

Sensory & Movement Bank

40 activities sorted by sensory profile, a calm-corner build guide, and the movement rhythm that helps hyperactive afternoons — a real menu instead of guessing in the moment.

Document 4 of 7

Used on Days 8, 9, 10, 13, 25, 27

In plain terms: sensory regulation just means helping your child's body get the right amount of input — not too much, not too little — so they can feel calm enough to eat, play, learn, or fall asleep. Every child needs this. Autistic children often need more deliberate help getting there.

Occupational therapy using a sensory-integration approach is recognized as an evidence-based practice, with a 2025 randomized controlled trial finding improved occupational performance following a structured program^[8], and vestibular/proprioceptive exercise interventions have shown measurable reductions in hyperactivity in a recent randomized trial^[17]. The activities in this document are a starting menu — an occupational therapist can tailor further.

Which profile is your child?

Think of it like a phone battery.

Every child's nervous system manages "input" — sound, touch, movement, light — a little differently, the same way every phone manages its battery a little differently. Neither is broken. They just run differently, and once you know which kind you're working with, everything else in this document gets easier to use.

THE SEEKING CHILD

Like a phone that drains fast and needs frequent charging, a sensory-seeking child's body seems to run low on "charge" throughout the day and needs to actively top up — through movement, deep pressure, noise, or touch. Sitting still for too long doesn't rest this child. It runs the battery down further.

THE AVOIDING CHILD

Like a phone that overheats in a hot car and needs to power down to cool off, a sensory-avoiding child's system gets overwhelmed by too much input — a loud room, a scratchy tag, bright light — and needs to retreat somewhere quiet before it can function well again.

THE MIXED CHILD — MOST CHILDREN, HONESTLY

Just like a phone can be perfectly fine on brightness but struggling on battery, most children seek input in one area (say, movement) while avoiding it in another (say, loud noise). That's not a contradiction to solve. It's the normal picture.

Spot the signs

Use this as a starting read, not a diagnosis. Most children show some signs from both columns — look for which column has *more* of your child in it.



Sensory-seeking signs

Craves movement — runs, jumps, spins, climbs on things not meant for climbing.

Crashes into furniture or people · seeks loud noise or bright light · mouths or chews objects · enjoys tight hugs or deep pressure · seems to "need" to touch everything.



Sensory-avoiding signs

Covers ears at noise levels that don't seem to bother others.

Avoids messy textures (sand, paint, certain foods) · overwhelmed by crowds or bright light · resists certain clothing textures or tags · startles easily at sudden sound or touch.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

A child might climb on every piece of furniture in the house (seeking — movement) while also refusing to wear anything but the same soft t-shirt (avoiding — touch). That's one real, mixed-profile child, not two contradictory ones. Document 4's activity lists below are grouped exactly so you can pull from "seeking" and "avoiding" for the same child.

● START HERE, THIS WEEK

Your top 6 picks to start with

Don't try all 40 activities. Start with these, matched to what you just read.

SEEKING

Loaded laundry basket push

What it is: pushing a full laundry basket across the floor. Why it helps: heavy resistance is calming for a seeking child. How: let them push it to you from across the room, 2-3 times.

SEEKING

Animal walks

What it is: bear crawl or crab walk for a short distance. Why it helps: works muscles and delivers deep input fast. How: race them across the room, 2 minutes between tasks.

AVOIDING

Noise-reducing headphones

What it is: over-ear headphones that dampen sound. Why it helps: gives instant relief in loud spaces. How: keep a pair by the door, offer before you enter anywhere loud.

AVOIDING

Weighted lap pad

What it is: a small weighted pad across the lap. Why it helps: calming, grounding pressure during seated tasks. How: place it during homework or dinner, no explanation needed.

MIXED

Sensory bin (rice or beans)

What it is: a bin of dry rice or beans to scoop and pour. Why it helps: self-paced input either profile can control. How: bury small toys inside for your child to find.

MIXED

Bubble popping

What it is: blowing and popping bubbles. Why it helps: visual tracking plus a satisfying tactile pop. How: use before a transition as a 2-minute reset.

Seeking activities

For the child whose battery runs low and needs to actively recharge.



Loaded laundry basket push

Fill a laundry basket and let your child push it across the floor. The heavy resistance gives calming input through the muscles and joints.



Wall push-ups

Push both hands flat against a wall for 10 seconds. A quick, quiet way to get the same calming pressure anywhere, even a school hallway.



Carrying grocery bags

A real household job that's also excellent sensory input — let your child carry the heavier (but still safe) bags in from the car.



Bear crawl

Walk on hands and feet like a bear for a short distance. Works shoulders and core while giving deep pressure through the arms.



Crab walk

Walk on hands and feet facing upward, belly to the ceiling. A fun break between tasks that's also a real workout.



Jumping (trampoline or mattress)

Repetitive jumping is one of the most effective ways to help a seeking child 'get the wiggles out' before a task that needs sitting still.



Squeezing a stress ball

A small, portable way to get hand and grip input anywhere — the car, a waiting room, a classroom desk.



Bear hugs (if welcomed)

A firm, full-body hug — always with your child's willing participation — can give the deep pressure some children specifically seek.



Wheelbarrow walks

Hold your child's legs while they walk on their hands. Builds arm strength and delivers strong input through the shoulders.



