



Summer's Here!

Wow! Where has this year gone? It's the countdown to summer! It has been a busy start the year for senSI and we are now preparing for our summer programmes. Summer is often a daunting time for children being out of routine and facing a period of transition.

Our therapists have created some simple and enjoyable activities for you to try out. We hope you have an amazing summer and don't forget to take photos for your therapy journals!



Structuring unstructured times during the holidays

We all like our holidays to be a little less structured, to not have to do so much planning and organising; however, for some of our kids these unstructured times can be incredibly difficult. Some children have difficulty with:

- ✋ Knowing what day of the week and what time of the day it is
- ✋ Knowing and predicting how long school holidays will last for
- ✋ Generating their own ideas about what they can do or play with
- ✋ Knowing what options are available and what type of activities suit what type of weather
- ✋ How to play with different toys in different ways, especially toys that involve imaginary play
- ✋ Having too many options to choose from and feeling overwhelmed
- ✋ Remembering what chores to do and when
- ✋ Managing their regulation when there is a change in routine and / or transitions

As a parent you can create some structure during these unstructured times by using visual supports:

- ✋ Talk about which routines will stay the same and which ones will be different
- ✋ Create a calendar for the holidays and tick the days off
- ✋ Highlight major events on the calendar as well as when it is time to go back to school
- ✋ Use a whiteboard to create a checklist of chores or jobs to do in the morning or afternoon and teach your child to tick the jobs off as he / she finishes it.
- ✋ Put a reward at the end of the list, if it is not too long, or at the end of a job. Make a decision regarding your child's ability to manage rewards that are delayed
- ✋ You can use rewards to keep your child motivated to complete jobs such as a drink and a biscuit, watching a youtube video together, playing a game, changing a toy, having a dance to his or her favourite song
- ✋ Break your day up into segments, e.g. morning afternoon and evening. Create a visual using a whiteboard or a big piece of paper to show what will happen during that period of time as well as the choices of games or activities
- ✋ Use meal and snack times as time markers throughout the day and 'reset', i.e. revisit your visuals during these times and talk about what you have done and what will happen next. Use a visual such as these cards
- ✋ Don't put all the toys out at the same time. Only show what options are available for that period of time and what they can do with it. Make a list or draw pictures and put this on a board to remind children of their choices
- ✋ Give plenty of opportunity to move, especially on rainy days.
- ✋ Remember to include sensory play or activities
- ✋ When you are unsure about what will happen, explain this and use a big question mark on your calendar or whiteboard to indicate that you do not know yet.
- ✋ Use a timer on your phone, computer or tablet to help a child understand how long half an hour or an hour is.
- ✋ There are some great apps available to help parents create visual schedules or use timers, such as Visuals2Go, This for That: Visual Schedules, Choiceworks



garden ideas

natural art

Natural art involves collecting natural stuff like twigs, leaves, grass, flowers, etc. to create something beautiful. You can get involved with your kids and make small huts using the twigs, grass, etc. It is a lot of fun, and your kids will get their creative juices flowing once they realize how amazing it is to bring your ideas to life. This activity is perfect during autumn with so many things to find on the ground.

You don't necessarily need to use only the natural stuff. You can bring cardboards, crayons, sprinkles, tapes, gums, etc., but you must use stuff from your garden.

sponge darts

Create a darts or target board on a flat surface in the back garden, and test the kids' hand/eye coordination. Sponges dipped in water make great missiles to throw at a target, with the wet residue confirming their accuracy. Add different scoring zones to give the kids something to aim for – as they challenge their friends to become the back garden wet sponge darts champion.



Outside activities

Get outside in the garden

Gardening is a great activity for children's sensory processing skills. Digging, raking, weeding (through pulling out or using a weed scraper) and planting seeds are all good proprioceptive activities which require heavy work or use of force, stretch and pressure. There are also plenty of tactile stimuli opportunities through planting in soil, handling different textures of plants, use of pots or other garden materials e.g. bark, stones.

Gardening can provide visual treats for sensory seekers through use of various colours, water features, flowers and lights. Also for those olfactory seeking, perhaps using herbs for those range of smells as part of a sensory garden area.

Through gardening, children will also work on developing their gross and fine motor skills (digging, grasping gardening tools, manipulating seeds, reaching up to prune).



Climb a tree

Why not get the children to hug a tree for some extra proprioceptive input and if safely supervised and there is minimal risk, encourage some tree climbing! This is great work for strength, grasping, endurance, co-ordination and more. This can also encourage their connection with nature.

