

ADVICE SHEET

Sensory Busy Boxes

‘Sensory Busy Boxes’ are an effective resource to support pupils with sensory needs during different times of the school day.

How to set-up:

- These boxes should be personalised to the child’s individual sensory needs, so completing a sensory checklist to fully understand the child’s sensory profile is advisable.
- The box can then be set-up with a range of objects and resources which provide the child with the sensory input and experiences they require throughout the day.
- The box can be used either as a calming resource for pupils who may need support in self-regulation, or as an alerting activity to prepare pupils to be ‘ready to learn’.
- Sensory busy boxes should be used throughout the day at regular intervals. For example they can be used to provide learning breaks when a child is losing engagement, or as a calming strategy for a child who may be distressed or need support to self-regulate.
- The aim is that pupils feel ‘just right’ so they are able to focus on their learning rather than being distracted or feeling anxious.



Resource Ideas

Type of sensory need	Busy Box resource ideas
Touch/tactile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of fidget toys (let children choose their own) • Various textured materials • Squeezy or stretchy toys • Theraputty or playdough • Weighted lap or neck toys • Therabands • Puzzles and jigsaws • Feathers or ribbons • Stringing beads • Pipe cleaners • Vibrating toys • Feely bag – with a range of textured objects • Messy play
Gustatory (taste)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Mouth fidgets’ for chewing– e.g. a straw • Oral-motor activities – e.g. blowing bubbles • Crunchy foods – e.g. dry pasta • Appropriate chewing resources – e.g. chewy tubes, pencil toppers, ‘chewlery’
Auditory (hearing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ear defenders • Headphones to listen to calming music • Shakers/instruments
Olfactory (smell)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scented playdough • Scented stationary, stickers, pens, keyrings • A ‘smell station’ or ‘aroma pot’ – pots with cotton wool, scented with different smells for the pupil to explore • Scented hand cream (with parental permission)
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light toys • Mirrors • Sensory toys – e.g. liquid timers, bubble tubes, sensory bottles • Shiny or sparkly objects • Old CDs to spin

- It is important that children are taught to use their box and use of items is modelled for them, over time this will help them learn which items help best to regulate their sensory systems, and the aim is that they will eventually be able to self-select them from their boxes – an important self-regulation and independent calming strategy. Ensure you allow the children ownership of their box, letting them select the items they play with.
- Staff should observe and take note of children’s reactions to certain items – e.g. if you notice a particular object helps them to calm, then make sure this is available at times of stress.
- Ensure positive language is used so that the child doesn’t relate the box to being a sanction – e.g. ‘I can see you might need some time to relax.....’ ‘I can see you may need some help to concentrate/ to be ready for learning.....’
- If the pupil is out of the classroom or off-site for any activities then a ‘sensory survival kit’ can be taken with you for support if necessary.
- Boxes can be related to specific curriculum areas is schools wish to, as long as they are still providing the appropriate individual sensory experiences for the child – e.g. messy play around a particular topic, sorting & stacking related to maths, activities themed around a particular story for English.

For further, practical advice on sensory support – we recommend the following book:
Sensory and motor strategies – Published by The National Autistic Society