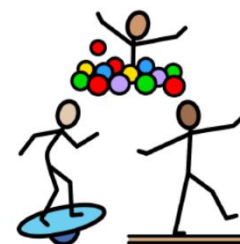


## Sensory Circuits - Getting Ready For Learning



### What are Sensory Circuits?

Sensory circuits are similar in function to a gym circuit, but instead of focussing on fitness, they focus on supporting arousal. Arousal is the body's level of alertness and it can range from sleeping, to highly stressed. In order to learn, a student needs to have adequate arousal to focus. Sensory circuits can help students with this. These circuits are especially beneficial for students who may have sensory processing differences or who simply benefit from extra sensory input to help them focus and regulate their emotions.

Sensory circuits have evolved from the sensory diet concept which provide a set of specific sensory strategies created for one student to help to support their readiness to learn. Sensory circuits are designed so more children can be involved at the same time. A well-designed sensory circuit will support each child's individual arousal needs. So, if the student needs to increase their arousal, the circuit should support this. If they need to get organised, the activities in the circuit should help with this. For individuals who are sensitive, it should help them to calm down.

### Before you start

It is important to consider the individual needs of the children. Setting a goal is a great way to monitor if the circuit has been helpful e.g. if your students are super fidgety and inattentive, the goal may be that they are able to sit and concentrate on lesson input for 15 minutes.

If you have a lot of children who are very fidgety in class, then movement to increase their arousal, coupled with heavy work to finish should help. This could include pushing, pulling and yoga.

If you have children who are more sluggish and struggle to maintain sufficient alertness, then more movement could be the best choice as they will need to increase their arousal.

Adapted from Griffin, Kim. "Creating Successful Sensory Circuits". *Senmagazine*, 7 Nov. 2021, [senmagazine.co.uk/content/specific-needs/sensory-impairment/15468/creating-successful-sensory-circuits/](https://senmagazine.co.uk/content/specific-needs/sensory-impairment/15468/creating-successful-sensory-circuits/). Accessed 14/04/25

If a child needs to calm down, yoga, heavy work and breathing activities should be in the circuit. You should try to avoid alerting movements as this could increase their arousal levels further, making them more dysregulated.



As you can see, understanding your students' current levels of arousal and what you aim to achieve, allows you to choose the best activities which support changing their alertness level to where they need it to be to allow them to learn.

## Setting up a circuit

Circuits can be designed to be completed anywhere in school such as the school gym, in the classroom, in the corridor or hall, or in the playground. Activities will depend on the space and equipment available. You will also need to take account of the needs of the children doing the circuit.

Sensory Inclusive schools 2004 states “We recommend that all children benefit from a sensory circuit at the start of the day to regulate and reset their sensory systems so they are ready to learn”. It may be beneficial to schedule a circuit into the daily timetable to make sure it's not forgotten and this also help create routine for children. Circuits should last between 10-15 minutes and are often done first thing in the morning however children may need to refocus following lunchtime or breaks. They can also be shortened for a break between lessons to help children refocus for the next lesson.



Adapted from Griffin, Kim. “Creating Successful Sensory Circuits”. *Senmagazine*, 7 Nov. 2021, [senmagazine.co.uk/content/specific-needs/sensory-impairment/15468/creating-successful-sensory-circuits/](https://senmagazine.co.uk/content/specific-needs/sensory-impairment/15468/creating-successful-sensory-circuits/). Accessed 14/04/25

## Order of Sensory Circuits

Sensory circuits must happen in the following order which is based on theories of sensory processing and sensory integration.

### 1. Alerting

Aim is to provide vestibular stimulation within a controlled environment. These alert the brain and provide information to where the body is and prepare the brain for learning. Put a control in place e.g. for 1 minute or perform 10.

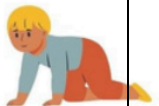
Activities include skipping, jumping on a mini trampoline, bouncing on a therapy ball, animal walks, marching or running on the spot, shuttle runs. Take extra care if spinning as this can quickly over alert!



### 2. Organising

These activities involve motor planning, balancing and organising the body to support the brain integrating the senses. Put a control in place e.g. star jumps for 45 seconds.

