

Are you having trouble with some of the kids in your class?

Are there a couple of kids who stand out and make teaching hard?

Occupational therapy services can help some kids, but there is much you can do with a few good tools or strategies for managing behavior.

Kids today are living in a much faster paced world and many of them can't keep up, so behavior begins to affect not only their learning, but often the learning of the entire class. If you have been struggling with one (or more) of these kids, try out the strategies we have provided. We are trying a "toolbox" of sorts to get you started. Much like checking out books at the library, we encourage you to try these strategies, tools and equipment. If you document what you are seeing, it becomes easier to better determine what the cause of behavior is and which tools work for the specific needs of a child.

We are working toward being able to provide more individualized intervention, but we need you to start the process in your classroom. Keep in mind, strategies that work one day might not work the next. It's not easy, and some days it will seem like nothing works. Please try these strategies for a month before completely discarding them. Kids that truly need sensory tools will use them...if they become toys and more of a distraction, we need to consider other reasons behind behavior. We can't tell kids to STOP a behavior, we need to replace it so they continue to get what they need to learn; this is how a toolbox can be helpful.

Executive functioning is under-developed in ALL children, but some kids simply can't adapt or rise to our expectations. We want to help you determine if behavior is based on sensory issues, specific executive skills that are lagging or something more organic in nature. If nothing seems to work, fill out the questionnaire provided so we can begin to determine what specific skills might be preventing this child from being successful. Utilize the problem-solving strategies at the bottom of that page to begin communicating with the child. A huge way to help these kids is through enlisting their help in determining what the problem is, coming up with solutions and monitoring how it is going. We can't define their problem or come up with solutions without their buy-in or ideas so this is a very different approach and likely why consequences may not have worked in the past. It's not easy or fast, but eventually, it does work. Thank you for your commitment to our kids!

Sensory Processing: You must consider all the senses when coming up with strategies. The following table lists strategies for symptoms/behaviors you might see that could fall under a specific sensory area and tools you can try.

Behavioral Symptoms might include:

- Movement- Fidgeting, jumping, standing, can't calm down after recess, hyperactive (bull in a china store)
- Touch- Avoids touch or close contact, seeks out and touches everything, constantly fidgets with hands
- Auditory- Sensitive to noise, has trouble in groups or loud settings, never hears instructions
- Visual- Distracted/watching surroundings vs. instruction, avoids light, struggles in busy room, visually busy work is hard
- Oral- Sucks on clothes/hair, chews on erasers/nails to point of affecting participation

Strategies that might support behavioral challenges might include:

<u>Movement</u>	<u>Touch</u>	<u>Auditory</u>	<u>Visual</u>	<u>Oral</u>
Deep breathing	Compression vest	Noise cancelling headphones	Quiet corner	Water bottle or trips to fountain
Weighted pad/vest	Velcro on desk	Earplugs	Cover part of page	Gum
Heavy work	Heavy work	Quiet corner	Visual cues/cards	Sensory diet
Dynamic sitting	Sensory diet	Breaks to move	Decrease visual clutter	Chewy/crunchy Snacks
Breaks for movement	Dynamic sitting	Touch to get attention	Lamp vs. fluorescent lighting	Chewelry or pencil toppers
Thera-band on chair	Hand fidgets	Written instructions	Hoodies/hats	Chewy sippy cup
Sensory diet	Deep pressure	Picture cues		Weighted medicine ball
Jobs for teacher	Pencil fidgets	Bell for initiation		Heavy oral work
Standing to work	Personal bubble	Picture schedule		Ice
Chair push-up	Line buddy	MP3 or music		
Stretching/Yoga	Line placement	Vestibular input		
Compression shirt	Play-doh/Thera-putty			
Timer	Vibration			
Line placement	Joint compression			
Line Buddy	Picture schedule			
Heavy walking	Weighted medicine ball			
Rocking/spin chair				
Weighted medicine ball				

Definitions and what these tools look like:

Deep Breathing- Count to 3 breathing in (“smell the flower”) and blow out counting to 5 (“blow out the candles”)

Weighted pad/vest- Weight can be on lap, shoulders or worn. Ideally, it’s 10 min on then take a break but usually the child will know when they want it off. If you keep it on all day the nervous system gets used to it and it doesn’t have the same effect.

Dynamic sitting- Cushion, ball chair, t-stool, lying on stomach, standing at board or at a tall table/desk to work, balance board

Breaks for movement- Doesn’t have to be huge, even a walk to the drinking fountain will work

Thera-band on chair- Stretchy band that goes around legs of chair so child can push/pull and work leg muscles to feed nervous system

Chair push-up- Sitting in a chair, put hands under legs/hips and push up, so legs and buns are up off the seat

Sensory Diet- Any kind of movement-based activity that can be integrated into a daily routine. For instance, before transitions do breathing and put chairs on top of desk. Returning from recess do 10 wall pushups or chair pushups before sitting to work.

