

BLUE BREAK

Who and why?

- ❖ Children who are over responsive to sensory input (need to escape)
- ❖ Children who are under responsive to sensory input (need more to stay alert)
- ❖ Children whose sensory thresholds fluctuate (over and under responsive: need to escape some and attain other)
- ❖ Children who are anxious, stressed etc
- ❖ Children who are trying to sit and concentrate
- ❖ ALL OF US

Note: some students will NOT seek sensory input if the opportunity is not there, this does not mean they don't need it.

Where and when?

- ❖ Breaks at the desk (to help keep on task)
- ❖ Breaks outside the classroom: yard, hall, sensory room, quiet rooms, fitness room etc (to escape some input and attain other input)
- ❖ Breaks away from the desk in the classroom: safe space, sensory corner etc.
- ❖ When a child asks
- ❖ Schedule them for some children: at least one every hour.

What?

- ❖ Depends on child's sensory needs and preferences (how do we know: willingness to participate)
- ❖ A variety of age and socially appropriate activities
- ❖ What the child enjoys (how do we know: willingness to participate)
- ❖ What the child actively participates in (willingness to participate)

How long and how often?

- ❖ How long does the child need? When does he/she get to 'just right?'

- ❖ How many does he/she need? How do you know he/she is getting anxious /distracted? Children differ: start off with too many, then they can be reduced.
- ❖ Put breaks into the schedule. Have natural breaks: between classes (Smart Moves, Stickids etc).

What of the child does not carry out the activity?

- ❖ Does he/ she like the activity. If not, why not? (e.g. not familiar, new person, doesn't like sensory input etc)
- ❖ Is there enough structure? Does he/she know what is expected?
- ❖ Is he/she bored? Is it the same activity every day?
- ❖ Is he/she getting the sensory stimulation he/she needs from the activity?
- ❖ Is he/she distracted?
- ❖ Does he/ she want to do something else?

What if the sensory break didn't work?

- ❖ Was there enough/ too little sensory input?
- ❖ Look at the conditions: environment, noise, distractions etc.
- ❖ Transitioned too soon?
- ❖ Was 'just right' but finishing, transitioning, busy corridor etc put the child into high alert again?
- ❖ Stressed/ upset because break is over and the child has to go back to something he/she does not like.

BLUE BREAK GUIDELINES

- **Needs for structure:** breaks outside the class can be as deregulating as break as inside the class. If you are using the sensor room, quiet rooms etc you need to have a plan.
- Blue breaks won't work if **conditions are not right** for the child. Environment, people, mode of communication, use of language, distractions etc. It is not just about the activity.
- Students should have a **menu of activities** that are regulating not just one or two. We need to target different sensory systems.
- Always build on choices and check in with the child to **monitor their responses:** 'fast or slow? Round and round/ forwards and back?
- Is the child in **high alert or low alert?** What sensory input/ escape does he/ she need?
- **Be consistent:** use the same name/ LAMH sign or visual as much as possible.
- **All children** should learn what a blue break is through modelling and normalising breaks within the classroom and school structure. Blue breaks **should be naturally built into the daily routine**. When starting to learn about the blue break, we need to schedule in blue breaks: they won't ask for them. Children should learn the blue break symbol and break activities when they are 'just right'. Some choices can be given, sometimes there isn't a choice.
- If a child asks for a break, **ALWAYS give it to them**, otherwise they will stop asking. You CAN control what break and duration of break it is.
- Blue breaks are a **proactive strategy:** do not wait until the child is in high alert to give him/ her a break. Watch for signs for increasing stress, anxiety etc.
- **Active participation is key:** Is the child willing to participate or do you find yourself constantly offering motivators, rewards etc? do you offer choices? What is he/ she choosing? What does his/her verbal and non verbal communication tell us about how he/she likes the activity?
- Breaks should be rewarded **NOT used as a reward**.
- **Calming or alerting?** Each child differs in their threshold and responses. Staff members need to observe reactions and responses to sensory activities. What is the child like after the activity? Remember strong sensory input can last in the nervous system for up to 1 and a half hours.
- **Sensory seeking:** some children seek sensory input because they are in 'low alert'

TYPES OF SENSORY INPUT AND EFFECTS ON AROUSAL LEVELS

- ❖ **Tactile:** light touch= alerting, **Pressure touch is** calming (but some children are over responsive to being touched to receive pressure).

- ❖ **Vestibular= Movement :**
 - bouncing, rotary, angular (different directions) and fast= alerting
 - Slow rocking, forward and back rhythmic = calming

- ❖ **Proprioception= input to muscle and joints= Heavy muscle work:** regulating (calming and alerting)

- ❖ **Vibration:** can be calming or alerting

- ❖ **Oral sensory:**
 - Crunchy foods (regulating)
 - Chewy foods (regulating)
 - Spicy foods (alerting)
 - Acidic/ bitter (alerting)
 - Blowing, e.g. through straws (regulating)
 - Sucking, e.g. hard boiled sweets (regulating)