Use of Props

If coming up with ideas is difficult for your child, grasp a 'prop' to help inspire movement, engagement and creativity. This can include hula hoops, swing ball, bubbles or using chalk for drawings on pavements or walls (Pictures can be taken of the latter as a keepsake when these areas are then washed). Think of different shapes and sizes for your bubbles and make use of big trays (a barbeque grill cleaning tray or paddling pool are ideal as they have a large surface area but are not too deep). Children will become very happy with making extra big bubbles through using a hula hoop, especially if getting each other to stand inside the bubble!



Treasure Hunt and Obstacle Courses

You'll already be aware of how our therapy staff use obstacle courses and various hunts for finding hidden items/treasures in our clinic or school sessions, to encourage sensory-motor movement and really work on those planning and problem-solving skills. These activities are easy to take outside and you can either create yourself or encourage your young one to use outdoor natural resources to create these. Getting siblings/friends/parents/carers to plan each other's also means the opportunity for joint play and enjoyment with each having a clear role each time. Using outdoor chairs, tunnels, trees, garden string (for walking foot over foot like a balance beam) and other easy to hand equipment, can be useful. For those requiring more visual/written instruction, just using paper for a visual prompt of an activity e.g. hop to the other side of garden on one leg, carry a ball up your t-shirt, hop 15 times. Think of incorporating different tactile textures into your courses/hunts and encourage bare feet (when ground is safe and void of sharp hazards) such as putting sand, pasta, rounded stones and other safe materials in plastic boxes or on the ground to manouvere over.



Make the most of the rainy times!

We may well be in for another hot summer but do make the most of any rain or water opportunities. Getting your child into their welly boots and going puddle jumping is great proprioceptive input. Encourage your children to get wet while in play through taking them to streams and beaches. You can't beat the calming sensory input of running water and increase tactile stimuli through sandcastle making or encouraging them to dig with their feet!

Hit the playgrounds

There are hundreds of ways to increase a child's sensory input on the playground and it requires every skill including balance, strength, co-ordination, spatial awareness, negotiating different textures and not forgetting to mention, some social and communication skills with fellow little ones. Stimulating your senses through movement is easy when you have access to swings, see-saws, climbing frame, monkey bars and more. The magic sense of proprioception especially can easily be accessed through climbing, hanging onto/from equipment, pushing others on equipment or for a double dose of sensory stimuli to aid calming, a child using a traditional swing independently and not being pushed i.e. using legs and arms to self-propel and control movement. (Proprioception and linear Vestibular input) If you're in doubt as to which is best to encourage your child with, speak to your therapist for guidance.

Here are some simple ideas for sensory foods and recipes

Pineapple Orange Banana Lollies

A little sour, a little cold and the perfect alerting combo!

Ingredients:

2 cups of fresh chopped pineapple
3 bananas, peeled
2 oranges, peeled

Directions:

Pulse all ingredients together in a blender until smooth. Pour into lolly moulds and freeze until firm. For some extra health benefits, add a teaspoon of fresh ginger.

Mint chip smoothie or Lollies

A healthy alternative to heavier lolly or ice-cream options, that is still chocolatey and good to enjoy cold on a warm day. Even better if your child has grown their own mint!

Ingredients:

2 handfuls/cups of spinach leaves
1 cup of full-fat coconut milk
5-6 fresh mint leaves
1/2 teaspoon of vanilla extract or essence
1/4 cup of honey or maple syrup
1 frozen banana
1/2 cup of chocolate chips or cocoa nibs

Directions:

1. Blend all ingredients except or the chocolate chips in a high speed blender until completely blended and no green bits remain.
2. Add in the chips at the very end and pulse in the blender very quickly then serve in glasses or into some lolly moulds to freeze. If having a smoothie, use paper straws for additional oral proprioceptive stimuli.

Strawberry Roll-ups

For additional sensory input, you can use home grown strawberries or take yourself off to a local strawberry farm for children to pick their own fresh strawberries

Ingredients:

4 cups of Strawberries, hulled.
1/2 cup of granulated sugar
2 Tablespoons of Lemon juice

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to a low temperature - 80 degrees Celsius if possible.
2. Line two 12 x 17 inch, rimmed baking sheets with greaseproof paper or silicone baking mats
3. Blend ingredients together until smooth. If desired, strain mixture to remove seeds.
4. Spread the mixture evenly between the two baking sheets with a spatula.
5. Bake for 3 hours or until mixture is no longer soft sticky. Rotate the pans 180 degrees half way through.
6. Transfer the hard mixture to a cutting board to slice into desired sizes. These can then be rolled up and wrapped with parchment or wax paper. Store in an airtight container.

