Sensory Rooms

Ideally sensory information is best presented within the context of daily functional activities. However, for some students, interaction within a generalized environment is too difficult for them and additional strategies need to be used before integrating sensory information into daily activities.

The Sensory or Snoozlin Room if often used to help our students with sensory difficulties to relax, cope, engage, or help adjust to sensory input. However, the sensory room is sometimes used to give the student or caregiver some 'down time'.

Although the sensory room is a marvelous tool when appropriately used, we need to first ask ourselves if the student can practice these sensory skills within daily activities at home, school or in the community, as the outcome will have a greater functional component and is more likely to be generalized to other activities.

We often forget that there should be measurable programs with specific goals to help address the student's sensory requirements. If not used appropriately, the student may not benefit from his/her time in the room. In addition, the student may find some of the sensory activities over stimulating or aversive and avoid sensory input even more.

The following should be in place **before** using the sensory room:
- Goals of the student's therapy or reason for being in the sensory room
- Student's sensory needs (what is needed in the room to achieve goals) and
- Student's existing sensory status (i.e. a base line or current sensory profile)

When using the Sensory Room:
- Provide sensory input in a controlled manner
- Ensure that the sensory treatment follows a developmental sequence
- Ensure that the child is providing a measurable adaptive response
- Allow the child to guide treatment

INCLUSION OUTREACH

- Have input from the therapy team (OT, Vision Consultant etc.) on an ongoing basis to adjust the goals as required
- Have a specific step-by-step plan in place to introduce the sensory input
- Avoid sensory stimulation that is not outlined in your student's goals (e.g. if the goal is tactile; avoid visual activities such as lights etc. unless they have been included with specific tactile goals as outlined by the team or therapist.)

Once the student is using the sensory room and has achieved some, or all, of his/her sensory goals, **the next question** is:

- Can the student generalize the information that is provided within the sensory 'room', sensory activity or environment? (i.e., can s/he take that information and be comfortable using it in the world at large).
  For example:
    o Is s/he able to visually pay attention to or notice (coloured) lights outside of the sensory room.
    o Is the student able to tolerate holding a tool with similar sensory information as found in the sensory room.
    o Is s/he able to tolerate sounds heard in the sensory room in the class environment?
    o Is s/he able to generalize information to other objects; e.g. is s/he able to touch/hit a switch (tactile) that has a similar texture to an item explored in the sensory room ?

What happens if the student does not generalize this information?

- If s/he is having difficulty generalizing sensory information, talk to the student's therapist to devise ways to facilitate transitioning from the sensory room to the classroom.

- If the student is not able to take the learned response outside of the sensory room, you may need to revisit the sensory goals and how they are applied within the sensory room before trying them in the classroom.

- Where possible, try to marry activities within the sensory room with functional activities in the environment as a whole. It may be more successful.

- Try introducing one sensory stimulus at a time, don't overload your student, and don't give up……!

Remember, when used inappropriately, the multi-sensory room can lead to:
- Over-stimulation - too much inappropriate stimulation may result in 'shut down', inability to focus on the specific goal etc.

INCLUSION OUTREACH

- Lack of Meaning - the sensory information has no structured meaning to the student and the information is lost
- Confusion- the student is unable to understand why they are there and are confused about focus
- Stress - too much stimulation can result in the student becoming very stressed and 'shutting down'
- Feeling of Bombardment - too much information can overwhelm and bombard the student