

## Altering the Environment

Sensory, Alertness, Regulation, Attention

The dual ability to take a real interest in the world – sights, sounds, sensations; to make sense of those and to calm ones self to the “just right level”. We call this the arousal level, alertness level or self-regulation. It is the ability to manage our own internal environment. It is the neurological basis of motor control and influences ALL behavior. Children under the age of 8 or those that are struggling with sensory differences frequently rely on adults to supervise their regulation.

**Basic Rules:** Limit competing stimuli – change what you can in the environment  
Work at child’s eye level  
Pay attention to yourself and the use of affect. When in doubt: Voice off    Eye contact?  
Remember you are ALWAYS impacting their world.  
Routine is vital. Child needs to know what to expect and have clear boundaries and structure  
Use music

**In General: To increase arousal:**

- Use up beat music
- Trampoline with “light” jumping
- Jumping games/running games
- Sit-and-spin or spinning board in generally fast and/or non-rhythmical rotations
- Play “be an animal” game or march
- Light rubbing of skin (pass around the circle)
- Crunchy foods, sour balls, ice chips
- Chewing

**To decrease arousal**

- Use slow rhythmical music
- Rocking chair
- Swing set – slow and rhythmical
- Weight: vest, lap, shoulders, back pack
- Dim lighting and use lamps and/or use natural light
- Decrease noise, including your voice
- Vibrating pen
- Bubble wrap to pinch
- “drown out” environmental sounds (headphones with or without music)
- Calmer, more focused activities
- “womb” like space; beanbag, blanket, weighted blanket, tent with single book.

**Classroom ideas:**

- When on the floor, have a carpet to contain the group or use individual carpet squares, throw rugs, chairs, hula hoops or colored tape.
- Desk/table & chairs should be at correct height: feet on floor, writing surface at / just above elbow
- Allow alternative seating: T-stools, bean bag chairs, inner tubes
- Allow varied positions: laying on tummy with clipboard or standing at desk
- Use a plush area rug or soft carpet to dampen noise
- Hang a hammock, swinging chair, or porch swing in nearby area
- Have a rocking chair available
- Let child use a sleeping bag to calm self down for nap or reading time
- Develop a quiet corner in the room
- Use weighted items, lap, shoulders, vest, backpack.
- Allow the over aroused child to sit in a tent
- Use visual markers on the floor to help maintain place when lining up
- Post a daily schedule using pictures if able

## Altering the Environment - Continued

Have ear plugs available for older children to use  
Simplify directions: Break down into very concrete simple steps, one at a time  
Always show a finished product of art and other projects first and KEEP it visible.  
Background music may be distracting, not calming  
60 beats per minute music is calming  
Keep chalkboards and wipe-erase boards clean  
Cover open and “busy” shelves with sheets  
Keep all the “stuff” in opaque boxes  
Put all children in chairs even in circle time  
Position furniture around the perimeter of the room  
Pay attention to how fast you move  
Tubing tied around 2 front legs of the chair for them to push against  
Cut swim noodles and place them on backs and sides of chair to give child feedback.  
Warn early that the day will be different and repeat it.  
Place a “waiting” mat on the floor near activities  
Work at the child’s eye level  
Use small flashlights with overhead lights out to help kids focus, especially in groups.  
Minimize the number of items that are out. Put some away and “rotate the stock”  
Tape artwork outside in the hallway instead of the room and avoid hanging things from the ceiling  
Use hand signals or home made signs instead of voice  
Use an auditory signal, such as specific clapping rhythm to attract attention before giving instructions  
Use close proximity and touch to help kids focus  
Foam and duct tape over the bell/loud speaker, etc.  
Wear sunglasses and/or ball cap for outside or places with bright florescent lighting (gym, cafeteria)  
Tennis balls on the bottom of chairs to decrease noise when scooting them.  
Cover florescent lights with sheets like a swag. Fire retardant billowing is commercially available  
Have them sit on a beach ball (\$1 at dollar store) only partially blown up.  
Make sure the activities you’re doing do not have odors that are noxious or too strong for the child.  
Use picture icons or photographs for “quiet hands” , “quiet feet”, “sit down” and “voice off”  
Wear a loose fitting “hoodie” sweatshirt and allow the child to pull arms in and to pull hood onto head in busy environments like hallways, cafeteria, gym and school bus.