



Little Light House

Building a
Sensory Room



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What is the purpose of Sensory Rooms?

Sensory rooms are specially designed spaces that offer a variety of sensory experiences to promote relaxation, self-regulation, and sensory exploration. These rooms can benefit individuals of all ages and abilities, especially those with sensory processing challenges, autism, or other sensory-related conditions. Sensory Rooms help students regulate and process the information coming in through their senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and more.

Some students have a lower threshold for sensory input and need to have sensory input reduced, such as dimmer lights or softer sounds, in order to regulate their bodies. Others have an increased sensory threshold and need added sensory input, such as fidgets with texture or weighted blankets, to regulate their body and engage in learning activities. Sensory Rooms help students regulate their bodies and benefit all students, not just students with disabilities.

Sensory Rooms support student growth by

- Providing a calming space for students who are overstimulated
- Providing increased sensory input (bright lights, swings, textures, and more) for students who are under-stimulated
- Improving students' mental health, attention spans, and behavior
- Activating different areas of perception and learning in the brain
- Providing learning opportunities through
 - Challenging students to recognize patterns, colors, and shapes
 - Supporting early math and literacy skills
 - Challenging students' fine and gross motor skills
 - And helping students with vision impairments learn to focus their attention, control their eye movements, and develop skills that are crucial to communication.



Key Components of a Sensory Room



Lighting

Sensory rooms often feature adjustable lighting to create different atmospheres. Soft, calming colors and visual effects can be used to influence mood and sensory experiences. It is recommended that you turn off overhead/ceiling lights and use other light sources.

Here are some other lighting options:

Dimmable and Adjustable Lighting:

Having control over the room's overall lighting, including the ability to dim or adjust the intensity of lights, is essential to tailor the environment to individual preferences.

LED Lights with Color-Changing Capabilities

create a dynamic and visually stimulating environment.

Projectors

Projectors equipped with soothing visual projections, such as moving water, fish, or abstract patterns, can be used to create a relaxing and engaging visual experience.

Bubble Tubes

are tall columns filled with water and bubbles. LED lighting within the tube can change colors and create a mesmerizing visual effect as bubbles rise through the water. They can be purchased on various websites online.

Fiber Optic Lights

Fiber optic lights consist of bundles of tiny, flexible fibers that emit colored light. They can be integrated into the ceiling or wall, creating a calming and visually appealing effect. Highly recommend! They are very popular with children but can be expensive.

UV/Blacklight

UV or blacklight can make fluorescent or glow-in-the-dark materials and objects stand out, providing a unique sensory experience. Add colored tubing for the blacklight to shine on for an added sensory experience and play option.

Sensory Balls and Light-Up Toys

Some sensory rooms may include light-up toys or sensory balls with LED lights. These toys can engage individuals in interactive play and visual stimulation.

Laser Star Projectors

Laser star projectors can create a calming starry night effect on the ceiling, promoting relaxation.



Sensory Equipment

Sensory rooms include a range of sensory equipment such as tactile surfaces, sensory walls, bubble tubes, fiber optic lights, and projectors with soothing visuals.

Soft Seating and Comfortable Furniture

Bean bags, soft cushions, and comfortable chairs provide a cozy and inviting space for relaxation and sensory exploration.

Sensory Swings

Swings designed for sensory rooms provide vestibular input and can be calming for some individuals.



Textures

Different textures on walls, floors, and furniture provide tactile sensory experiences. These textures can be smooth, rough, bumpy, or soft.

Tactile Mats and Surfaces:

Mats with different textures, such as furry, bumpy, or smooth surfaces, offer tactile sensory experiences when touched or walked



Music and Sound Systems

Soothing or stimulating sounds can be integrated, including calming music, nature sounds, or white noise. Speakers with customizable music playlists or soothing sounds can be used to create an auditory sensory experience.

Nature Sounds

Gentle sounds of nature, such as ocean waves, rain, birdsong, or a bubbling brook, can have a calming and grounding effect.

Weighted Blankets and Sensory Vests

Weighted blankets and vests provide deep pressure input, which can be calming and grounding for some individuals.

