

## A selection of ideas...

A selection of useful ideas and activities to help children:

- build and maintain friendships & confidence
- learn self-regulation activities
- get ready to participate
- cope with change
- And so much more...

The activities are divided into 3 categories: **Movement**, **Sensory** and **Emotional Regulation**.

The following activities are examples of things which could be built into the structure of the day to try to keep children's stress bucket levels low.

[Psychological Service Home Visiting Teachers](#)



## DISCLAIMER:

Every child is different and develops at different speeds. The ideas on these cards might help quickly but, more often you have to do activities consistently and regularly.

We do not recommend a "one size fits all" approach and we caution you to be considerate of any possible aversions a child may have to some sensory activities.

If, after using relevant support strategies for a while, you still have concerns then seek advice from the Occupational Therapy Service. You can contact them on the Just Ask helpline. Just Ask can be accessed between 1-4 pm every Tuesday and Thursday on **0300 303 1365**. They may also point you in the direction of other therapists or specialists.

## Favourite activities

Some children find their own strategy for self-soothing by doing an activity they really enjoy. This could include counting, reciting the alphabet song, lining things up, building with construction toys, completing puzzles, etc. Sometimes a self-chosen activity could be harmful, have an impact on others or be so dominant that it takes over or restricts their ability to interact and play.

It's important to recognize the child's need to engage in this activity and work out why they might be doing it. They may also need help to manage it. Could you find other activities which might meet the same need?

This document contains ideas for a range of activities which may have a similar calming effect. Explore the options to find out which work best for the child.

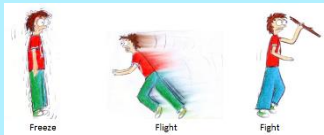
## Useful Websites, apps & publications

- <https://bumps2bairns.com/>
- <https://www.headspace.com/kids>
- [Headspace: Meditation & Sleep APP](#)
- **Sensory Processing 101** Abraham, D., Heffron, C., Braley, P. & Drobnjak, L. 2015.
- [Joining in with sensory differences](#)

The ideas within this resource have been suggested or cribbed from a variety of sources and credit goes to colleagues, Highland Council OT Services and free online resources.

## MOVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

Movement and balance (vestibular system) is probably the most important sense as it acts as the "gatekeeper" to our fight or flight or freeze response.



It is important to include plenty of movement opportunities throughout the day. Try to aim for about an hour in total. Although this may seem like a lot it can be made up in small amounts e.g. 5 minutes dancing around the kitchen in the morning, 10 minutes walking to nursery/ELC, etc.

## Puddle jumping / Hoop jumping

- Jump in with two feet together
- Jump out with two feet together
- Jump on your tiptoes
- Hop in the puddle/hoop
- Make the biggest splash
- Step through the hoop
- Skip with the hoop

## Autumn walks

- Kick up the leaves
- Throw the leaves above your head
- Tiptoe through the leaves
- March through the leaves
- Rake up a pile of leaves
- 1,2,3 jump into the leaves
- Roll in the leaves

## Animal walks

Let's walk to the next lamp post...

- ...like a kangaroo, frog, crab, bird, etc.
- ...on our tiptoes like a floating butterfly
- ...following the monkey leader
- ...with giant elephant footsteps

<p><b>People walks</b></p> <p>Let's walk to the next lamp post...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...like a ballet dancer</li> <li>• ...like a superhero</li> <li>• ...following the leader</li> <li>• ...like a soldier</li> <li>• ...like a swimmer</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sensory walks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close your eyes and listen. What can you hear?</li> <li>• Look closely at the ground. What can you see?</li> <li>• Close your eyes and tell me what you feel? (cold, wet, wind, shoes, coat label, etc.)</li> <li>• Find smooth/hard/soft things</li> <li>• Carry this heavy backpack (but not too heavy!)</li> <li>• Let's go on your scooter</li> </ul>
<p><b>Heavy work chores</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make use of tidy up time: fill and carry toy boxes, plumping cushions, stacking chairs, etc.</li> <li>• Setting or clearing up after meals or snacks e.g. carrying jug of water to table, wiping table, etc.</li> <li>• Helping in the garden</li> <li>• Helping with laundry</li> <li>• Putting the shopping away</li> <li>• Horse and cart game</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sensory-motor scavenger hunt</b></p> <p>Find something to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...climb</li> <li>• ...crawl under</li> <li>• ...jump over</li> <li>• ...walk across</li> <li>• ...balance on your head</li> <li>• ...use as a drum</li> <li>• ...match with hard/smooth/soft/squishy/etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Positioning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play on your tummy, your back or in side-lying</li> <li>• Play at shoulder height e.g. paint standing at an easel, work on a smart board, wipe the white board, tidy the shelves, etc.</li> <li>• Vary sitting options e.g. on a beanbag, against the leg of a table, snuggled beside a grown up, on a cushion, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mirror, mirror</b></p> <p>Partner up with the child facing you. Change the position of your body e.g. lifting an arm, turning sideways, etc. and ask the child to mimic your position. Continue to do this encouraging the child to copy your every move. Switch roles!</p>
<p><b>Parachute games</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parachute popcorn: bounce the balls in the middle but keep them on the parachute</li> <li>• Make waves at ground level and encourage the child to stomp out the air bubbles</li> <li>• Make waves at waist height</li> <li>• See other examples in <a href="http://playparachutes.com/pagaac.html">Play@Home</a> <a href="http://playparachutes.com/pagaac.html">http://playparachutes.com/pagaac.html</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>Drumming</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tap with your hands on a table and add "Red Light/Green Light" into the game</li> <li>• Tap or beat with pencils, chopsticks, maracas, etc.</li> <li>• Tap and copy a simple rhythm</li> <li>• Tap on the child's back (if they like it) or on a ball</li> <li>• Instead of tapping try clapping, stomping feet, clicking tongues...</li> </ul>

