

Spring 2015

Autism Bay Area



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Sensory Activities for
Calming Hyperactivity



Sensory Activities for Calming Hyperactive Children

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Parenting or teaching hyperactive children can be frustrating and futile without tools and techniques to help soothe the child who is constantly feeling restless. Hyperactive children are either moving continuously or talking incessantly or both. They have a hard time keeping their bodies still; they seem to be fidgeting and always “on the go.” It is common for them to speak loudly and interrupt others. They can’t sit still in class and have a low frustration tolerance. This inability to self-regulate makes it hard for them to interact socially, impedes their ability to focus, causes anxiety, and often makes it harder for parents and caregivers to help the child.

Hyperactivity can be a symptom of a variety of developmental differences such as, but not limited to, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Childhood Anxiety Disorders, Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Sensory Processing Disorder. Therapeutic activity to help support the hyperactive child may include psycho-social therapy, behavioral modification therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, psychiatric and sensory integration therapy.

Sensory integration therapy is a successful intervention approach used by skilled clinicians in occupational therapy. The approach helps override the hyperactive brain in a child, allowing them to better adapt to their environment. Sensory integration is how the brain processes and responds to various types of sensory input as a way of organizing different sensations for different tasks. In addition to using our five senses - sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste - we also have a “vestibular” sense and a “proprioceptive” sense. Our vestibular sense supports our balance and movement. This sense tells us where we are in relation to the ground and things around us. Our proprioceptive sense gives us information about how our bodies are moving in space. This awareness is what helps us control and plan our motor movements. For example, the child who is under sensitive to proprioceptive information may run around banging into objects

and people in order to feel their environment and their bodies in space - making them appear hyperactive. Sensory integration therapy supports hyperactive children in their ability to learn, play and explore. It works in providing each child with just the right balance of sensory input to help them feel calm and organized in their environments, which in turn makes them feel more successful at school, in their homes and in social interactions.

Below is a list of the top ten sensory strategies to help calm a hyperactive child:

The top 10 ways to calm a hyperactive child:

1. Seek the help of professionals. Obtain an occupational therapy assessment to determine the child’s unique sensory profile and underlying reasons behind the hyperactive behavior.
2. Create a calming space in the home, such as a tent or a space behind the couch. Limit distractions, as well as visual and auditory stimulation and keep conversations to one or two words. Essential oils such as lavender or vanilla can be placed in this space and can be used to create a calming affect on children. Massaging the oils into the arms and legs of the child in a rhythmic motion with moderate to firm pressure is calming.
3. Create a visual schedule of the child’s day. Predictability and structure help to calm anxiety.
4. Hyperactive children often become calmer as they listen to classical music, especially music free of lyrics. A specific recommendation would be “The sound health” CD series:

<http://advancedbrain.com/soundhealth/sound-health.html>

5. Provide an organized room for the child at home. In school, having

a structure and routines is also important.

6. Deep pressure is helpful for calming in the moment. For example, deep pressure can be holding the child against you in a firm but kind way. Another way to get deep pressure is exchanging bear hugs.

7. After school it is best to allow children to be outside and play and or engage in activities that provide sustained and repetitive deep pressure input such as: crossing monkey bars, gymnastics, running on a track, biking and/or scooter board.

8. Chewing. Chewing is a great way to calm a hyperactive child. It promotes blood flow to the brain and has a calming affect. Chewing gum, sucking a thick smoothie and or providing the child with chewy items such as chewy dog tags:

<http://www.amazon.com/Sensachew-Dog-Tag-Blue-Soft/dp/B006LTU8XS>

9. Teach deep breathing techniques. One way to do this is by having your child imagine blowing out candles on a cake with the number of candles equivalent to your child's age. Have your child breath in the nose and blow out each candle with the mouth one by one.

10. Proprioceptive input - resistive pushing and pulling - creates a calming affect on children. Activities that naturally provide such input are: swimming, rock climbing, riding a bike, carrying groceries, helping with household chores such as vacuuming, jump rope, playing hopscotch, and jumping on a trampoline.

The ideas presented in this article are for informational purposes only and are not medical advice. An article can never replace an individualized treatment plan developed as the result of in-person assessment, clinical observation, and collaboration between therapist and caregiver. If you are concerned about the development or functional abilities of a particular child in your life, then that child's parent should talk with his/her pediatrician or seek out the services of a developmental pediatrician or a local occupational therapist.

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pediatric occupational services since 2005. She has advanced certification in the treatment, evaluation and management of sensory processing dysfunctions and supporting children with a broad range of developmental challenges.