

Policy

This policy describes the purpose of sensory supports and sets out the requirements for when and how a sensory supports may be used at Southern Autistic School to support a student.

This policy is adapted from the Department of Education Sensory Rooms and Equipment policy, last updated February 2022.

Summary

Sensory processing is the ability to organise and interpret the information that we receive through our sensory systems. Everybody processes sensory information differently - we all have our own sensory preferences and things that we like to avoid (ie. those who enjoy finger painting and those who don't enjoy the feeling of paint on their hands). Sometimes our sensory processing can impact on our ability to attend or to participate in tasks. It is common for autistic individuals to have differences in their sensory processing.

At Southern Autistic School we acknowledge and embrace all sensory preferences. Occupational therapists work within classrooms to accommodate sensory needs and empower each student to interact, participate and learn.

- The occupational therapist at Southern Autistic School must be consulted in the assessment, planning, implementation, staff training and evaluation of sensory supports at Southern Autistic School.
- Every student who has been prescribed deep pressure, weighted products, sensory chews and ear defenders must have individualised sensory guidelines completed and displayed in the classroom. Sensory supports are linked to functional goals and are regularly reviewed.
- SAS does not have a sensory room.
 - Evidence indicates that best practice for sensory intervention is that it is implemented regularly throughout the student's day to work towards a functional goal or defined purpose.
- Many of our students access sensory strategies across the day to support their engagement in functional activities and the Victorian Curriculum.
 - Seating
 - Ear defenders
 - Deep breathing
 - Movement breaks
 - Fidget toys

Deep pressure therapy

There are numerous deep pressure therapy items on the market and the department cannot list them all, nor can every behavioural scenario in which they are used be described.

With the exception of deep pressure applied for a therapeutic purpose, prescribed by an occupational therapist, the department does not support the use of deep pressure therapy as its application can pose a risk to the health and safety of students, and alternative interventions that address the function of a student's behaviour are more effective.

What is deep pressure therapy?

Weighted items apply deep pressure to muscles and joints through weight. These items tend to be worn or applied over regular clothing. Examples of weighted items include, but are not limited to, weighted blankets, lap pads, backpacks, and vests.

Compression items apply deep pressure to muscles and joints through compression. These items tend to be worn under, not over, regular clothing. Examples of compression items include, but are not limited to, compression body suits, compression shorts, and compression singlets or vests.

Other types of deep pressure therapy that may be prescribed include deep pressure touch, therapeutic brushing and deep pressure provided to the body through equipment e.g. fit ball.

Therapeutic use of deep pressure therapy

The use of weighted and compression items and other deep pressure strategies to apply deep pressure is only permitted when prescribed by an occupational therapist for a therapeutic purpose.

Prescriptions from occupational therapists must be in writing and describe the purpose, or goal, of using the prescribed equipment.

The Southern Autistic School occupational therapist prescribing weighted or compression items, will complete individualised Sensory Guidelines outlining the purpose, goal and precautions of use. The Southern Autistic School sensory guidelines template has been adapted from the Department of Education Equipment prescription template.

Family consent is obtained and documented in all sensory guidelines.

Therapeutic purposes include:

- providing support to achieve proper body position, balance, or alignment to allow greater freedom of mobility than would be possible without the use of such devices or mechanical supports
- providing temporary immobilisation for medical purposes (for example, a cast or splint to allow healing)
- permitting a student to participate in activities without risk of physical harm (for example, ride a tricycle).
- **Providing sensory input that promotes nervous system regulation, student sense of safety and engagement with learning and play.**

The use of an item for therapeutic purposes must be:

- based on an assessment of a student's need by an occupational therapist
- based on evidence for how the prescribed item will help the student
- be individually fitted for the student.

Using the Southern Autistic School sensory guidelines also ensures that there is appropriate documentation by:

- explaining how the prescribed item will be used, including the goals that the item will help to achieve, how long the item can be applied for and when it must be removed based on that assessment.
- outlining what training staff need to use, or supervise the use of the prescribed item safely.
- detailing when the use of the prescribed item will be reviewed and how and when the goals will be evaluated.

Definitions

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

A written statement of the educational program designed to meet a student's individual needs.

Occupational therapist (OT)

An occupational therapist (OT) is a degree-based health professional regulated by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Occupational therapists use a whole person perspective to work with individuals, groups and communities to achieve optimal health and wellbeing through participation in the occupations of life, including education. In the school setting, occupational therapists facilitate students' occupations including accessing the curriculum, playing/socialising, and self-care.

Problem, challenging or maladaptive behaviour

Behaviour that interferes with the learning of the student or the learning of other students.

Ear defenders

Commercially available noise cancelling or noise reducing, over-ear, on-ear or in-ear headphones that muffle or reduce auditory input.

Sensory Chew

A 'sensory chew' is an oral sensory tool that provides tactile and proprioceptive input to the lips, tongue, cheeks, and jaw. This sensory feedback can provide information to the brain about the mouth and can be used for students who are under responsive to oral sensory input and are observed to seek this input throughout the day.

Deep pressure touch

Firm but gentle tactile sensory input provided to the body. The student may apply deep pressure touch to themselves, or an adult may apply it to the student to support them to regulate.

Policy last reviewed	N/A
Approved by	Principal School council members.
Next scheduled review date	March 2024