Frozen grapes

Super easy and a fun, cold snack to alert.

Ingredients:

Grapes

Directions:

Place the grapes in the freezer... When frozen eat.

travelling over the summer

For many children with special needs, even going on holiday could be a stressful experience. This is especially due to the increased sensory input from busy noisy environments when travelling. They could also struggle with dealing with unfamiliar environment and routines.



Navigating airports

-  Inform your child in a timely manner that you will be travelling to allow time to prepare them. Be mindful that informing a child too long in advance could create more anxiety.
-  Explain what will happen in advance. Visuals might be useful to explain the sequence of events and could be used during travelling
-  Show pictures or videos of the airport. Some airports might have a virtual tour you can access
-  When going through Security, try to have a familiar adult in front and behind the child, in case a child has to undergo additional security checks
-  Have some calming ideas ready e.g. child carrying heavy rucksack filled with their toys, books, fiddle toys, weighted toys etc. Also colouring books and pencils.
-  Snacks such as cereal bars and chewy sweets or drink from a sports drink bottle, smoothies, etc could also have a calming effect. Water Bottles will need refilling after the Security check. A twirly straw could also be used with any drinks bought/provided
-  Have some surprise/special toys available to take out if there are delays
-  Some children may benefit from wearing comfy earphones and listening to favourite music through an MP3 player. Ear defenders could be used but be aware that noise sensitivity may be more acute following a short period of time wearing them.
-  Getting the child to help pull cases or load onto trolleys then getting them involved in pushing the trolleys would provide proprioception which can help with calming.
-  Pushing a trolley or pulling a case can also provide a slight physical barrier between the child and other people which could potentially reduce anxieties about touch.
-  A fast track service is usually available at airports for children and adults with additional needs to prevent a lot of the queuing and reducing the anxiety. Sometimes this is available through a special lanyard which staff recognise as someone needing more help.
-  For some children, boarding the plane later will allow more time to move around and feel less restricted



Visual Timetable



Ear Defenders



Favourite Toys



Books for in flight



Sweets for Take Off



Trolley for toys & books

During the flight



Chewing gum or chewy food such as dried fruit during take-off might help to reduce the discomfort with ears and help with calming too.



Weighted toys or equipment and stretchy toys might help keep the child calm on the flight

Other considerations



Keep to your familiar routine and pack familiar items when able, eg child's usual flannel, soft toy, shampoo etc



When booking a hotel or apartment, ask for a quieter area if possible

Have a happy holidays...

Putting on Suntan Lotion to Child who is tactile defensive:

- ✎ During the summer it might be easier to get into the habit of applying suntan lotion daily so that it becomes part of the daily routine, potentially done in a more relaxed environment at home, rather than in the middle of a sandy beach which present additional tactile challenges!
- ✎ Reapply the suntan lotion regularly – perhaps top up every 2 hours so that the child gets used to this.
- ✎ Introduce the concept of using suntan lotion well before the event, discussing why we need it to protect ourselves, that everyone in the family is going to use it and that is it not good to go outside without it on.
- ✎ What type of sunscreen you use may make a difference. Spray sunscreen might make it easier than messy, greasy lotion and minimises the rubbing in. Spray down the child – not on the face and make sure they get covered. Some sunscreens also dry on the skin and are then sand resistant and water resistant so that no sand sticks and lotion does not need reapplying after being in the water. E.g. bit.ly/2JpSUKZ
- ✎ Neutrogena sunscreen ultra sheer stick is good for rubbing on a child's face.
- ✎ Take a mini pop up wind shield/tent and blanket. This provides a little den to escape to when the sun/wind/visual overload gets too much and if a blanket is placed under it, limits contact with sand when a break from sand is needed.
- ✎ Sew two large velvety beach towels together, leaving the bottom unsewn and room for the head at the top. Armholes can either be formed at the sides or sides completely sewn. Ideally this should fully cover the child's body and is fantastic for popping straight over the head on exit from the sea. Your child can then sit in it warm and snug, and dry without getting sand stuck to their body and without rubbing themselves to get dry.
- ✎ Engage in proprioceptive rich activities beforehand such as crawling or jumping. End with giving self a hug and squeezing arms. Apply pressure to self through arms, legs and face.
- ✎ Ideally the person needing suntan lotion would apply the lotion. If not possible, prepare the person you are about to touch them and approach them from the front.
- ✎ Get the person to rub in the lotion themselves. Support with hand over hand support. If this is not possible, use firm strokes to apply the suntan lotion.
- ✎ If necessary get the person to apply deep pressure to their other limb e.g. through deep touch pressure or squeezing/massage prior to further application of the suntan lotion.
- ✎ If suntan lotion is difficult sun protection shirts (rash guard shirts and shorts) can provide additional protection for the shoulders, arms and chest and reduce reapplication of suntan lotion.
- ✎ Sometimes having the child engaged in the process of which sun protection to use helps to get them involved and can reduce the battles for sun protection.