Jobs for teacher- Running errands (even made-up ones) especially if it involves carrying something heavy not only feeds the nervous system but it allows for a change in environment and can help the student reset when you notice they are struggling

Standing to work- Many teachers are raising the height (or using bed risers) of their tables to provide alternative heights. You can also take the lower legs off of tables to provide for sitting on the floor while at the table. Making various “centers” in your room with different seating options will let all your students benefit from movement-based input for work time

Stretching/yoga- This is usually an entire class activity and done when the teacher notices that most kids aren’t regulated or attending. It can be 30 seconds and done right at their seat, so it is easy to transition back to work

Compression shirt- Some kids need the pressure of these tight-fitting shirts to feel good in their own skin.

Timer- When kids have trouble attending or beginning an activity it can be related to motivation. When they see how much time they have before a break (even a 30 second stretching break) it can help them muster the energy to begin

Velcro on desk- Stick the hook end of Velcro to under-side of desk so child can rub their fingers along during listening time

Hand/Pencil fidgets- squeeze balls, pencil toppers that twist or move or anything to fidget with during listening time, items that are soothing (smooth rock or worry stone)

Noise cancelling headphones- These allow for participation while dulling the noise often associated with classroom time (not to be used all day!! Meant to be periodic!)

Quiet corner- Providing a quiet work space for times when focus is difficult can be critical. Some teachers set up a study carrel with headphones/earplugs, beanbag (behind screen). Sometimes a tent or enclosure of some sort can be all the child needs to still hear what is going on but get the break they need.

Touch to get attention- When input doesn't register, sometimes simply touching their shoulder can help.

Personal bubble- Picturing a bubble can help kids understand that people have different spatial needs related to engagement. Many kids needing movement or seeking touch are always in personal bubbles and this is tough especially for the kids who don't do well with touch. Allowing for these kids to stand in back during circle time or have a space that allows for a little bigger bubble can keep them participating while not setting off their sensory system

Line buddy- A student who respects and understands personal bubbles could be paired in line with one that struggles with standing/walking in line

Line placement- Kids that need to move or need input often struggle when standing/walking in line. Putting them in the back or giving them something to carry while in line can distract or give the input they need to be successful. When kids are in the front or back of line it decreases chance of unexpected touch by 50%

Hoodies/hats- Blocking out the visual world can be as simple as allowing for a hoodie or hat in certain environments

Written instructions- Kids that shut down and therefore miss verbal instruction can refer back when something is visually right in front of them

Visual/Picture cues- Providing a way to let the student see what is expected, what the end result is or what the motivator is can help with starting work. It also fills in gaps and allows them to figure out what they might have missed in verbal instruction. Using a break card as a picture or visual tool can also help kids who are embarrassed or can't find the words for times when they need help.

Bell for initiation- A different sound to indicate "go" can sometimes make more of an impression than simply saying "begin"

Cover part of the page- Kids who get overwhelmed with visual detail often can't start working because they shut down just as you set the busy page they must complete in front of them. Covering part of this and chunking the work can help.

Lamps vs. Fluorescent lighting- the bright lights of a classroom can feel like razor blades to some students. Providing alternative lighting options (even for just certain times) can help these kids focus and stay learning

Water bottle- Oral input is critical for focused attention so allowing kids to sip on water or move to get a drink can help

Gum- Make sure that this is used as a tool so kids must respect its use and never have it out of the mouth or tell their peers that they have it

Chewy or crunchy snacks- Bagels, licorice, jerky, taffy, carrots, pretzels are options

Chewelry or pencil toppers- These can be necklaces or pencil top fidgets designed for chewing but keep in mind there will be slobber so determine if this is something your system can handle and that it is developmentally appropriate for their age

Chewy Sippy Cup- These provide water and a more socially appropriate way to chew without the drool potential. They look like sippy cups but have a chewy mouth piece that is designed for chewing

Deep pressure- Have the child hug themselves tight, push hands together and hold, shrug shoulders and relax. Any time you touch the child use firm, deep pressure.

Play-doh/Thera-putty- This material is made to squish and roll so it can address fine motor issues and even help kids better understand and perceive the pressure of their pencil on the page

Heavy work- Anything that makes the muscles work helps with regulation- carrying books, stacking chairs, or even games like wheelbarrow

Vibration- Hand held massager on hands, arms, legs

Decrease Visual Clutter- Cover busy bookcases, make corners of room with nothing on walls or hanging overhead

Joint compression- Teach the child to gently push/pull fingers at all joints, push hands together

Heavy walking- Encourage walking while lunging because this uses big muscles of the legs, and walking on tip toes or with toes pulled up in the air can also feed the nervous system

Rocking/Spin Chair- Rocking chairs can be calming and alerting. Spinning chairs are alerting so kids can wiggle without banging into their neighbor. If they spin, do no more than 10 revolutions each way even if they think they want more.

