

Classroom Sensory Corner



What is it? A designated area or corner, with boundaries established by a piece of fabric, barrier or board, or small tent. For students to use individually or with a staff member, not for play or for learning, but for regulation.

This is different to a sensory room, because it's within the classroom. This is important so the student remains within the learning environment and can transition away from and back into learning more smoothly.

What is it for?

To support a student's sensory system to calm through a reduced stimulus environment. Children who have tactile, auditory or visual sensitivity can find the 'hustle and bustle' of a classroom environment, and unpredictable peers, overstimulating. Spending some time in reduced stimulus area can allow the sensory system to 'reset' and return to learning.

Who a sensory corner is for:

Any child in the class can use the space for self-regulation. However it is particularly for those who cannot identify or communicate to when they need self-regulation support, and benefit from an opportunity to learn to move to a space, and then re-enter the classroom.

When to use a sensory corner:

When a student shows signs of dysregulation or sensory over-arousal. This will be different for every child, it may be holding hands over their ears, making loud repeated vocalisations, or seeming distressed. The goal is for a student to learn for themselves when they will benefit from the space.



How to Use a Sensory Corner







- **Set realistic goals based on a child's self-regulation abilities.** Are they able to identify when they will need to use the corner, or will they need a verbal or visual prompt? Can they self-regulate in the corner, or will they need a buddy? An adult can visit the sensory corner with the child for co-regulation.
- **Prompt use:** Try gently prompting students with the offer of using the calm down corner as they need it. Communicate about using the sensory corner such as through a picture visual within a now/next strategy.
- **Plan use:** For some students e.g. who typically return from lunch quite heightened or enter class late often and heightened, the sensory corner can be a space they use in their routine, transitioning back into class.
- **Set rules for how the class will use the space:** if someone is in there, how can someone else request to use it?
- **Manage Work avoidance:** To avoid student's developing avoidance of work by using the sensory corner, consider making a social story, visiting the sensory corner with a staff member and using a timer and now/next to transition back to work, and bringing a tool from the sensory corner back to the learning activity.
- **Support sensory needs:** The sensory corner is not effective if it is used as a reward or consequence for negative behaviour. Sensory needs are foundational to functioning, and it is important they are supported regardless of how the student is 'behaving'.
- **Finishing Use:** Prompt the student before they transition with an object of reference for verbal or visual cues of what the next activity will be. Using a visual timer, or playing an 'ending song' can be a sensory cue to help prepare the

student for ending the time in the calming corner.

For some children, it helps to offer a quick 'chat' about their experience to form a narrative and reinforce the skills uses: e.g. *'you were feeling upset by the work, it was hard, so you came to the corner and had a break with your eyes and hands, now you seem ready to work again, well done for using the calming corner'*. Consider basing this 'debrief' on a visual, such as characters or colours, to help their learning.

What does it need?

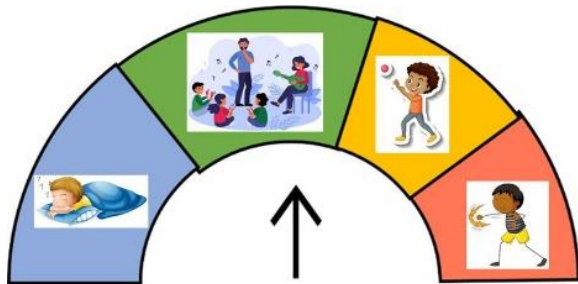
An Enclosed Space
For example: a cardboard box, a sheet draped over a table or chair, a small tent, curtains hanging from a ceiling hook or top of a door frame.

A welcoming and clear label
E.g. Welcome to the Calming Corner.


Deep pressure input
Body sock, bean bags (large, small), cushions, soft carpet or blanket, weighted blankets, weighted soft toys.

Reduced sound
Ear defenders, blankets to hide under, soft gentle music playing on iPad or speaker e.g. nature sounds, white noise etc.

Calming lighting
Overhead sheet/fabric to reduce light, small lamp. E.g. Educational / Classroom Fluorescent Light Filters to secure over ceiling lights.

Focused Tactile input
Playdough, theraputty with beads hidden inside, spinner toys, (soft cushions/blanket/fidgets/ playdough/flour/rice in a balloon without air, as a squeeze ball. Lego, puzzles.

Focused visual input
Light up toys focus calming visual input (picture book/glitter jar.

Breathing tools
Provide breathing visuals, like star breathing, or pictures of balloons and dandelions for students to pretend to blow away. Bubbles, cotton wool balls to blow tied on a string.


Regulation Visuals

Based on the children's abilities, ideas include:

- Characters representing emotions e.g. inside out
- Zones of Regulation
- Colours and emotion pictures
- Energy based pictures, such as volcanoes, fast running cars, waves, weather.
- Phrases to express emotion.
- Photos e.g. of happy class activities etc.



Evidence and Research:

A Teacher has said:

“Try utilizing a Classroom Calming Corner where students can go to briefly get away from the frustrating task or overstimulating activity...it is a good idea to try to have the student remain in the classroom rather than send him out to prevent this behaviour from becoming an avoidance tactic as well as to promote self-calming strategies. The Calming Corner should be a safe place where a student can go to calm himself using pre-taught strategies for a short amount of time. The goal is to give the student a “time away” so that his behaviour does not escalate any further. The Calming Corner is a positive place that rewards students for keeping their emotions in check and using strategies to calm themselves so that learning can occur.”

Plastino, L. 2024, *The Classroom Calming Corner*, The Watson Institute,
<https://www.thewatsoninstitute.org/watson-life-resources/situation/classroom-calming-corner/>

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- This research article provides detailed descriptions of the elements of a sensory corner and how to use this in a mainstream classroom setting:
Maich, K., Davies, A. W. J., & van Rhijn, T. (2019). A Relaxation Station in Every Location. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 54(3), 160–165.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451218767916>
- This research examined classroom spaces for children with ADHD:
Du Preez, H., & Combrinck, C.-M. (2022). The Sensory Classroom Teacher Questionnaire: A tool for assessing conducive classroom conditions for children with ADHD. *African Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 4(1), e1–e8.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/ajopa.v4i0.107>