Sensory Integration Equipment

Items like therapy balls, balance boards, and trampolines support sensory integration and motor skill development.

Mirrors and Visual Stimulation

Large mirrors can create the illusion of a bigger space and provide visual feedback, while visually stimulating materials like liquid tiles can engage users.

Sensory Wall Panels:

Wall-mounted panels with various tactile, visual, and auditory elements can be explored through touch, sound, and sight such as the Razzle Dazzle Mirror Panel.

Tactile and Kinetic Sand Tables:

Sand tables with kinetic or tactile sand offer opportunities for tactile exploration and fine motor skill development.

White Noise

White noise, like the sound of a fan or flowing water, can help mask distracting background noises and promote relaxation.

Soothing Music

Slow tempo and instrumental music, including classical, ambient, or relaxation music, can create a peaceful atmosphere.

Lullabies

Soft lullabies and gentle nursery rhymes can be comforting and calming, especially for younger users.



Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy diffusers can add pleasant scents to the room, promoting relaxation.

Lavender

Lavender is well-known for its calming and soothing properties. It can help reduce anxiety and promote relaxation.

Chamomile

Chamomile has a gentle, calming aroma that can be comforting for individuals experiencing stress or agitation.

Peppermint

Peppermint is invigorating and can help with alertness and focus. It may be beneficial for users who need a sensory boost.



Seating

Comfortable seating options, such as bean bags or soft cushions, allow for relaxation and sensory exploration.

Safety Mats and Padding:

Ensure the safety of users with soft mats and padding, especially if the room includes equipment for physical play.

Bean Bags

Bean bags are soft, comfortable, and versatile. They conform to the user's body, offering a cozy place to relax and unwind.

Soft Cushions and Pillows

Large, soft cushions and pillows provide a comfortable seating and lounging area. They can be arranged in various ways to create a customized seating arrangement.

Eucalyptus

Eucalyptus has a fresh, invigorating scent that can help with congestion and promote a feeling of clarity.

Citrus Scents (Lemon, Orange, Grapefruit)

Citrus scents are energizing and can uplift the mood. They can be especially helpful in creating a cheerful atmosphere.

Vanilla

Vanilla has a warm and comforting scent that can evoke positive emotions and reduce stress.

Rose

Rose essential oil has a pleasant floral scent that can promote relaxation and reduce tension.

Sensory Rockers

Sensory rockers or rocking chairs offer soothing motion that can help with self-regulation and relaxation.

Swings

Some sensory rooms include swings designed for sensory therapy. These swings can provide vestibular input and a calming sensation.

Floor Mats

Thick, cushioned floor mats or foam tiles create a comfortable surface for sitting, lying down, or engaging in floor-based sensory activities.

Hammocks: Hammocks can provide a cocoon-like sensation and gentle rocking motion, promoting relaxation and sensory comfort.



Considerations

Before you start purchasing items for your sensory room, there are a few logistics to consider

How/Where are you going to put the Sensory Room?

- It's important to have sensory options, but not so much that the room is cluttered
- Items and/or activities should flow seamlessly from one activity to the next
- Think not only about if you have a space for the Sensory Room, but also where you might store extra equipment.
- It is good to rotate the sensory options every few weeks to keep students engaged and learning new skills

Where are you going to put the Sensory Room/Sensory Area?

- Think about where the room is located. Is it by a busy/noisy hallway? Is the space echoey? Is the room close to an AC/heating systems which vibrates and “hums”?
- A speaker for music or a white noise machine can help block out other noises.
- If you do not have a whole room to dedicate to sensory play, a separate corner tent or dedicated area within the classroom can serve as a sensory/calming corner.

What do your students' needs?

- What are some of the specific needs of your students, and how can the Sensory Room meet these various needs?
- Some students may need a calming space, others may need more sensory input. Can you split the group in two based on needs? One session can be for those who need reduced sensory input, and the other for those that need more sensory input.

How are you going to light the room/area?

- Consider lighting options for students that need more input and students that need less.
- Adjustable Lights/blinds can set the right mood for the space and help students regulate.
- Light covers can filter harsh fluorescent light to make it softer and more calming.

How are we going to transition to and from the Sensory Room?

