

POSITION PAPER: DEVELOPING A SENSORY ROOM

This position paper was developed by the Occupational Therapists of Green Hills Area Education Agency. It is based on professional judgement, clinical experience and evidenced-based research. It is our opinion that the below information will guide schools and educators in developing appropriate uses of sensory rooms. The term “sensory room” refers to a specific room, with specific equipment and activities, to benefit specific sensory processing difficulties.

SCOPE: This position paper applies to the use of sensory rooms within schools. This is not meant to replace clinically based sensory treatment.

PURPOSE: To develop guidelines for the use of the sensory room and sensory activities/equipment designed to provide a controlled sensory experience that is safe and designed specifically to meet the needs of the student.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *It is always an educator’s goal to keep the student within the natural learning environment to the extent that it is possible. The use of the sensory room is to prepare or equip the child so that they are able to participate within the least restrictive environment.

GENERAL USE: The sensory room is available for individual students under the supervision of an adult. It offers a nurturing, student-centered sensory supportive environment. It is used to facilitate self-organization, self-regulation, relaxation, and sensory awareness, **in order to integrate a student back into the classroom or least restrictive environment.** The goal of the individuals program in the room is to address the primary senses of sight, touch, smell, hearing, vestibular and proprioception. The level of the child’s arousal, either too high or too low, should match the degree, intensity, type and frequency of sensory input.

DEFINITIONS:

Sensory Modulation: The ability to regulate and organize reactions to sensory input in a graded or adaptive manner (behavioral). The balancing of excitatory and inhibitory inputs, and adapting to environmental changes (neurophysiological).

Sensory Diet: As defined by Occupational Therapist, Patricia Wilbarger, is a carefully designed, personalized activity plan that provides the sensory input a person needs to stay focused and organized throughout the day.

Proprioceptive: The body’s ability to receive input through our joints and tendons. This lets us know where our limbs are in relationship to our body and space.

Vestibular: This systems engages the receptors of the inner ear to provide information on movement and head position.

Tactile/deep pressure touch: This sensory system provides information through sensory receptors in the skin and give input on the following senses: pressure, vibration, movement, temperature, and pain.

EQUIPMENT: Consult with your school occupational therapist to help you decide on items or materials for general recommendations for sensory rooms.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS:

- 1) Plan time and specific activities for sessions in the sensory room. This is not meant to be a play time or as a time out room.
- 2) A daily schedule of sensory activities should be implemented throughout the daily routine.
- 3) The student should always be supervised.
- 4) Be very observant of a student's responses to sensory input. Student responses should be documented, and data collected as decided upon by the team.
- 5) Equipment provided in a sensory room are tools with a purpose, not toys.

ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY RELATED TO THE USE OF THE SENSORY ROOM:

- 1) General resource: OT can provide general recommendations (not student-specific) for the layout and use of a school's sensory room.
- 2) Student Specific Consultation: OT can consult on students whose sensory processing is impacting their participation in education, by teacher completion of the "Request for Collaborative Consultation" form. Once this form is completed, the OT can complete a screening and conduct occasional and incidental monitoring of the student.
- 3) IEP service: The OT could be listed as a support or related service or support to school personnel on a student's IEP. In this case, the OT might recommend student-specific interventions to be implemented within the sensory room. OT's within the Green Hills AEA provide educationally-based OT services. They do not provide clinically based sensory integration treatment. They are required to follow eligibility criteria according to Iowa Guidelines for Educationally-Related Occupational Therapy Services, as well as IDEA.

CHECKLISTS:

Sensory Checklists-Gwen Wild

[Classroom checklist](#)

[Sensory checklist](#)

Sensory poster- available through the GHAEA webpage

BOOKS:

Abraham, Michael C., and Darcy Myers. *Sensory Integration: Practical Strategies and Sensory Motor Activities for Use in the Classroom*. Grand Rapids, MI: LDA, 2002. Print.

Ayres, A. Jean., and Jeff Robbins. *Sensory Integration and the Child*. Los Angeles, CA: Western Psychological Services, 1979. Print. Gwen Wild "Sensational Brain"

Bialer, Doreit Sarah., and Lucy J. Miller. *No Longer a Secret: Unique Common Sense Strategies for*

Children with Sensory or Motor Challenges. Arlington, TX: Sensory World, 2011. Print.

Biel, Lindsey, and Nancy K. Peske. *Raising a Sensory Smart Child: The Definitive Handbook for Helping Your Child with Sensory Processing Issues*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2009. Print

Henry, Diana. *Tools for Teachers: Sensory Integration in the Schools*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

Kranowitz, Carol Stock. *Answers to Questions Teachers Ask about Sensory Integration: Forms, Checklists, and Practical Tools for Teachers and Parents*. Las Vegas: Sensory Resources, 2001. Print.

Kranowitz, Carol Stock. *The Out-of-sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder*. New York: Skylight Book/A Perigee Book, 2005. Print.

RESEARCH ARTICLES:

VandenBerg, N.L. (2001). The use of a weighted vest to increase on-task behavior in children with attention difficulties. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 55, 621-628.

Susanne Smith Roley, MS, OTR/L, FAOTA Julie Bissell, MA, OTR/L Gloria Frolek Clark, MS, OTR/L, FAOTA. Providing Occupational Therapy and Using Sensory Integration Theory and Methods in School Based Practice." *OTA* 63.6 (2009): n. page.

TRAININGS:

Summer Autism Institute Training- sensory component

WEBSITES:

Check GHAEA medianet for Titles
Pediatric Network,
SPDfoundation.net,
Sensationalbrain.com