



# Sensational Classrooms

Making Sense of Sensory

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# Outline

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Our sensory systems

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Overview of sensory processing

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Signs of sensory overload – What to do?

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Universal Strategies for Calming and Alerting

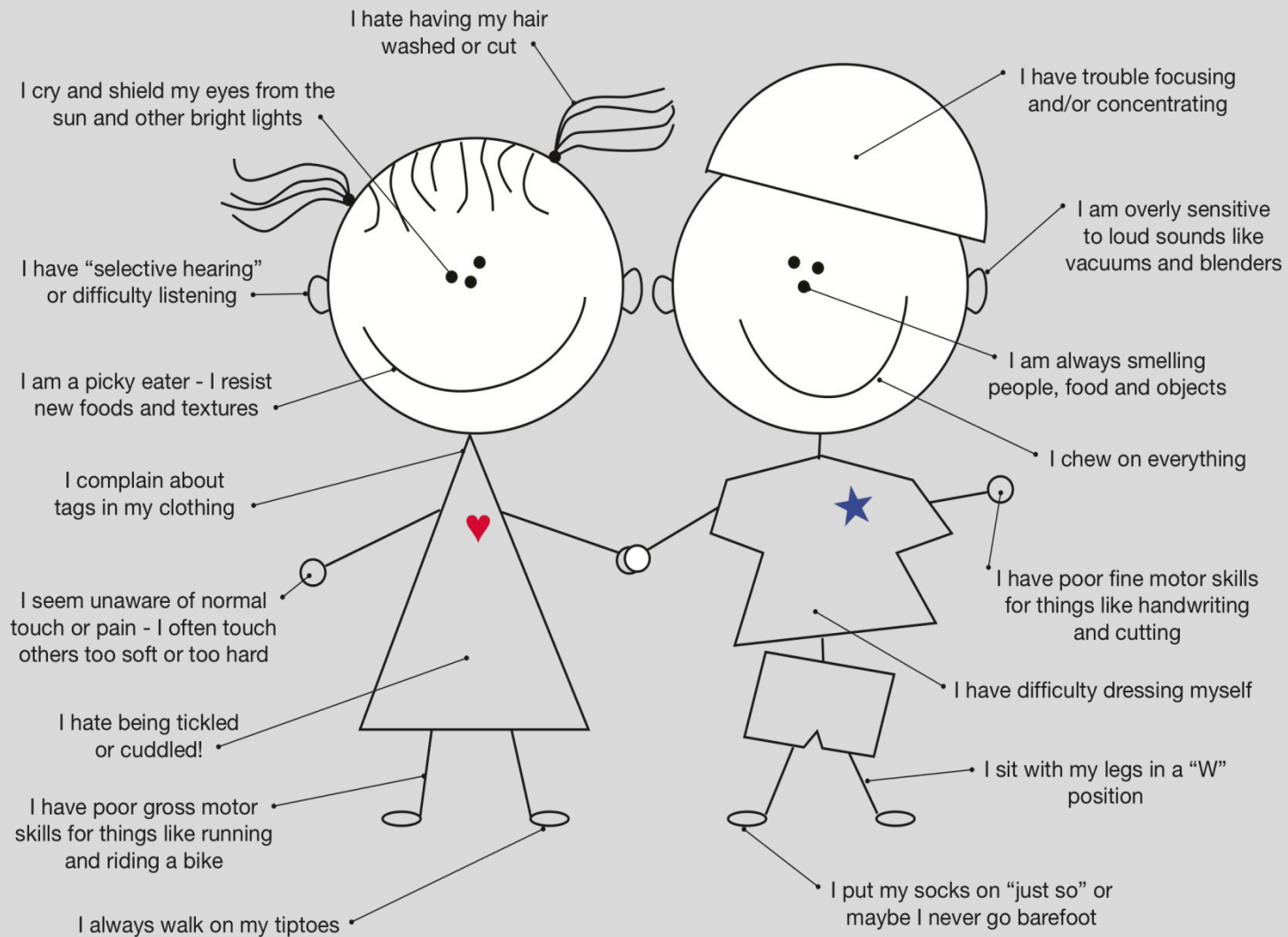
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Sensory diets

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Next steps

# DO YOU KNOW ME?



## AUDITORY

The auditory sense is responsible for hearing.