Towel tug-of-war

A gentle tug-of-war with a rolled towel gives resistance input in a fun, connected way.



Climbing (playground or cushions)

Climbing safely – a playground structure, or a pile of couch cushions at home – combines movement, planning and heavy input.



Heavy-blanket “burrito” game

Roll your child snugly (never over the face) in a blanket like a burrito, then “unroll” them. Playful, calming deep pressure.



Supervised swinging

The rhythmic motion of a swing gives balance (vestibular) input that many seeking children find calming and organizing.



Resistance-band pulls

Pulling against a stretchy resistance band gives strong, safe muscle input, and can be done seated at a table.

Avoiding activities

For the child whose system overheats and needs to power down.



Noise-reducing headphones

Keep a pair by the door for loud events — concerts, parties, busy stores — so your child has an instant way to turn the volume of the world down.



A dim, low-traffic corner

A spot away from bright light and foot traffic gives an avoiding child somewhere to retreat to before they're overwhelmed, not just after.



A weighted lap pad

A small weighted pad across the lap during seated tasks (homework, dinner) can have a calming, grounding effect for some children.



Slow rocking in a chair

Slow, predictable rocking is calming for many avoiding children — the key word is slow and steady, never fast or surprising.



A quiet reading nook

A soft, enclosed reading spot — even a blanket fort — gives a low-stimulation retreat that still feels like a “yes” space, not a punishment.



Soft, textured seating

Swap a hard or scratchy chair for a soft cushion if certain textures cause visible discomfort during seated time.



Advance warning before loud events

A simple heads-up — “the blender is about to turn on” — lets an avoiding child prepare instead of being caught off guard.



Sunglasses or a cap for bright light

A cheap, immediate way to reduce visual overwhelm on a bright day or under fluorescent store lighting.



Chewable jewelry for quiet oral input

For children who seek oral input but are overwhelmed by loud environments, a chew necklace offers a quiet, safe outlet.



Quiet, non-clicky fidget toys

Choose fidgets that don't add noise to an already loud environment — soft putty over a clicky pen, for example.



A warm bath

Warm water and stillness together are calming for many avoiding profiles, especially before bedtime.



Protected single-task quiet time

A short block with one task, one input, no competing noise — genuinely restorative for a child who spends most of the day filtering stimulation.



Gentle hand massage

Slow, firm (not tickly) pressure on the hands can be calming for a child who tolerates touch on their own terms.



A predictable, low-stim wind-down space

The same calm spot, used the same way each evening, becomes a cue for the whole body to start settling.

Mixed & flexible activities

Good starting points for almost any profile, or for a mixed child.



Sensory bins (rice, beans, water beads)

Scooping and pouring through a bin of dry rice or beans is self-paced — your child controls exactly how much input they get.



Playdough or putty squeezing

Kneading and squeezing gives hand input that can go either direction — calming for some, engaging for others.



Bubble popping

Visual tracking plus a satisfying tactile pop — genuinely fun, and useful as a between-task reset.



Drawing or coloring

A quiet, focused activity that still allows movement of the hand and arm — good for winding down without full stillness.



Water play at the sink

Running water, pouring cups, washing toys — accessible, self-paced sensory input using something every home already has.



Rolling a textured ball

Rolling a bumpy or textured ball back and forth combines tactile input with the social turn-taking from Document 3.



A glitter “calm-down” jar

Shake it, then watch the glitter settle. The slow visual motion is genuinely calming, and gives eyes something to follow.



Simple yoga poses

A few basic poses (tree, cat-cow, child's pose) combine movement, body awareness, and a natural wind-down rhythm.



Blowing bubbles (breath regulation)

The slow exhale needed to blow a bubble is, essentially, a breathing exercise disguised as play.



Stacking or building blocks

Combines fine motor work with a satisfying, structured task that has a clear beginning and end.



A short nature walk

Fresh air, changing scenery, and light movement — flexible enough to suit almost any sensory profile.



Music through headphones, child's choice of volume

Letting your child control the volume themselves respects however much or little auditory input they want that day.

Build a calm corner (10 minutes)

A calm corner is simply a small, predictable spot your child can go to when things feel like too much – before a meltdown, not just after one.



BUILDING IT, STEP BY STEP

1. Choose a **soft cushion or folded blanket** as the base.
2. Pick **dim lighting**, or simply a corner away from bright light and foot traffic.
3. Add **1-2 favorite calming objects only** – more than that can overwhelm rather than help.
4. Add **noise-reducing headphones**, if tolerated.
5. **Practice using it together** during a calm moment, before you ever need it during a hard one.



THE ONE RULE THAT MATTERS MOST

This is a regulation space, never a punishment space. Bring your child there proactively, before a known trigger, not only after a meltdown has already started.

The 10-20-5 movement rhythm

Fighting for stillness first often backfires. Try movement first instead.



THE RHYTHM

10 minutes of real movement → 20 minutes of a focused task → a 5-minute movement break

A 2022 meta-analysis of exercise interventions found meaningful attention improvements in children with ADHD^[10]. In plain terms: movement isn't a reward you give after the hard task is done — it's often the thing that makes the hard task possible in the first place.

Sources for this guide: [8] OT Sensory Integration RCT (2025) · [10] Exercise & ADHD meta-analysis (2022) · [17] Vestibular/proprioceptive exercise RCT (2025). Full list of 19 references in Document 0 — Start Here.