



Sensory Support



Students with Autism may need extra support to navigate indoor or outdoor spaces with a lot of stimulation: sound, movement, and visual stimulation. Remember, every child with Autism is different! What calms one may excite another. For example, some get overstimulated by too much noise, while others need to move to stay calm. Stay flexible and try out different techniques to help students calm their nervous systems:

Quiet zone: If a child has his hands over his ears or is running away from the play space, direct him to a quiet area with books or tactile toys. Sing soothing songs to him that are familiar to help calm him.

Headphones: If the child can keep them on, these are a great noise reducer and can help reduce challenging behavior that comes from sound overstimulation.

Small Spaces: A simple children's tent can provide a quiet area and reduce visual overwhelm. Place pillows and a couple books in the tent to give children a calming and comforting space or plastic sensory bottles for visual calming.

Participation: If a child is overwhelmed by the larger group, let him participate to the side of the main group activity. That way he will still be involved but in a way that feels safe to him.

Visual Play: Some students respond negatively to touch. Offer large legos, books, dancing scarves, and visual toys that will allow the child to engage without physical contact. Instruct the peers without disabilities to play through music or visual games to encourage socialization.

Visual Cues: Show pictures of the activity that is coming next or what kind of play activities that child can choose from. That visual cue may support a child that struggles with transitions or verbalizing what he wants to engage in. If offering options, hold one image up at a time.

Tactile Variety: Have toys that feel rough, smooth, bumpy, etc. Variety will ensure that every child has a way into the play that is soothing to them. Some sensations will soothe some children and not others. Experiment and see what works for that individual child!

Squeeze Toys: Provide hand-held toys that the child can squeeze (bumpy balls, stuffed animals, bean bags, play dough, bubble wrap, pipe cleaners). This can help reduce overwhelm and calm the nervous system.

Go Slowly: Instruct peers to let that child take the play at his or her own pace! If they can have time to explore their sensory environment, they will start to reach for what they need.

Take Breaks: If the child is overwhelmed by too many other children in one area, let her parallel play to the side and try to rejoin the group later. Bring some of the play supplies over to that child, so she is still engaging in the same activities as her peers. Stay flexible. Avoid forcing that student into an activity they are resistant to.