

## SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOLS

### BEFORE YOU ASK THE OT: Sensory Concerns

- Interventions and strategies to use BEFORE requesting an OT observation or referral for OT Screening or OT Evaluation.
- Interventions and strategies must be tried with fidelity for a minimum of two weeks.
- Remember to document outcomes.

### TOPIC: SENSORY CONCERNS

#### PRE-REQUISITE TO SELF REGULATION FOR SCHOOL READINESS

1. RULE OUT MEDICAL PROBLEMS
2. CONSIDER ANY MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS, HEALTH ISSUES, NUTRITION, SLEEP, etc.
3. CONSIDER DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL as well as CHRONOLOGICAL AGE
4. ENVIRONMENT that is CONDUCIVE to FOCUS AND ATTENTION
5. PROVIDE STRATEGIES CONSISTENTLY AND THROUGHOUT THE DAY (won't work at time of melt down)

#### CONSIDER "HEAVY WORK" ACTIVITIES FIRST

Having a classroom of students at different levels of attention/alertness can be a particular challenge to teachers. Some students are under-attentive: looking sleepy, appearing uninterested and yawning. Others are over stimulated, ready to run a marathon, but not ready to sit, listen or write. One effective strategy to address the needs of all these students is known as **HEAVY WORK**. When children engage in focused, heavy work activities, they arrive at a "just right" state of attention. **HEAVY WORK** is a teacher's best friend. It can bring down those revved up students and speeds up those slow students.

#### What is HEAVY WORK?

Heavy work activities are those that activate sensory receptors in our muscles and joints. These receptors are responsible for our "body awareness" and help with our state of attention/alertness. When we intensify how much these receptors are given, we often see more organized behavior and better ability to follow directions for either students who are under attentive or over stimulated.

#### EXAMPLES OF HEAVY WORK ACTIVITIES

1. Whole body actions involving pushing, pulling, lifting, playing and moving using BIG muscle groups
2. Oral actions such as chewing, sucking and blowing
3. Using the hands for squeezing, pinching or "fidgeting"

\*\*MORE SENSORY STRATEGIES AND LINKS AT END OF DOCUMENT.

Movement in general, that is controlled and purposeful, can be a powerful tool to use for self-regulation for all students. Movement breaks can be short and still be effective. There are several online options for a variety of exercises, breathing, movements, etc. Examples include:

GONOODLE <https://www.gonoodle.com/>

COSMIC KIDS YOGA <http://www.cosmickids.com/>

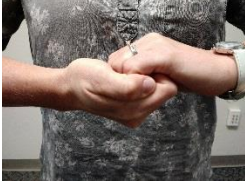

Or go to You Tube and search Cosmic Kids Yoga

BRAIN BREAKS <http://teachtrainlove.com/20-brain-break-clips-fight-the-fidgeting/>

FITNESS ADVENTURE <http://adventuretofitness.com/>

BRAIN DANCE <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UelcKjKAfNQ> (one of many you tube videos)

MEMOVES

<p>Heavy Work ideas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Hang from monkey bars or hold plank position for spelling words.</li> <li>· Exaggerated slow arm movements like arm circles or swimming strokes while holding something weighted (i.e. full water bottles.)</li> <li>· Jumping jacks (pair with counting, saying ABCs, spelling words, etc.)</li> <li>· Carry a box or heavy item to office or other pre-arranged classroom</li> <li>· Push palms together</li> <li>· Curl fingers of one hand into the other. Pull hands apart. Hold for a count of 5.</li> </ul>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Chair push-ups</li> <li>· Heavy-footed marching</li> <li>· Catch weighted ball</li> <li>· Push/pull/carry heavy items (chairs, books, crates, carts)</li> <li>· Push away from wall (wall push up)</li> </ul>
<p>If you see this...</p>	<p>Try this...</p>
<p>HYPERSENSITIVE (Overly sensitive)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Create a quiet space with reduced stimuli</li> <li>· Deep breaths – slowly smell the flower and slowly blow out the candle</li> <li>· For severe auditory sensitivity, consider headphones or an iPod with white noise to muffle sounds.</li> <li>· Yoga for Strengthening and stretching (downward dog, cat, cow, child's pose) Hold poses for two full breaths( inhale exhale x2)</li> <li>· Heavy work activities (see list above)</li> </ul>
<p>SEEKS SENSORY INPUT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Wheelbarrow walks</li> <li>· Hanging from monkey bars</li> <li>· Balance activity (i.e. tree pose, flamingo)</li> <li>· Ball chair or wiggle cushion for seating</li> <li>· Hand fidgets (i.e. stress ball, Velcro, pipe cleaners)</li> </ul>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Hold pushup pose (regular or modified)</li> <li>· Alternative work positions (belly on floor, standing)</li> </ul>



- Chewy/crunchy snack on desk
- Stretch break
- Deep pressure: bear hugs, firm touch
- Weighted vest, pad, or blanket for grounding
- Opportunities for “heavy work” (see list above)
- Active jobs (notes to the office, erase the board, move/carry chairs, wash tables, sweeper) · Animal walks
- Music with strong tempos; movement
- Roll a tennis around the bottom of the feet
- Chewy tubing or chewelry or necklace for chewing for those who chew/suck their shirt.