## GUSTATORY

The gustatory sense helps a child detect and perceive taste.



## OLFACTORY

This sense helps us to differentiate between thousands of different odors and determine if they are dangerous, foul, pleasurable, strong, or faint.



## VISUAL

The visual sense helps a child to see and detect objects.



## TACTILE

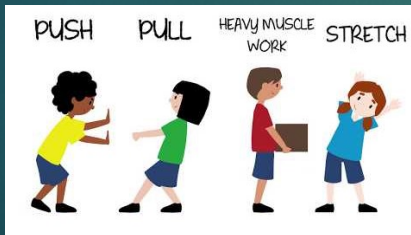
This sense helps a child detect light touch, deep pressure, texture, temperature, vibration, and pain.





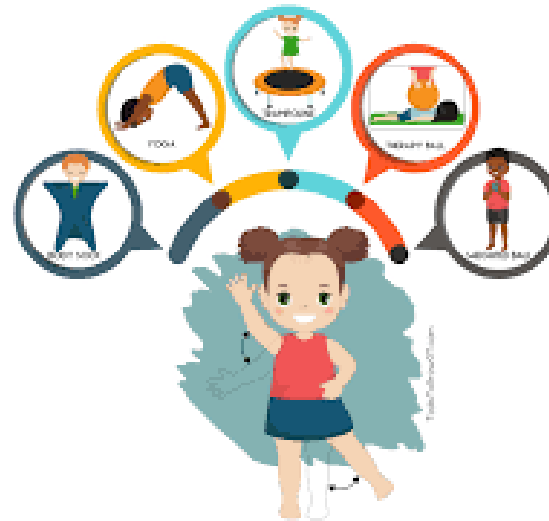
# MOVEMENT Senses

These are invisible senses, but they have the most profound affect on ability to organize and calm or alert our body.



## PROPRIOCEPTION

The sense that helps a child with body awareness is known as proprioception.



## VESTIBULAR

The sense that detects movement through sensory receptors in the inner ear.