Picture schedule- This can even be a quick thing made from pictures taken on a smart phone. It is simply a way to provide pictures to show the progression of their day. Words can be used, but pictures process faster. Knowing what is coming allows for discussion regarding how to handle something that has been hard in the past or if their routine is changing (like with a substitute teacher or assembly)

MP3 or music- Calming music in class or with headphones can help kids who struggle with times that are loud. When kids are always telling others to be quiet it can be a way to manage auditory input that is too much.

Vestibular input- Anything that involves tipping the head is vestibular. Vestibular input helps with auditory processing so rolling on their stomach over a ball to put their head down, swinging, stretches that involve moving head, rocking chair

Weighted medicine ball- Heavy work to lift and move. Good activity before seat time or for transition times

Heavy oral work- Sucking apple sauce, pudding or yogurt through a straw

Other Common Issues that Occur at School

Standing/Walking in Lines- Standing and walking in line involves being bumped into, boredom with waiting and walking at a pace that might not work for your system. Give kids an agenda to complete as they walk like “I spy” or counting the number of red objects in their head. Focus on counting breaths versus the “bubble in the mouth” so they aren’t holding their breath but can still transition quietly.

Humming/Verbal Processing- This is a common sensory anchor or way a child is attempting to self-regulate. They can like the way it feels in their mouth, or like the sound it is making (whether it is to alert them or drown out other noise in their space).

Fidgeting, Tapping Hands/Feet/Objects- This provides proprioceptive input and feeds the nervous system for regulation. Telling a child to stop doing this prevents them from getting the input they were attempting to get to focus. The goal is to REPLACE this behavior because it does serve a purpose to the child. Possible replacements include fidgets, deep pressure into hands, Thera band around a chair, vibrating toy, heavy work before working or dynamic sitting options.

Times of frustration or outbursts- Refrain from talking the student through the moment because when their system is in fight/flight they can’t use the logical part of their brain. Allow for a break or change in scenery before talking. Picture prompts and simple “first/then” commands can be used to help the child redirect or utilize a strategy for resetting their nervous system. Try to create environments that are organized, clutter free, and with dim lights or calming/quiet music.

Work Refusal- Often this can be related to an executive skill weakness or not knowing WHAT to do or HOW to do it. Providing discrete, visual prompts or instructions can help, setting a timer with a clear motivator for when the work timer has gone off, allows for a sense of control over their environment can be a good start. Maybe Math or English could be an option or starting with 2 or 4 problems knowing the reward at the end of 4 is bigger than 2. Keep in mind that pushing and reminding often doesn’t help and if they are refusing to work, they aren’t engaging in academics anyway so providing an alternative to ease them into participation isn’t such a terrible thing. Once they experience success through the baby steps you’ve provided, they will likely enjoy how that feels and try again. If they have some

lagging skills you are able to identify with their help they might be able to figure out WHY they couldn't start in the first place and you can work through ways to help them. Consider also that the child may need more time to process than their peers so setting a timer to help them start out can sometimes work.

Trouble with Changes in Routine- When change occurs, kids who depend on structure and predictability for self-regulation often melt. Preparing them through picture schedules, taking time to talk about possible problems that could arise and incorporating heavy work should all be considered. Visual timers help kids see how long they have until their next transition. Some kids that have trouble with noise or visual stimulation have a really hard time at assemblies and sporadic events at school. These may not be appropriate for them to participate in (especially if it hasn't gone well in the past) or sometimes if they can be prepared about the subject matter of the assembly, they can have control over where they stand and you can have them focus on certain things (like how many times they speaker said the word "bully" when you know the content is about school relationships etc.)

IF A TOOL DOESN'T MEET THE NEED AND CHANGE BEHAVIOR, THEN THE PROBLEM LIKELY ISN'T STEMMING FROM A SENSORY ISSUE (YOU SHOULD SEE A CHANGE IN 24 HOURS IF IT IS SENSORY AND YOU TRY AN APPROPRIATE TOOL). CONSIDER OTHER IDEAS LIKE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS THAT MIGHT BE WEAK AND AFFECTING A CHILD'S ABILITY TO DO WHAT IS REQUESTED.

FREQUENCY FOR BREAKS AND WORK TIME BASED ON AGE:

KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS NEED BREAKS EVERY 15 MIN

1ST GRADE EVERY 20 MIN

2ND GRADE EVERY 25 MIN

3RD GRADE EVER 30 MIN