- Calming breaths: inhale fully through the nose and exhale with a steady hum
- Blow toys for deep respiration: whistles, bubbles, straw
- Mini-Trampoline
- Pacing Lane



**HYPO RESPONSIVE**  
(Inattentive? Sedentary?  
Droopy?)

- Frequent movement breaks (animal walks, hop to get cold drink, wheelbarrow walk to the table, somersault to the door, log rolls)
- Alternative seating to engage the core (t-stool, bucket seat, ball chair, wedge cushion)
- Tape paper to wall- complete work standing up
- Upbeat music...run in place for 30 seconds-take 5 slow deep breaths. Then run in place for 20 more seconds.
- Bunny hop/ goose step march/ swim with hand motions on walk to specials
- Active jobs: Pass out papers/ collect papers/ stack chairs/ sharpen pencils for class/ clean white boards or lunch tables.
- Water bottle on desk

- Standing at desk
- Jumping in place
- Pushups
- Seek student's attention prior to giving directions
- Stretch bands or stretch break
- Hand fidgets
- Wall jumps - jump and touch a particular point on the wall



- Encourage upright posture for alertness and breath control
- Vary the pace and routines
- Provide stimulating movement experiences during transitions
- "Wake up" activities: rub vigorously on their back or arms; music/singing, pat their extremities
- Blowing games (races to blow cotton balls, bubbles, blowing in a crazy straw)
- Energizing breaths: Deep breaths in and out of the nose
- Rhythmic activities to encourage an internal rhythm (Mozart music, balance boards, drumming games on the table)

**ADDITIONAL HEAVY WORK ACTIVITY IDEAS:** Naturally occurring activities within the school environment

Seated activities

- Wring a thick piece of rope
- Use elastic bands on the fingers and doing "finger exercises"
- Sit on hands
- Use a disc sit cushion
- Use quiet squeeze toys that won't distract others
- Chair push-ups
- Prior to seatwork, have student pinch, roll, pull theraputty or squeeze balloons filled with flour
- Give the student firm pressure on shoulders
- Take chewy candy breaks – such as licorice, fruit roll-ups, Starburst or Tootsie Rolls or healthier options with crunchy foods such as dry cereal, vegetables (raw carrot or celery), pretzels or popcorn
- Sip from a water bottle with a straw
- Use a beanbag chair in the classroom during silent reading or independent work tasks
- Stretch exercise band

### Other Whole body activities:

- Wash desks and/or chalkboard/dry erase board
- Help rearrange desks in the classroom
- Sharpen pencils with a manual sharpener
- Push the lunch cart or carry lunch bin to the cafeteria
- Run around the track at school
- Wear a weighted backpack when walking from class to class (Be cautious about how much weight goes in the backpack so that it does not result in lower back pain)
- Carry books with both hands hugging the books to the chest to the office or from class to class
- Have student move several packs at a time of photocopy paper from storage area to the school copy center
- Perform sports activities that involve running and jumping
- Have students push against a wall
- Stack or unstack chairs
- Animal walks (crab walk, bear walk, army crawl)

### LINKS to other lists of HEAVY WORK activities

- <http://www.sensory-processing-disorder.com/heavy-work-activities.html>
- [http://www.aea1.k12.ia.us/documents/filelibrary/special\\_education\\_services/occupational\\_therapy/CClassroom\\_heavy\\_work\\_8a\\_990FC1C03167D.pdf](http://www.aea1.k12.ia.us/documents/filelibrary/special_education_services/occupational_therapy/Classroom_heavy_work_8a_990FC1C03167D.pdf)

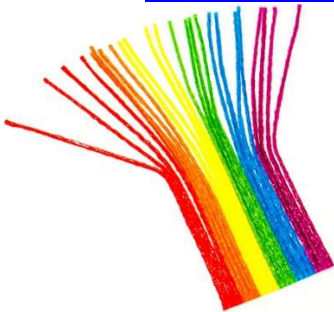
### **HAND FIDGETS**

Hand Fidgets are great self-regulation tools to help with focus, attention, calming, and active listening. There are countless items that can be used as hand fidgets. It is important that they are used as “TOOLS” and NOT toys.

- Stress Balls: You can make them with cornstarch or sand and balloons.



- Corks: for people who like to pick at things.
- Wikki Stix [www.wikkistix.com](http://www.wikkistix.com)



- Marbles in a small bag
- Squish balls: kids love the ones that an effect happens when you squish it (eyes pop out, or different colors turn on)
- Ponytail bands
- Soft pipe cleaners with ends cut off (not sharp)



- Silly Putty or rubber kneaded eraser



- Velcro: Attach a 5-inch strip of adhesive Velcro underneath the desk for students to rub with their fingers. Most kids like the soft-loop Velcro but some prefer the more prickly side – either one will do the trick.

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RESOURCES compiled by Sarasota District Occupational Therapy Department staff  
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