

Classroom Based Movement Breaks

Introduction

Some children have difficulty maintaining an appropriate level of attention in the classroom. You may notice that some children appear tired, inattentive and unfocused, while others may be fidgety, active and moving constantly. Some children may also be over-aroused and under-aroused at different times of the day. Children experiencing these characteristics often have difficulty with sensory modulation. Sensory modulation refers to the process of sensory integration as it relates to organizing and interpreting incoming sensory information. A modulation deficit is thought to exist when the child is seen to consistently over- or under-respond to the intensity and significance of sensory events, or in other words, when the child is hypersensitive or hyposensitive to certain modes of sensory inputs.

In order to maintain an optimal attention level, these children need to have regular body breaks throughout the day (after every 30 to 60 minutes of seated work, depending on the student). Body break activities can be either calming or alerting. Sometimes children seek this movement on their own, but it may be disruptive to those around them and socially inappropriate. Body breaks are intended to be preventative in nature – the regular use of them should decrease the incidence of disruptive and/or inappropriate behavior and help the students stay focused and attentive to the classroom activities. Body breaks should be performed outside of typical break times (i.e. recess, gym). Each body break should last about 5 to 10 minutes.

Movement breaks include the following components:

- 1) *Vestibular input* is created by body movement, which can aid in self regulation, alerting and organizing the body. To provide vestibular input, the following activities can be used:
 - a) Lots of movement and jumping to begin. Activities like jumping jacks, pretend downhill skiing and frog jumps are excellent choices. Use movement activities until students are beginning to breath harder.
 - b) Then progress to movement without jumping, like miming swimming strokes. Ensure both sides of the body are working, as this is the beginning of the self-organization process.
 - c) Then play the “grown-up” version of Simon Says, where students simply copy postures rather than listening to Simon’s instructions. Begin with the arms moving one at a time. Then move to the arms doing the same thing, on their own sides of the body (i.e. right hand on right shoulder and left hand on left shoulder). Then progress to having the arms cross the midline, but doing the same thing, (like hands on opposite shoulders). Finally, end with arms moving together, crossing midline, but doing different things (right arm on left shoulder, left arm on right knee). This progression moves from simple to complicated movement patterns, and “slows down” the students by making them think about their movements.
 - d) If the class responds well to videos during movement breaks the following YouTube videos are suggested:
 - o Have Fun Teaching: Fitness Song

2) *Proprioceptive input* is created when the muscles of the body are engaged in sustained, effortful work. Activities that require students to perform heavy muscular work will exert an organizing influence on their nervous system. To provide proprioceptive input, the following activities can be used:

- a) Chair push-ups- grasp either side of the chair seat and push up to lift your bottom from the seat
- b) Chair pull-downs – grasp either side of chair and pull your bottom down into the seat
- c) Press into the back of chair
- d) Knees waves – place feet on floor, hands on knees; move your knees in and out rapidly while resisting it with their hands
- e) Foot stomps – while seated in desk and grasping sides of seat with your hands, quickly raise and lower each leg with knees bent to “stomp” feet
- f) Quick Tug o’ War – grasp hands with student beside you and tug (gently) back and forth
- g) Hand Presses – turn to the peer beside you, place your hands together, and then push or press
- h) Hand Hugs – clasp your own hands together (without interlocking fingers) and squeeze; alternate hand on top
- i) Leg Raises – while seated in your desk with your hands holding each side of the chair seat, lift your legs off the floor with legs straight and hold for a count of 5 to 10 seconds
- j) Reach and stretch – standing beside your desk, reach to the sky
- k) Chair Leg Pulls – hook your feet around the legs of your chair/desk, pull the chair legs together
- l) Power March – march in place beside desk
- m) Rhythmic Body Claps – clap hands, clap hands on knees, clap hands on shoulders and other body parts
- n) Wall Push –ups – stand with feet together, one large step from wall, place hands on wall at shoulder level, touch nose to wall and then push away

3) *Deep Pressure Input* is created when a student’s body is compressed. This provides firm tactile input, and exerts a calming and organizing influence. Students can provide this pressure themselves, by any of the following techniques. Please note students will require some coaching in these techniques, and possibly some subtle cueing during initial stages of use:

- a) Press hands flat on stomach and apply firm, steady pressure
- b) Place palms together in front of chest and press palms firmly together
- c) Place both hands on top of their head and press down
- d) Self-hug around the shoulders.
- e) Lean forward so body leans against the legs and then hug the legs
- f) Stand at a desk with hands flat on the table, lean weight downwards through arms
- g) From a seated position, with the elbow supported on the desk, press the forehead into the palm of the hand.

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