# Big Cup, Little Cup

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmAgTzFJW0Q>

# Big Cup

## Sensory under-responsiveness

- ▶ May look quiet and passive
- ▶ Can appear to have no energy or motivation





# Little Cup

## Sensory Over-responsive

- ▶ Feel things too easily or intensely





# Hole in my cup!

## Sensory Seekers

- ▶ Crave more sensory input
- ▶ Require input throughout day



Chewers



Messy



Noisy



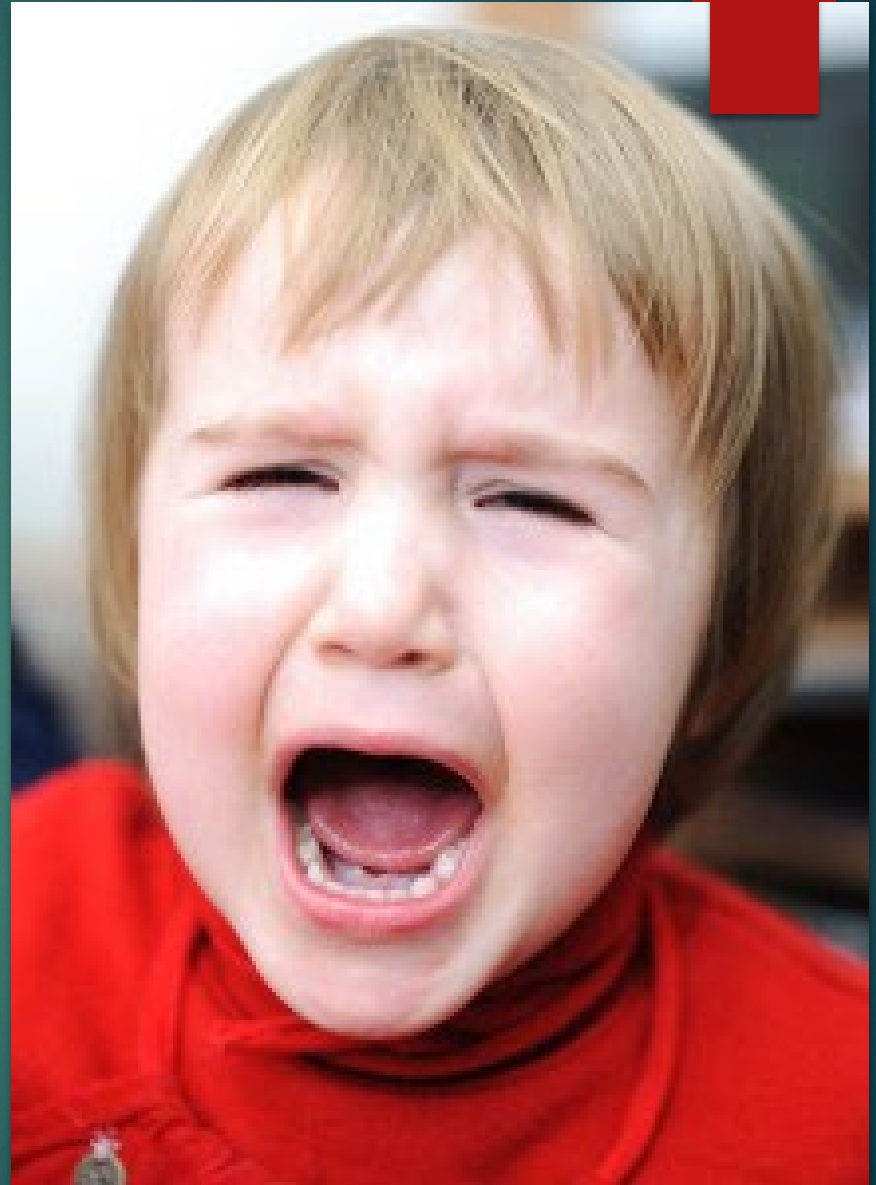
Wiggly

# Signs of Sensory Overload

- ▶ Becomes easily distracted, disorientated or confused.
- ▶ Appears overly excited, wound up or silly.
- ▶ Irritability and/or angry outburst
- ▶ Shuts down and refuses to participate in an activity
- ▶ Fidgeting and restlessness
- ▶ Covering eyes, ears
- ▶ Trying to leave room

# Sensory Meltdown = Stress

- ▶ The brain becomes overwhelmed with the sensory input coming in and goes into a fight, flight or freeze response.
- ▶ During this time, the brain shuts down all “un-needed” higher brain functions and goes into survival mode.
- ▶ This is not planned or intentional
- ▶ When a child reaches the point of the sensory meltdown, it is impossible to just talk them out of it. Their brain has shut down and is simply trying to survive what it deems a dangerous situation (fight, flight or freeze response).





# Sensory Meltdown – Now What?



DON'T TALK – THEY  
CAN'T UNDERSTAND  
YOU



REDUCE SENSORY  
INPUT (SOUND,  
VISUAL, SMELL, LIGHT  
TOUCH)



PROVIDE DEEP  
PRESSURE IF ABLE  
AND PRACTISED  
BEFORE.



PROVIDE SPACE OR  
'ISLAND OF RETREAT'



AFTER IT IS OVER –  
NEED TO BUILD IN  
MORE ACTIVITIES TO  
KEEP BRAIN IN "JUST  
RIGHT" ZONE.

