

# THE SENSORY SPACE

## AN ESSENTIAL IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Learn how simple it is to add a sensory space in your classroom that will contribute to your Social-Emotional Learning program



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# THE SENSORY SPACE

## AN ESSENTIAL IN YOUR CLASSROOM

The school and classroom provide a wealth of sensory information. Whether or not your students have special needs, processing sensory information can be a real challenge and also impact their behavior (e.g. difficulty paying attention, sitting still, working cooperatively with others, etc.).

Sensory processing difficulties arise when the brain can't sort, organize, analyze, or integrate sensory messages. It's like a "traffic jam" in the brain, with a few snippets of sensory information "stuck in circulation". When this happens, certain parts of the brain don't receive the sensory information they need to do their job<sup>1</sup>.



Providing a sensory space helps students to calm down and is a way to avoid disorganization. It's a simple solution for improving social-emotional behaviors and beneficial for cognitive development.

### What is a sensory corner?

A sensory corner is a designated area inside your classroom that is dedicated to supporting the sensory development of all students. It allows the child to take refuge there completely independently. Their withdrawal into this space helps them regulate their emotions and energy level in order to be more available to learn and interact with others.

A sensory space stimulates the primary senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch, vestibular and proprioception without creating overload because the senses are chosen on a voluntary basis.

# THE 7 SENSES



## SIGHT

Anything related to what we see. Typical needs include sensitivity or overt attraction to light and overly busy environments.



## TOUCH

Refers to touch and feeling of different textures. Some may be uncomfortable or pleasing on the body.



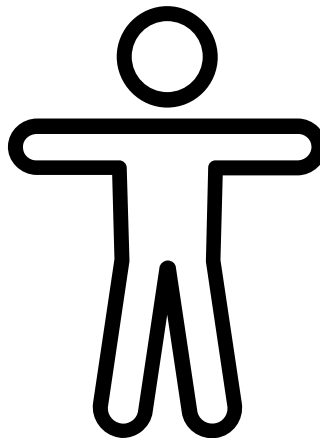
## ORAL

Associated to the mouth. Specific tastes and texture preferences and chewing are common needs.



## AUDITORY

Related to what we hear. Some noises are overwhelming or comforting. Sometimes the brain has issues processing what is heard.



## OLFACTORY

Everything we feel. Some may have trouble distinguishing smells or may be hypersensitive to smells.



## PROPRIOCEPTIVE

Helps to understand where our body parts are in relation to each other and estimate how much force to use in different activities (think of picking up a feather versus a brick).



## VESTIBULAR

This sense refers to balance and coordination of the body, it is responsible for controlling our muscles, and most of our reflexes.

## The benefits of a sensory corner



These very precious moments, lasting at least 15 minutes, improve mood management by taking care of one's emotions, increase the feeling of security, and help reduce agitation and apathy (lack of energy). No wonder they allow the improvement of attention and the quality of concentration

Regulating our senses is important in maintaining our mental and physical well-being and self-esteem. The sensory space allows for wonderful one-on-ones or supports a moment of guided learning, if the space is sufficient to accommodate the adult and child.

## How to design a classroom sensory space



- › It must be welcoming, comfortable and a defined space. The area has boundaries and is large enough to accommodate at least one seat (armchair, cushion, carpet, etc.).
- › Make sure the child will be isolated from ambient noise or the hallway.
- › Make sure you can adjust the light intensity or filter it. Some children will seek intense light while others will benefit from dim lighting.
- › Try to find a corner of the class where the student can have some privacy, out of sight of their peers. To enclose this space, you could use a curtain or furniture such as a bookcase or shelf.
- › Ideally, provide storage for the items or equipment that your corner will offer. The space should not be overloaded with things.

The objective is to be able to immerse yourself in a "cocoon-bubble" atmosphere in order to experience better sensory stimulation and enjoy all the benefits.

The effectiveness of a sensory corner has nothing to do with your allocated budget. It's therefore not necessary to invest in expensive and sophisticated equipment.

## What equipment should you provide in your sensory corner?

Your sensory corner can evolve over time and according to the needs of your students. Here are some suggested items that can stimulate the senses.



### Touch

- › Tray with play dough
- › Vibrating cushion
- › Manipulative tools such as stress balls, fidgets
- › Massage accessory
- › Homemade sheet/board with different textures on it (sandpaper, fur, silk, feathers, etc.)



### Hearing

- › Protective earmuffs
- › Earphones and radio
- › Rain stick



### Oral

- › Chewy tools (topper for pencil, pendants, gum)
- › Blowing games
- › Blowing cotton balls with a straw



### Smell

- > An accessory or cushion that you can put a few drops of essential oils on (ex: lavender)
- > Scented putty
- > Small cotton sachet (for the bottom of a drawer) with different smells



### Sight

- > Lamp (lava type, glitter, plasma, fiber optic, etc.)
- > Mini flashlight, mini battery-operated candle
- > Light tube
- > Hourglass or sensory tube
- > Homemade glitter bottle



### Vestibular (balance and movement)

- > Disc or balance board
- > Air cushion
- > Surfboard
- > Pedal exerciser
- > Rocking chair



### Proprioception

- > Weighted animals
- > Ghost or body socks
- > Resistance Band
- > Bean bag
- > Sensory peapod

You could display or make available inspirational thoughts, relaxing music, pictures to colour, breathing strategies, a timer to give the child perspective about time.

## And the most important...

Once your sensory space has been established, take the time to show it to your students and teach how to use it, when, and why so that they understand the purpose of this space.

It's also important to display the tools and resources available in the space. Don't hesitate, for example, to demonstrate breathing techniques in a large group so that they know how to repeat them when alone.

Having a space like this is a great way to implement social-emotional learning strategies in your classroom.

### And now, play on!

- The fdmt team





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créateur de  
creator of **MANIMO**®

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## About fdmt

For almost 20 years, fdmt has promoted everyone's development potential by offering quality sensory tools, including its own creation, the manimo® series of weighted animals.

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