

Active Sensory Spaces

Overview

Sensory spaces are a fun and engaging way for children to [get their wiggles out](#), refocus during a transition or self-soothe after facing a difficult challenge. These paths are created to be colorful and playful and turn a passive environment into an active one. Not only do they add more physical activity to a child's day, they can also be designed to help them practice a variety of skills and [just play](#).



Take Action

At School

Carve out some time to plan what your path will look like. Research sensory path or movement hallways and pick out your favorite stations and activities. Get creative! Consider a variety of stations and activities that touch on various skills.

- Gross motor skills:
 - Create a mix of zig zag, curved and straight lines with directions for children to hop on one foot, balance and walk on their tip toes or crab walk.
 - Use hand print and foot print cutouts or decals along the floor and wall with directions for children to match their hands and feet to do wall sits

or pushups.

- Fine motor skills:
 - Create lines or shapes with colorful tape or paint for children to trace along the wall.
 - Include spaces with small manipulatives like a buttoning and zipping wall or interactive Lego wall.
- Social emotional skills:
 - Promote goal directed behavior and decision making through a mix of increasingly challenging tasks along the path. Include spaces where children can decide to go one way or another.
 - Encourage optimistic thinking and self-regulation through positive affirmations. As children push up against the wall or hop from one square to the next, post affirmations for them to read aloud such as:
 - I am smart and I am capable
 - I am going to have a good day
 - I am strong
 - I am ready to learn new things
- Core academic skills
 - Encourage literacy skills with alphabet patterns or sight words along the path.
 - Practice numeracy skills with numbers to determine how many hops or addition/subtraction hopscotch.
 - Tie in science with themes around weather, outer space or animals - ex. tracing a line from flower to flower to help the honey bee carry pollen.

Choose a space that is both accessible to all children and not a disruption to others when in use. Sensory and movement paths can also be modified for an office or classroom for mid-day brain breaks or to help children refocus.

- Main hallway
- Sidewalk or playground
- Guidance counselor or principal's office

- Cafeteria or gymnasium
- Classroom
- Hallway

Meet with your principal or administrator to discuss the project and share your ideas. This is also a great opportunity to engage your School Health Team, including parents, to pull in different ideas and gather support and install.

At Home

Just like at school, sensory spaces can refocus attention and add physical activity to your child's day at home, while improving self-awareness and allowing them to practice key decision-making skills.

- Use Chalk and a sidewalk to create a twisting, turning maze or path for children to follow. Add in hopscotch, alphabet patterns or other key educational concepts to reinforce school work. Or, just keep it fun and active! Trace your child's hands or shoes in a line to give them a "path" to follow. Make it fun by practicing critical developmental skills like hopping, walking on a "balance beam" and following a twisting line.
- Create an obstacle course out of your outdoor space! Using chalk and basic equipment like cones, jump ropes and balls, encourage kids to follow the course through to the end.
- No outdoor space? No problem! Utilize the hallways in your house with easy to access items like paper plates, pillows and painters tape! Create a sensory space with basic household items, encouraging kids to walk toe-to-heel along a string or jump rope, bounce on a mini-trampoline and balance on mom's Yoga ball. Cut out handprints and footprints and encourage them to stretch, reach and balance.

Social Emotional Health Highlights

Activities such as these help students explore...

Self-Awareness and Self-Management: Exploring senses through unstructured play helps children identify emotions to better manage stress, self-regulate and control their impulses. Sensory based activities can also help develop organization skills through physical and visual orientation activities.

Responsible Decision Making: Providing children with alternative methods to walking down the hall in a straight line allows them to choose how they want to exert their energy. Giving children more options to decide how they want to react to their emotions helps them reflect and problem solve and make constructive choices in consideration of the well-being of themselves and others.

Tips



Starting small is okay! Start with a classroom path and then widen to a school-wide initiative to engage children and add more playful time into the day.



Consider the space and the materials you use. Laminating any pieces you make on your own will keep them in good condition for longer. For outdoor paths, talk with your administrator about using paint or consider chalk for a temporary path and then change it up! Similarly, if placing in a hallway or communal space like the cafeteria or gymnasium - vinyl tape or decals are longer lasting - where for classrooms, masking tape on the carpet or floor can be more temporary, but still get the job done!



As with anything, think of safety first! Be sure any routes you create are safe for children (ex. corners or intersecting hallways) and there is adequate supervision



Tie in arts and crafts. Cut out and laminate children's handprints or footprints instead of using decals, ask children to help lay down zig zag lines with colorful tape or

when in use. Also be sure to secure anything that is on the floor or wall to avoid slips or falls. If you need a flexible option, contact paper is great – just be sure to clean the area before placing to ensure a nice stick!



Keep in colorful and fun! Ensure there are age appropriate signs or directions throughout like arrows for directions, alternative footprints for jumping in and out, or pictures such as a crab for a crabwalk or bear for a bear crawl.



encourage them to write their own positive affirmations. Die cut machines are also a great way to cut out labels like 'jump' or 'skip'.

Take a video of a teacher or child using the course. Share with teachers, other school staff and parents to demonstrate how to use and encourage modeling its use for brain breaks, sensory walk to support self-regulation when upset, during parent pick up and more.

For more activities and ideas like this one, be sure to [sign up for our news and updates](#). And if you like what you see, please [donate to support our work](#) creating more ways to help build a healthier future for kids.

Active Learning Opportunities

Incorporate physical activity before, during, and after the school day, as well as into daily lesson plans.

Easy, On-the-Go Play Activities

Turn travel time—whether on foot or in the car—into playtime using these fun, imaginative activities!

Sensory Play

Help kids get in touch with their senses by facilitating sensory play using interesting materials to create tactile and visual experiences.
