

SENSORY PROGRAM

This home-based program aims to treat all the sensory problems. Based on a neurodevelopmental approach, it works on the theory that some of the early stages of development are missing or incomplete and need to be recreated.

The program was developed by the late Svea Gold, an inspirational writer and therapist, who worked with children with a variety of difficulties.

Initially designed for children with attention problems, these exercises should also help some children with ASD, although you may have to adapt the language to suit your child.

The exercises begin by mimicking pre-natal stimulation, which simply means repeating the movements that the foetus should make in the womb. Ideally, these will be done with eyes closed in a warm pool, but the floor or a bed will do fine.

Since it will not be possible to do all of the exercises in the program, choose those which are easily manageable in your own circumstances. If nothing else, try the suggestions marked with an asterisk.

If possible, the exercises should be done every day for at least three weeks. Some improvement should be visible within three or four weeks and if this is the case, continue with the treatment.

Note: If any of the following exercises cause nausea, slow them down to the point where the child can tolerate them.

Rotating Chair (1 min. each way)

Slowly turn the child in a rotating chair with his eyes closed. Take one minute to complete one turn in one direction, and then after a few seconds rest, an equally slow return in the opposite direction. Try to be precise using a stop watch as a guide to turn one quarter every 15 seconds.

Follow this by turning the chair rapidly for 2 minutes, with the parent controlling the speed, interrupt the movement, and change direction and speed often. The child should have his eyes open during this. This forces quick adjustment of the eyes.

Log Rolls (3 mins.)

Do log rolls on the floor, both slowly and fast, at first with the eyes closed, and then open. Doing them as slowly as possible allows for the greatest input into the brain.

This movement provides input from the senses of touch, smell and enables the child to adjust to the distance of the walls of the room. Talking to the child during these exercises also helps to develop auditory space perception.

Helicopter (5 mins.)

As an alternative to log rolls, get the child to 'twirl' like a helicopter with arms out to the sides until dizzy - repeating 10 times. About 15 seconds is usually long enough. Then get him to wait with eyes closed with someone supporting him, until the dizziness passes and the child feels ready to twirl again.

Trampolining (5–10 mins.)

This achieves a measure of visual stimulation, combined with input from the entire body. As the child reaches the highest part of the jump, there is a moment of weightlessness before gravity takes hold. When the child hits the trampoline, the body feels its weight and compression between the joints and this will add to the child's body image.

Jogging (5–10 mins.)

If a trampoline is not available, jogging is an excellent alternative because the pressure of hitting the ground jars the spaces between the joints, which helps tell the brain to know where the body is. The eyes constantly have to adjust to changes in space and the vestibular canals in the ear are stimulated by the constant up and down movement.

Massage (5–10 mins.)

This needs to be done by the child's parents or a professional therapist. Ideally, the child should experience a deep and a light massage every day. This should include the face and the scalp. If the child is ticklish, start with a deep massage and slowly move to light touch. This

can be done before the child gets out of bed in the morning as this will also have the child wide awake before eating breakfast and going off to school.

Marine Crawls (5–10 mins.)

Crawling on the stomach and creeping on hands and knees can be added later to integrate what has been achieved. It may help if you call the creeping ‘tiger stalking’ or ‘Indian stalking’. Stress the expected improvement in athletics, since this may be more important to the child than academic achievement.

Once the child’s body is better coordinated, it is time to establish a preferred or dominant side. Encourage him to become totally right-sided or totally left-sided. The side chosen should be based on the side of the stronger eye use.

Ask him to write something with a pencil between the toes as the side chosen is usually a good indication of the preferred side.

A well-established, dominant side will help the child to know right from left. This is vitally important, not only for reading and writing, but also for simple things like knowing which side to pick tools up with.

Teenagers might be persuaded to give this program a four-week trial by stressing the possible improvement in athletic skills. This should be enough time to bring about some improvements which may encourage them to continue with it.

Program quoted by kind permission of Svea Gold. The complete version of this program can be found at www.fernridgepress.com.

Note: Young children may also enjoy some of the exercises that were developed for children with dyspraxia. These can be found in the Tree Fu Tom series which can be seen on YouTube.