Sensory Circuits

Sensory circuits are a set of sensory based motor activities which promote sensory regulation, enabling children to achieve a calm and alert state, ready to learn and concentrate (Jane Horwood, 2009). SenSI offers sensory circuits as a group therapy session during the school holidays and this structure also forms the basis of many of our school-based sessions. We promote the use of sensory circuits within schools as part of a child's daily routine and can provide training and sensory circuit programmes individualised to a child's sensory needs.

Alerting

Movement activities, which will activate the body's central nervous system in preparation for learning.

Please note, that for some children whose arousal levels are already high, this can be too alerting and therefore they would benefit from beginning and ending with calming activities instead.

Organising

Activities that require multi-sensory processing and balance. They demand the brain and body to work together for the activities to be performed effectively. Children usually need to plan their actions, or perform actions in a sequence during these tasks; this helps to focus the brain for learning.

Calming

Activities that help give the child an awareness of their body in space, by giving feedback to the muscles, and increasing the central nervous system's ability to self-regulate sensory input.

These activities can also be used in isolation, at times when the child is feeling anxious or over stimulated to help calm them.

Multiskills Development Group

Multi skills development group is a 6 week programme, designed by our team of Occupational Therapists to help children further develop gross and fine motor skills.

This will offer the opportunity to develop further skills in:

- 🖐 Sensory Processing
- 🖐 Gross motor coordination
- 🖐 Fine motor control
- 🖐 Motor planning
- 🖐 Visual Perception
- 🖐 Visual Motor
- 🖐 Social and Emotional regulation
- 🖐 Handwriting skills

Handwriting

SenSI offers a 6 week handwriting programme.

This will offer the opportunity to develop further skills in:

- 🖐 Sensory Processing
- 🖐 Fine motor control
- 🖐 Visual Perception
- 🖐 Visual Motor Integration
- 🖐 Hand strength
- 🖐 Integrating primitive hand reflexes
- 🖐 Shoulder stability
- 🖐 Midline crossing

Just Right State Programme

The Just Right State Programme, designed by Occupational Therapist Eadaoin Bhreathnach, helps children to learn self-regulation techniques, and not to be afraid to accept regulation and nurture into their life. Many children can become anxious by feeling calm, and it unnerves them, and this programme teaches them that regulation is a positive thing! It will also help them to become more self aware, develop their sense of self, and general emotional regulation.

This will offer the opportunity to develop further skills in:

- 🖐 Sensory activities
- 🖐 Exploring regulating properties of food
- 🖐 Introducing emotional regulation work by using characters from a series of books called The Scared Gang
- 🖐 Integrating primitive hand reflexes

COPING WITH SAND:



Prior to the beach play with sand when the child is calm and relaxed. Start to get used to the feel and texture of the sand. If necessary add other sensory materials which the child plays with so they can improve their tolerance of different textures. Gradually increase the amount of time they are exposed to this



Prior to going to the beach, talk about things to do to help cope with the feel of sand so you and the child can feel equipped with strategies and feel more positive about coping with it.



Wear beach shoes or swimming shoes on the sand to minimise the feel and heat of the sand when walking on it.



Engage with proprioceptive rich activities prior to playing or going onto the sand.



Have short bursts of being on the sand then sitting on a mat to reduce the exposure to the sand.



Try and have lots of fun – digging, using buckets, paddling in the sea and not focus too much on the sand. Use spades, and other equipment to dig in the sand.



Children could wear swimming leggings or rash shirts/clothing to protect themselves from the sun but also exposure to the sand. Compression garments or lycra clothing also provides the same input



Go for walks, have an ice cream, play in the sea – break up the time on the sand with pleasurable activities.



Have a soft towel to hand which the child can use to provide deep pressure which helps when a child is irritated by textures. Alternatively have a soft blanket or other material which is comforting to the child



Have lots of crunchy and chewy foods to hand which will provide oral proprioception which can help with calming



Have a drinks bottle with an integral straw or sports bottle top again to provide hydration but also to provide proprioception.



Use a pop up tent on the beach with a towel or blanket underneath to provide shelter, reduce the discomfort from the sand but also reduce the feel of the sand.