# How do we get into the 'Just Right Zone'?

- ▶ Use of sensory diets/lifestyle/feel good menu
- ▶ Use of visuals to guide sensory tool choice and build self awareness
- ▶ Offer choice = sense of control
- ▶ Experiment and be a detective
- ▶ Check in, stay calm and make it fun! 😊



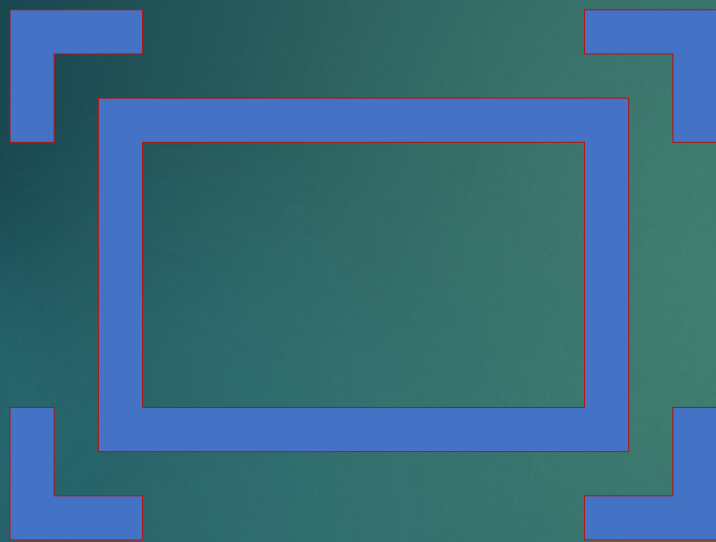
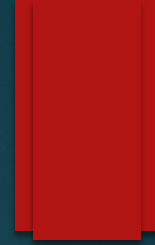
What Zone Are You In?			
Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Disgusted Out of Control

# Remember...

“Growth is a process of experimentation, a series of trials, errors and occasional victories. The failed experiments are as much a part of the process as the experiments that work.”

- Dr. Cherie Carter-Scott (1999)





# Universal Strategies

# Universal Strategies

- ▶ Heavy work break for every 20 minutes of seated work
- ▶ Wear a heavy backpack
- ▶ Carry a box filled with toys or books
- ▶ Push basket/box on the carpet, push and pull games and activities, move furniture, clean chalkboard or whiteboard.
- ▶ Air cushion – “Move ‘n sit” or exercise cushion (do not overfill)
- ▶ Tie Theraband to front of chair legs
- ▶ Jumping on a mini-trampoline or bouncing on a therapy ball while seated\*\*
- ▶ Playing jump rope, jumping jacks, animal walks, wheelbarrow races
- ▶ Pacing strip





# Universal Strategies



- ▶ Chair or wall push ups, push hands together, hug yourself
- ▶ Gentle slow rocking in a rocking chair or hammock
- ▶ Compression "sandwich" under pillows, mats
- ▶ Compression garments e.g. Under Armor or tight-fitting Lycra clothing.
- ▶ Make a "quiet corner." Have a tent with a beanbag chair, blanket inside with books to read.
- ▶ Wrap up snugly in a blanket or large beach towel
- ▶ Hot dog or Burrito Game