- Establish a routine for getting to and from the sensory space
- Visual timer for how long students will in the space

Sensory Space on a Budget

Building a sensory space doesn't have to be thousands of dollars. There are many affordable adaptations available for your students.



Create a Sensory Space Within the Classroom

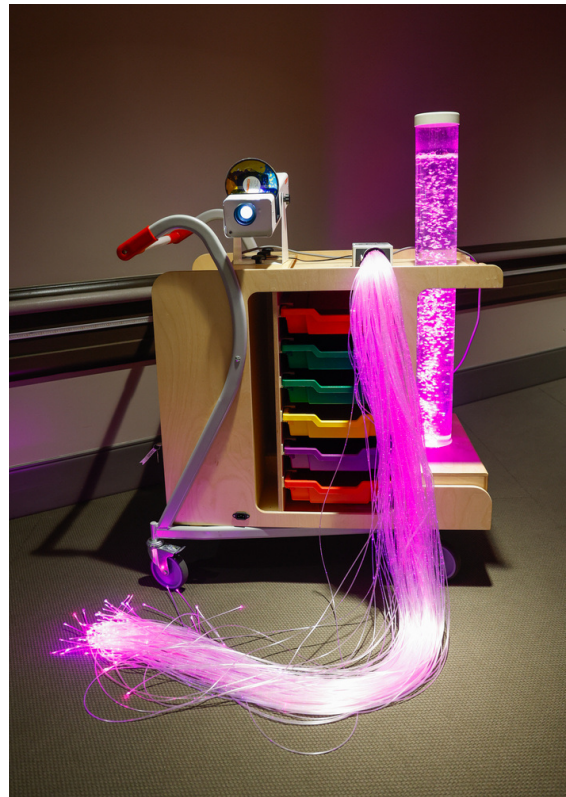
- Use a children's play tent or create a "cozy cave" by tossing a cloth over a table to create a private space within the room.
- A large cardboard box with simple tools inside can serve as a great sensory space,
- A fun "Kid Cubby" can be made with cloth hung over a PVC pipe cube. It's mobile and easy to move around the room or within several classrooms if need be.
- If your classroom has a bookshelf, turn it to be perpendicular to a wall, and create a simple sensory space in one of the corners of your classrooms.
- Cushions and Blankets: Enhance comfort with soft cushions and warm blankets for seating and relaxation.
- Bluetooth Speaker: Add a Bluetooth speaker to play calming music or nature sounds that promote relaxation.
- Bubble Tube: Consider a budget-friendly bubble tube, available on platforms like Amazon, to introduce captivating visual stimulation.
- Diffuser: Enhance the ambiance with an affordable diffuser, using essential oils like lavender or chamomile for pleasant aromatherapy.
- String Lights: Create a calming atmosphere by hanging battery-operated string lights, providing gentle and adjustable lighting.
- Sensory Balls: Inexpensive sensory balls with varying textures can be included for tactile stimulation.
- DIY Sensory Boards: Craft simple sensory boards using cardboard and textured materials for tactile exploration.

Create a Mobile Sensory Cart

When a permanent sensory space isn't an option for your space, a sensory cart that can be used in various locations may be a helpful option! Sensory carts can be purchased online, or one can be created with a simple rolling cart and budget-friendly sensory equipment.

Consider including the following materials, or any from the lists above!

- Black umbrella to block overhead light
- Various calming sensory manipulatives
- Tubs of kinetic sand
- A battery operated disco ball, music speaker, or projector
- Spray bottles of essential oil blends
- Battery powered string lights
- Fabrics with various textures
- Bubble Tube (battery operated or with a battery pack to plug into if outlets are unavailable)



Tips for Using a Sensory Room

Supervision:

Always ensure proper supervision, especially for young children or individuals who may need assistance.

Respect Individual Preferences:

Be aware of individual preferences and sensitivities, adjusting the sensory experiences accordingly.

Time Limits:

Set reasonable time limits for sessions to prevent overstimulation. (10-30 min)

Communication:

Encourage communication and choice-making within the sensory room.

Maintenance:

Keep the room clean, safe, and well-maintained.