Occupational Therapy Strategies for Students with Alertness Issues

Student Name:___________________
Therapist Name:__________________  Date:__________________

☐ Allow different positions depending on the activity; if it doesn’t affect performance, allow student to sit “pretzel” style in the seat, wrap feet around chair legs or swing/tap feet if it helps.

☐ Allow student to lie on floor to do work if possible- it can increase strength and provide trunk support.

☐ Allow student to have fidget toys if possible, these can be put in his/her pocket or desk.

☐ With permission from the school principal and parent, have student chew gum or eat sour candies during specified activities. An oral box can be prepared, and may include the following:
  - Gummy bears
  - Tootsie rolls
  - Suckers
  - Licorice
  - Pretzels
  - Graham crackers
  - Edible bubbles
  - Glycerin swabs
  - Nuk brush
  - Whistles
  - Straws

☐ Alerting Foods-Crunchy
  - Dried cereal, raw veggies, crackers, pretzels, popcorn, granola bars, cold drinks, popsicles.

☐ Calming Foods-Chewy
  - Raisins, gum, bagels, fruit chews, licorice, sweet food, warm temperature drinks.

☐ Try dycem or non skid rug material on the seat to decrease sliding, also seat cushions that provide slight movement help increase focus.
Weighted Items-Used for Calming/Regulating Alertness

□ Weighted Backpack-Backpack filled with books worn on back may help student in transitions between classes and may be more socially acceptable than vest. Avoid excessive weight. Student should not wear more than 20-30 minutes at a time.
□ Weighted Vest- Cut off sleeves of a sweatshirt and use the fabric to make four pockets. Sew the pockets onto the front and back of the sweatshirt. Weights can be dried beans, washers, fishing weights, small sealed bags of sand- distribute weights evenly.
□ Lap Pocket- cloth that sits on student’s lap and hangs several inches below chair seat. Fill with dried beans or rice and close channel with Velcro. Use during seated tasks.
□ Weighted Sock- Long tube sock filled with rice and sealed by sewing or rubber band. Student may decorate his “sitting buddy”. Use in lap for seated tasks.
□ Blanket-Bean bag chairs can serve as weighted blankets for naptime. You can also sandwich student between mats.

□ For the student who becomes over stimulated, provide quiet, “time out” spaces to help the child regroup and become organized (i.e. a reading corner behind a bookshelf, under a table with pillows or bean bag chair in a quiet corner, a well ventilated refrigerator box “house”)

Touch

□ For the student who experiences sensitivity to touch allow the child to stand at the end of the line and arrange the classroom seating to minimize the risk of being jostled or bumped by classmates (i.e. have the child’s desk either near the teacher or at the back of the room). Allow for an empty desk next to the student of space allows.
□ Allow the student to sit on the end of the table in the cafeteria, preferably at an end table.

Auditory

□ Forewarn the child of any loud noises before they occur (i.e. bells or alarms).
□ Allow students to use earplugs or headphone sets to decrease auditory distractions, especially during independent seat work.
□ To minimize auditory distractions, a classroom with a rug or carpet would help decrease extraneous noises
□ Place tennis balls (spilt open and fitted on each chair leg) on classroom chairs to decrease auditory stimulation
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Visual

□ Allow students to wear a hat or visor to decrease visual distractions
□ Position student facing an area of the classroom with the fewest visual distractions (avoid facing windows, bulletin board, etc.)

General Organizing Sensory Activities

□ Allow the child to become a teacher’s assistant and pass out papers so he is able to walk around the room appropriately with a goal directed task.

□ Placing your hands on student’s shoulders or head with safe, firm pressure can help slow him/her down.

□ Teach student to take several breath before making a transition to a busy environment or working on a difficult project.

□ Have younger children try to “hold the walls up” or “push the walls down” while waiting in line at the bathroom etc. Teach older children to do pushups in their seats with their hands.

□ Teach student to perform isometric exercises with his/her arms (push hands together; pull hands apart) prior to independent writing activities.

Seating and Positioning

□ Decrease fidgeting at the desk and promote improved postural adjustments by allowing the student to stand at the desk or to work on the floor in a prone on elbows position (on stomach).

□ Moving legs/feet on a bungee cord or Thera-band wrapped around chair legs provides sensory input to assist child in remaining seated longer.

□ Use a partially inflated air pillow (stadium seat) to help increase postural control by increasing sensory feedback in sitting.

□ To increase postural muscle strength and endurance: swinging, jungle gyms, rope climbing, calisthenics, pulling/pushing wagon, carrying weighted objects, scooter boards in prone lying positions and wheelbarrow walking.
Place dycem or non-skid shelving material on the student’s chair to prevent him/her from slipping and decrease squirming while seated.

Make sure student is positioned well in his/her chair with feet flat on floor. Provide a chair with arms for support if indicated.

Provide “boundaries” by placing colored tape on the floor surrounding the student’s desk.