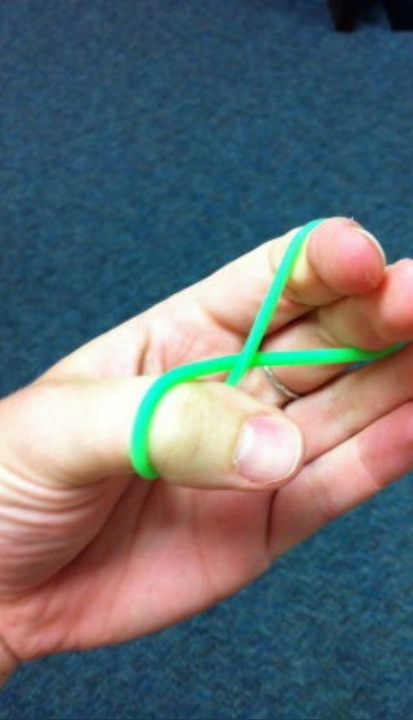




# Universal Strategies

## TOOLS FOR THE HANDS:

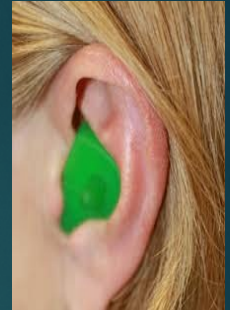
- ▶ Fidgets:
  - ▶ Squeeze a foam ball, eraser, smooth rock, pipecleaner, elastic hair band
  - ▶ Velcro under desk
- ▶ Thinking putty
- ▶ “Fidget like a ninja”



# Universal Strategies

## TOOLS FOR THE EARS:

- ▶ Listening to music with a variety of tempos.
- ▶ Ear plugs or headphones
- ▶ Access to quiet corner in the classroom
- ▶ Positioning in class – avoid busy areas such as the classroom doorway, near an open window or fan



## TOOLS FOR THE MOUTH:

- ▶ Chewing – 'concentration gum', coffee stir stick, straw, chewy tubes, chewelry
- ▶ Sucking on a sports/straw bottle
- ▶ Eating dry fruit snacks
- ▶ Sour candy, mints, crunchy foods (pretzels, carrots, apples), mint gum, ice cold drinks, lemonade





# Universal Strategies



## TOOLS FOR THE NOSE:

- ▶ Add scents such as vanilla and lavender
- ▶ Aromatherapy necklace

## TOOLS FOR THE EYES:

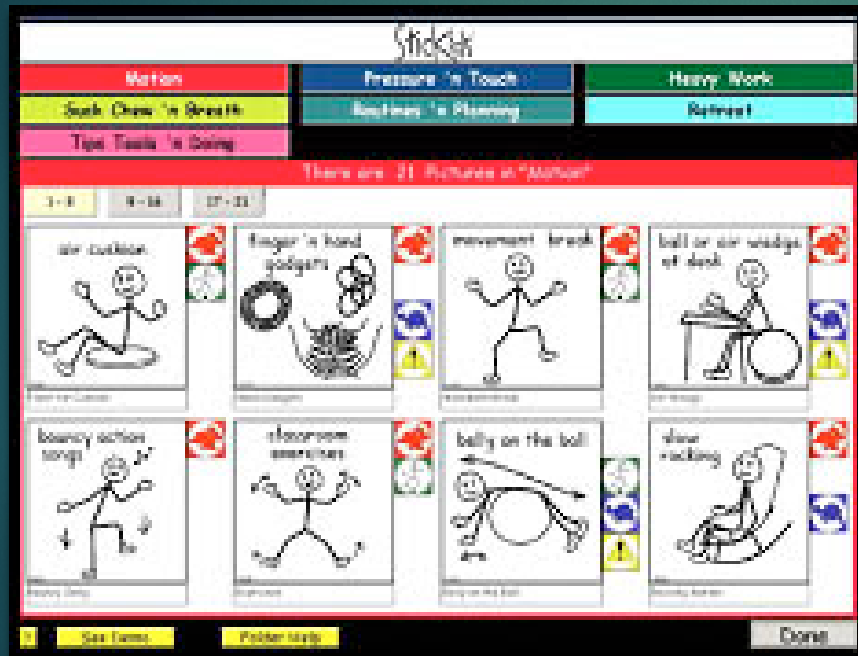
- ▶ Environmental adaptations: dim the lights, certain wall colors are particularly calming
- ▶ Slow moving visual stimulation (lava lamp, rope lamp, bubble tube)
- ▶ Declutter the learning environment
- ▶ Slant board



# Sensory Diet

- ▶ “A sensory diet provides the necessary combination of sensory input to feed or nourish a person’s nervous system” – Dr. Patricia Wilbarger
- ▶ A sensory diet can assist a child to manage attention, organization and facilitate smoother transitions.
- ▶ Inputs are purposeful, planned and proactive.

