FOR PARENTS

Sensory ideas for home

Some children need more movement, touch and sound to feel settled, and some need less. The right mix of everyday activities can help a child stay calm and focused through the day, including Sunday morning. These are starting points. If your child sees an occupational therapist, they can build a plan that fits.

Start with the schedule

- Post a written or picture schedule for the day and point to it often. Velcro-backed pictures make it easy to change.
- Avoid rushing. Easier said than done, and it matters more than almost anything else.
- Build movement into the day on purpose.
- Pick a calm time and a quiet spot for homework.

Pushing, pulling and carrying

Work that presses on the muscles and joints is calming for almost every child. Try:

- Jumping on a trampoline or hopscotch
- Carrying books or a laundry basket
- Vacuuming or wiping down the table
- Wall push-ups or chair push-ups
- Animal walks, marching, leap frog
- Tug-of-war or play wrestling
- Stirring and kneading dough
- Crawling through couch cushions
- Big bear hugs or a weighted lap pad

Spinning and swinging

- Swinging, back and forth or spinning
- Rolling down a hill
- Hanging upside down off the couch
- Somersaults and cartwheels
- Merry-go-rounds and roller coasters

Slow, steady movement usually calms. Fast or spinning movement usually wakes a child up. Watch what your child seeks and what they avoid.

Touch

- Shaving cream, sand or soap play
- Bins of rice or dried beans
- Play dough or mixing batter by hand
- Gardening
- Dress-up with different textures

Sound and sight

- Go outside and name every sound you hear. Play listening games. Let your child control the volume.
- A white noise machine or quiet music during activities smooths out sudden sounds.
- If your child is easily distracted by what they see, simplify the room: hide clutter in bins, a solid curtain over a bookshelf, solid colors instead of patterns.

- If your child seems tuned out, do the opposite and add bright, interesting things to look at.

Smell and taste

- Lavender and vanilla tend to calm. Peppermint and lemon tend to wake up. Explore with your child and notice what works.
- Strong flavors before a meal can make a child more willing to try new foods. So can helping cook it.
- Frozen treats and fizzy drinks wake up the mouth. Play with food. Make trying new things fun instead of a battle.

Clothes and food sensitivities

- Tag-free shirts, seam-free socks and soft pants solve more mornings than you'd expect.
- Give choices whenever you can.
- Put one food you know they'll eat on every plate, and keep offering the others without pressure. Mealtime shouldn't be a fight.
- If your child's eating is very limited, talk with their doctor, therapist or a dietitian rather than pushing through it alone.

Bring what works to church. Whatever settles your child at home will probably settle them at church. Tell their buddy. The All About Me page is an easy way to write it down.