Activities include climbing, hopping, balancing along a bench, throwing and catching a ball against a wall or with a friend, target work e.g. throwing bean bags into a bucket, jumping in and out of hoops on the floor, hopscotch, going under or over objects, pencil rolls. You could set up an obstacle course using any objects you have such as a climb over a chair, crawl under a table, jump over a folder, walk along a bench.



### 3. Calming

These activities provide proprioception, heavy work and deep pressure touch/pressure input to ensure the children leave the circuit calm and ready to learn.

Activities include wall press-ups, stretching, therapy ball deep pressure massage, self-hugs, cuddling or squeezing a pillow, yoga, deep breathing, rolling up in a blanket, blowing bubbles.



Watch your students and their levels of alertness, engagement and regulation as this may change from day to day. Remember that if a child is already dysregulated with high arousal levels you may need to go straight to the calming section.

If you are running a circuit with multiple children who have different sensory needs and levels of arousal, you will need a system which ensures they can

access the most appropriate activities for them. You can do this by colour coding the circuit e.g use coloured cones to show the children which activity they should move to next or giving each child their own individual activity schedule which shows them their activities and where they go to next.

Example of classroom sensory circuits activity ideas: -

### 1. Alerting

#### Choose 3

March on the spot to a song on the interactive board.  
Standing still, twist your body round to look behind you and back 5 times each side.  
Get out of your seat and jump 20 times on the spot  
Frog jumps - squat and jump forwards as high as you can 10 times  
Bunny hops - for 30 seconds  
Jumping beans - jump in all directions with both feet together for 45 seconds

### 2. Organising

#### Choose 3

Perform "Head Shoulders Knees and Toes".  
Throw beanbags into a bucket - for 20 throws.  
Balance along a line on the classroom floor, taking baby steps, moving slowly and with control!  
Use a soft ball to throw and catch with each other in pairs or in a circle. How many can you catch before it falls?  
Commando crawl around the room for 45 seconds  
Perform 10 star jumps  
March on the spot with high knees. Touch hand to opposite knee for 45 seconds.

### 3. Calming

#### Choose 1

Sit on the floor or in a comfy seat. Cross your legs and squeeze a pillow or cushion really tightly into you. Take slow, gentle breaths in and out  
Perform 10 wall press-ups. See if the class can push the wall away!  
Yoga stretches - stretch as tall as you can and hold for a count of 10. Fold over, bending knees a little and hang there for a count of 10 -repeat.  
Perform chair pressups - from sitting in your chair, push your hands against your chair and lift your bottom off the seat. Keep your breaths long and gentle; hold this position for 10 seconds. Rest then repeat.

Adapted from Sensory Circuits for Schools (Free Guide), by Sensory Inclusive Schools, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Example of playground sensory circuits activity ideas: -

### 1. Alerting

#### Choose 3

Run on the spot.

Stand still and twisting body to look behind you and back 10 times.

Go faster then slower to finish.

Balancing on one leg.

Shuttle running

### 2. Organising

#### Choose 3

Throw and catching a ball with a friend or throwing and catching against a wall. Aim for 10 in a row without dropping the ball.

Dribbling a ball around cones or passing the ball to another for 2 minutes

Skipping using skipping ropes for a minute

Walking on stilts

Hopscotch on the floor

Jumping in and out of hoops on the floor. Can they manage 5 in a row?

Climbing on climbing apparatus

Riding a bike or scooter

### 3. Calming

#### Choose 1

Sit on the floor or in a comfy seat. Cross you legs and squeeze a pillow or cushion really tightly into you. Take slow, gentle breaths in and out.

Yoga stretches - stretch as tall as you can and hold for a count of 10. Fold over, bending knees a little and hang there for a count of 10 -repeat. You can try a variety of yoga poses e.g. child's pose.

Perform deep breathing exercises - try roller coaster breathing.

Using your finger, trace up and down the fingers of your opposite hand. Breathe in as you go up each finger and slowly breathe out as you move down each finger.

Adapted from Sensory Circuits for Schools (Free Guide), by Sensory Inclusive Schools, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Finishing with a calming activities will help the children leave the circuit or return to class feeling calm and as ready for the day or lesson as possible.

### **Further resources:**

For more resources to help with developing skills or for further helpful tips and tricks, please visit our website or lookout for our Facebook posts.

[www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot](http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/cypot)

[www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders](https://www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders)