# Tips and Tricks for Sensory Diets



- ▶ Proprioceptive and vestibular inputs are MAIN MEALS
- ▶ All other sense inputs are SNACKS
- ▶ Trial strategies when you and kiddo are in a positive state.
- ▶ Pair with visual e.g., stick kids
- ▶ Sensory input needs to be proactive.
  - ▶ Use before a challenging part of day/activity:
    - ▶ Transitions, standing in line-ups
    - ▶ Fire drill, assembly, bathroom
    - ▶ Seated activity (carpet, table work)

TIME	KEY EVENTS IN THE DAY	SENSORY DIET ACTIVITIES	TRANSITION STRATEGY
7:00am	Wake up	Wake up routine with pressure input "kid sandwich" or massage	
7:30am	Breakfast	Sucking yogurt through a straw Eating crunchy cereal	Review visual schedule for the day
8:00am	Bus to school	Listening to music on iPod	
8:45am	Arrive at school	Enter classroom 5mins early with EA to get undressed without congestion of other children. Sit in beanbag chair and read a book. Lights in classroom should be dimmed or off if possible.	Visual schedule
9:15am	Circle	Sit on Movin'Sit cushion and hold lap snake on lap	Transition song – review visual schedule
10:00am	Activity centres	Wall push-ups and chair push-ups prior to beginning activity.	Visual schedule with transition object/card to take to the center. Timer with 2 min warning
10:30am	Snack	Drinking through 'crazy straw' – cold liquid Eating crunchy and salty snacks	Transition song Visual timer to indicate end of snack
10:45am	Bathroom	Wall push ups while waiting for classmates	Transition song
11:00am	Play time		Timer with 2 min warning
12:00pm	Lunch	Carry heavy box with lunch bags to the lunchroom. Drinking through straw. Eating crunchy and chewy foods.	
12:30pm	Recess	Climbing on playground equipment. Swinging on monkey bars.	Visual schedule

# Example Sensory - Morning



1:00pm	Quiet time	Lights out. Sitting in beanbag chair with weighted blanket. Soft, quiet music.	
1:15pm	Library	Carry bin of library books to library and back to class. Hold the door for classmates.	Transition song and transition object/card
2:00pm	Play time		Timer with 2 min warning
2:30pm	Snack	Drinking through 'crazy straw' – cold liquid Eating crunchy and salty snacks	Transition song Visual timer to indicate end of snack
3:00pm	Goodbye circle		Transition song
3:15pm	Bus home	Listening to music on iPod	
4:00pm	Play time	Heavy work play – jumping and crashing on the bed, .	
5:30pm	Dinner	Drinking though straw. Movin'sit at table. Helping set the table.	Give choice using choice board
6:00pm	Family time	Play wrestling, pressure play time.	
8:00pm	Bedtime	Bedtime routine, massage, weighted blanket.	Social story for going to bed.

# Example Sensory Diet - Afternoon

# Moving Forward

- ▶ Try out some of these strategies with the child you work with when you are both in a positive head space. Make it fun!
- ▶ Pair these activities with visuals and provide choice of activities
- ▶ Be a detective: observe how a child reacts to the input and if they appear better able to engage in activities afterwards
- ▶ Talk about rules and expectations when using sensory tools
- ▶ Check in with child if able before and after use of sensory tool





# Questions? Comments?...

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Thank you!



# Resources/Links

Proprioception video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oquc160D1dw>

Vestibular video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueDQjhJDqIg>

Big Cup, Little Cup Sensory Analogy video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmAgTzFJW0Q>

A Child's View of Sensory Processing video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1G5ssZIVUw&t=146s>

Sensory Diet Explanation:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B\\_cg0mRvqk&t=9s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_cg0mRvqk&t=9s)

Sensory Diet Ideas:

<https://www.sensorysmarts.com/sensory-diet.pdf>

Stick Kids Visual Sensory Resource

<https://www.stickkids.com/products---orders.html>