



## Sensory Modulation

We are constantly receiving messages from our own bodies and the environment around us via our senses. Sensory modulation is the ability to sort through this information and identify what is important and what is not. This allows us to respond appropriately to incoming sensory information and remain at an appropriate level of alertness for daily activities and demands.



For example, appropriate levels of arousal will vary for different tasks like sitting to complete homework, playing with friends at a party or settling down for bedtime. We also need to be able to filter out unnecessary information and focus on what is important at that time, for example, we may be able to tune out a loud ticking clock in a room but not a fire alarm.



Children who struggle with sensory modulation and find it difficult to self-regulate can experience challenges in the development of their learning, functional skills, social skills and emotional regulation. It is important to find what helps your child self-regulate for the different

challenges throughout their day- observe them, talk to them and keep a diary to reflect back on- become a detective! For example:



Observations	Reflection	Outcomes
After a family get together my child appears giddy and active, does not settle for bed and will cry easily.	They spent a few hours bouncing and tumbling on a trampoline and the get together was noisy and busy.	Play on the trampoline earlier in the day for a shorter time and provide quiet breaks away from busy environments.
Every Tuesday my child is more relaxed and engaged on arrival home from school and will complete homework without issue but has difficulty on other days of the week.	The class go swimming on a Tuesday afternoon.	Add in another swimming slot during the week and increase amount of heavy work activities in other days.

### Tips to help promote sensory modulation

- **Heavy work (Proprioception)** is organising and regulating, it helps the body feel good and can be helpful in reducing anxiety and promoting improved attention and focus. Add in heavy work opportunities throughout your child's day- please see our heavy work activities page for examples.
- Use **sensory tools** that help your child to tolerate unpleasant sensory information such as fidget tools, headphones to play music/white noise, sunglasses, chew gum or suck a sweet. Have a few of these ready to hand for when in new situations or in preparation for difficult situations.
- Providing a **quiet space/den** can be helpful in allowing your child to remove themselves from the sensory challenges in the environment and have time to regulate. Discuss whether a similar space can be identified in school.
- Be aware of possible **triggers** which may not always be apparent straight away and educate others involved in your child's care. For example, a fear of balloons if going to a birthday party, noise sensitivity and preparation needed for an upcoming fire drill. At times children will contain themselves when at school and then on coming home can experience an emotional outburst- consider a home/school communication book to enable you to reflect back on possible triggers and help plan for the future.
- Explore **breathing techniques** to help aid relaxation and try **mouth tools** (please see our mouth tools advice sheet).
- **Routine, predictability, consistency** – establish a consistent daily routine at home and also around certain activities to help reduce anxieties and worries. The use of visual supports such as a family calendar/daily schedule, written checklists, to do list, diaries, symbol or picture schedules are all great tools to help organise your child and prepare them for upcoming activities and events. Never underestimate the power of visual information- it is much easier for our children to process visual information than verbal information.
- **Be patient, stay calm and have your toolkit to hand** as children with sensory modulation difficulties will often switch to fight/flight/freeze mode more often and more quickly than their peers.