### Movement to music

- Step/march to the beat
- Play musical statues
- Dance with streamers tied to ankles/ wrists
- Action songs and rhymes
- Try child-friendly Yoga on YouTube
- [GoNoodle!](#)

### Move it – Movement Break ideas!

- Squeeze a stress ball
- Take a walk, to 'deliver a note'
- Swing on a swing
- Bounce on a trampoline
- Do stretches
- Try Jumping Jacks
- Have a go at wall push ups

### SUPPORTING SENSORY REGULATION:

Sensory Regulation allows children to maintain an appropriate level of alertness so that they can be ready to play and learn

For some children a firm hug or a cuddle or some other tactile experience like a massage or something for them to cuddle or stroke can be soothing.

Other children may need to be helped to move away from an over stimulating situation or environment to reduce their stress. This could include a walk or moving to a different or quiet environment or space.

### Hand warm ups

- Pencil rolls: have the child roll their pencil between their hands – fast, slow, out to the left, down at their feet, up above their head...
- Hand sandwiches; stacking hands game
- Follow the leader with hand warm ups; rub together, tap them on your head, click your fingers, clap 1,2,3, squeeze together as tight as possible, etc.

### Sensory dough fun

- Use Playdoh to squeeze, pat, stretch, mould, roll, etc.
- Use Playdoh Disco and Funky Feet on YouTube to extend this further to add music, rhythm, body awareness, crossing the mid-line, etc.
- Hide small objects in the dough for a mini treasure hunt
- Add scents and colours to the dough
- Warm up the dough but be careful not to overheat it!

### Balloons, feathers or bubbles

- Keep it up just by blowing
- Tie a string between two chairs and blow over/under
- Blow through a hula hoop, across a floor-based obstacle course or off the opposite end of a table
- Keep balloons up or pop bubbles, with any part of your body except your hands
- Bat the balloon with a cardboard tube

### Bubble wrap stomp (art)

Roll out large pieces of paper and squirt paint in drops and lines on it. Place various sizes of bubble wrap on top of your paint design. Get the child to jump on the bubble wrap with bare feet until they can jump no more! Pull off the bubble wrap to reveal the masterpiece below.

Or try making art with the child wearing booties made from bubble wrap!

### Sensory exploration & discovery

- Sensory bins for hands-on messy fun e.g. with warm custard, cool jelly, dry rice, freezing crushed ice, autumn leaves, gravel, etc.
- Sensory bags/bottles for clean and easy exploration. Hide little trinkets in wet or dry substances for the children to discover within
- Fill a bag with commonly used/seen objects and have the child feel within and guess what they are touching
- Cosy down with a lava lamp



### Sucking, Crunching and Blowing (oral motor)

- Offer a snack that provides a crunching or chewing opportunity
- Drinking from a sports water bottle can provide a calming sucking sensation
- How about giving a kazoo, mouth organ or paper windmill for more blowing opportunities

### Mouthercises

- Buzz like a bee or click with your tongue
- Pucker up and make kissing noises
- Open your mouth wide and say "Aaaaah!"
- Press your lips tightly together and say "mmmmm!"
- Blow up your cheeks like a bubble and pop them with your hands
- Blow up a balloon or puff out a candle
- Stick out your tongue as far as possible and make other silly faces

### TOWARDS EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION:

Working through emotional awareness is tough for everyone but we can take positive steps towards helping our very young children learn to manage their feelings by:

- Labelling their emotions and facial expressions as they experience them
- Helping them to recognise and name their own feelings
- Helping them to manage their feelings

What follows is a tiny part of an infinite list of calming strategies. The idea is always to personalise the approach to each child in our care, trying out some options that might work for them and then to support them to develop self-regulation skills.

### Deep breathing with visual aids

Take a look at [Coping Skills for Kids](#) blog post on using shapes to teach deep breathing

Lazy 8 breathing visual

Deep breathing star visual



<https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/using-shapes-to-teach-deep-breathing>

or

[Take 5 Breathing Exercise](#)

<https://childhood101.com/take-5-breathing-exercise/>

### Bubble Breathing

Blowing bubbles can be a useful way to practice controlled breathing. This can help to reduce anxiety or other strong emotions. Learning how to relax can be helpful, even at a young age.

This information sheet on [Bubble Breathing](#) is adapted from activities in Resilient Kids to School, a [resource pack](#) from Highland Council Psychological Service, created for children in the early years and used in many Highland schools.

### Emotional check-ins/thermometers

Check in on the good times as well as the more difficult ones. Use language, images or characters that appeal to young children.



### "Picture it"

- Have a photo album to look through of:
  - favourite people
  - pets
  - things of specific interest or
  - places
- Provide a box to keep favourite books in which can be looked at in quiet times.
- Have a box of mark making materials always available for those who find this activity calming.

### Listen!

- Listen to music which the child finds soothing
- Listen to a favourite audio story
- Block out noise when it's distressing but be wary of wearing ear defenders for too long. Children need to learn to filter sounds to be able to listen to what's important.