

Information and advice from:

Sensory Circuits



**Early Development and
Inclusion Team**
Supporting Inclusion at the Early
Years Foundation Stage

What are sensory circuits?

Designed by Paediatric Occupational Therapist **Jane Horwood** in 2009, sensory circuits are a great way to both energise and settle children, helping them to focus and engage by achieving the 'just right' or optimum level of alertness required for effective learning.

The circuit is a repeated sequence of activities that should be active, physical, and **FUN!**

There are **three stages** in each circuit:

- starting with something **alerting**
- moving to an **organisation** stage and
- finally to a **calming** phase

Stage 1: Alerting

The first stage of the sensory circuit should always be the **alerting** stage. This section aims to help children release any pent up anxiety and energy in a controlled way, so they're in a better position to settle, pay attention and focus.

Alerting activities are designed to stimulate proprioceptive, vestibular (balance) and motor skills by getting the body active.

Examples of Alerting Activities:



- Bouncing on a **mini trampoline, space hopper or gym ball**
- Rolling on a **gym ball or peanut ball**
- Jumping, bunny hops, star jumps
- Skipping
- Running
- Step ups



Stage 2: Organising

Next children move on to the **organising** stage. This section helps children channel their energy into an activity that requires skill and focus, improving how they organise their body, plan their movement, and do more than one thing at a time in a sequence.

Organising activities should stimulate the child's motor, vestibular, sensory, and timing skills so they feel more connected to their body and how it moves.

Examples of Organising Activities:

- Balancing on a beam or walking along a straight line
- Balancing on a [wobble board](#)
- Weaving in and out of cones
- Throwing [bean bags](#) into a bucket
- Throwing and catching
- Climbing



Stage 3: Calming

The final **calming** section is designed to re-capture the child's energy and help them feel more centred in themselves, so they're ready to learn.

Calming activities should stimulate the child's proprioceptive, deep pressure and tactile senses.

Examples of Calming Activities:



- Wearing [weighted wrist bands](#)
- Lying underneath a [weighted quilt](#)
- Massaging hands, feet, arms, and legs
- Draping a [weighted toy](#) over your shoulders
 - Wiggling around in a [body sox](#)
 - Crawling through a [tunnel](#)
 - [Gym ball](#) squashes
 - Yoga



How to use sensory circuits

Choose **2 alerting** activities, **2 organising** activities and **1 calming** activity.

Ideally the circuits should be completed at the start of the session (and after lunch too) but can be used at any time a child needs it. They can be set up outside if indoor space is limited.

Children do the activity by themselves but must be supervised at all times. Use a minute timer – a kitchen egg timer is ideal with a sound when time is up.

Staff provide lots of praise and encouragement but should never be forced to participate. Seeing other children having lots of **FUN** is often enough to encourage the reluctant child to join in.

How long

Timing will depend on the needs of the children. Some may need more alerting activities, some more calming time. For young children a sensory circuit should typically last 10 minutes. It's just the right amount of time for the children to feel focused without getting tired. It also maintains the circuit's element of fun, any longer, and they might start to see the activity as a chore.

Further information:

[Sensory Circuits: A Sensory Motor Skills Programme for Children – Jane Horwood \(2009\)](#)

Thank you to staff at Hungerford Nursery for their input.