me by Ines Lawlor](https://www.ldalearning.com/product/sensory-and-physical-needs/sensory-processing/max-and-me/avmt14405)