UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY THROUGH OUR SENSES

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MY BACKGROUND

• Undergraduate: Psychology / Fine Arts (Painting)
• Graduate: MGH IHP OTD Program
• Currently: Therapeutic day school for students age 6-22 who experience neurological, psychiatric, and learning based difficulties. I also teach OT graduate students pediatrics and mental health at MGH.
• Special Interests: Trauma Informed Care, Sensory Integration, Neurological Rehabilitation, Pediatrics, & Telehealth.
TODAY’S OBJECTIVES

- The anxiety-sensory connection
- Understanding your own sensory profile
- Creating tailored routines
- Resources to help get started
- Q and A
OUR 8 SENSES

- visual
- hearing
- smell
- taste
- touch
- balance
- body
- organs
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- **Physiological needs**: food, water, warmth, rest
- **Safety needs**: security, safety
- **Belongingness and love needs**: intimate relationships, friends
- **Esteem needs**: prestige and feeling of accomplishment
- **Self-actualization needs**: achieving one's full potential, including creative activities

The diagram illustrates the hierarchical structure of human needs, with more basic needs at the bottom and higher-level needs at the top.
WE OFTEN ASSOCIATE ANXIETY WITH OUR SOCIAL WORLD—AN LOOMING EVENT OR UNRESOLVED FEELINGS, BUT THERE MAY BE SOMETHING MORE FOUNDATIONAL AND SIMPLE GOING ON.... OUR BODIES CAN MESSAGE ANXIETY WHEN WE ARE DEHYDRATED, TIRED, HUNGRY.... PEOPLE DON'T LIKE TO THINK THEIR EMOTIONS CAN BE THAT SIMPLE, BUT OUR BODY'S NERVOUS SYSTEMS ARE OLD AND PRIMITIVE. EVOLUTION IS SLOW.
WE TAKE IN THESE SENSORY EXPERIENCES AND OUR BODIES REMEMBER.

OUR BODY-BRAIN CONNECTION IS SMART. IT WANTS TO RECOGNIZE PATTERNS AND BE PREPARED.

IT CAN TURN ON AND OFF THINGS BEFORE WE GET A CHANCE TO MAKE THAT CHOICE CONSCIOUSLY.
THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE
SNS/PSNS
WHAT CAN WE DO?
YOU HAVE SOME CONTROL
“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change”.

Charles Darwin
EVERYONE HAS PREFERENCES
IT'S APART OF YOUR BEAUTIFUL UNIQUE HUMAN EXPERIENCE
SENSORY ACTIVITY CHECKLIST

Plan grocery trips or errands during times of less traffic or days of clear weather!

Limit an unpleasant sensory experiences!
Media/Crowds

Try to explore new interests. We have to adapt to change!

Be intentional with all 8 senses!
HOME ENVIRONMENT

• Bedroom
  ✓ Limit activities in bedroom besides sleep related routines
  ✓ Find a evening routine that is repeatable every night

• Sleep Hygiene- Bedtime is an excellent time to practice sensory strategies
  https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene

Be intentional and address all 8 senses
CREATE A “SAFE SPACE”

Create a “Safe Space” or “Calming Corner”

- Sense of privacy
- Sensory bin
- Visuals: poems, quotes, pictures, & decorations
- Remember all 8 senses!
SENSORY BINS

Items specifically chosen based on your sensory preferences, aid in relieving feelings of anxiety, and increase organization and focus.

Example items:

• Weighted Items
• Squish/Stress Balls
• Fidgets
• Small Games/Toys
• Glitter Jars
• Small Candies
grounding tips

see
what colors & objects do you see? name them. what looks comforting?

hear
what sounds can you hear? tip: listen to safe music

breathe
take deep, slow breaths with long exhales. notice how you feel.

smell
are there any comforting smells? tip: light a candle, use essential oils

touch
stretch out, feel your feet on the floor, wiggle your fingers & toes tip: use soft toys, or blankets

you are here. you are safe.

5 4 3 2 1 Grounding Exercise

https://gramho.com/media/2147095874931727160
DEEP PRESSURE (TACTILE/PROPRIOCEPTION)

Deep Pressure Therapy is a form of proprioceptive input. The added weight puts pressure on your joints and muscles, giving your brain a better sense of where your body is in relation to space.

When deep pressure is applied to the body, the Autonomic Nervous System becomes balanced. The body’s “fight or flight” response (Sympathetic Nervous System) decreases, while the calming Parasympathetic Nervous System is activated.
SENSORY BREAKS & SCHEDULED SENSORY TIME

BE INTENTIONAL
MOVEMENT BREAKS/ SENSORY BREAKS

• 5-10 minutes
• Pre-schedule into daily routine
• Before and/or after stressful events
• Be Intentional! Remember all 8 senses. What grounds you?

• Example: 10 year old boy, between classes in remote setting.
  10 jumping jacks- 5 yoga poses- 3 deep breathes- 1 positive affirmation
    “Today will be a good day, I can handle this day!”
WORKOUT
PERFORM 10 OF EACH EXERCISE.

SQUATS
TOE TOUCHES
ARM CIRCLES
RUN IN PLACE

WALK BACKWARDS
ARMS OVERHEAD
REVERSE JUMPS
STOMP FEET

Get the complete Star Wars Packet at www.YourTherapySource.com
Roll a movement break
Roll a dice, find the picture that matches the number. Hold the pose for 20 seconds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dice</th>
<th>Pose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lunge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Warrior pose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Warrior 2 pose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mountain pose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tree pose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>March in place</td>
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</tbody>
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BODY SCAN/ MINDFULNESS

Body Scan: Kids/Teens Body Scan-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alC-lo441v4

Mindfulness-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzKryaN44ss
DON’T FORGET THE POWER OF EXPRESSION

• Art and craft projects are sensory rich experiences
• Creating something that has a purpose can be therapeutic
• Human hearts have all the feelings! Express them safely in your own way
I can carry a positive memory with me in my hand. I can remember it with all of my senses to help it feel real in my mind.

WE CAN’T LEARN NEW THINGS WHEN WE ARE ANXIOUS

REMEMBER THE PYRAMID- LEARNING NEW THINGS HAPPENS WHEN WE ARE SAFE AND COMFORTABLE. PRACTICE THESE SENSORY STRATEGIES WHEN YOU’RE NOT ANXIOUS!
OVERALL

• Coping skills are adaptation skills, and your senses are your toolbox. While at home, do your best to be proactive and intentional with all 8 senses.

• Understand and explore your own sensory preferences; use resources!

• Check your room and office environmental setup so it matches your preferences.

• Create a “safe space” for when anxiety gets too uncomfortable.

• Practice sensory grounding techniques when in a calm space, not when anxious!

• Take care of your basic needs!
BE EASY ON YOURSELF AND OTHERS- THESE ARE NOT EASY TIMES!

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjfCS88Gc7Q

May I be safe
May I be happy
May I be healthy
May I live with ease

you can do anything, but not everything.
-david allen
Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them, that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.

Lao Tzu
RESOURCES

• Book suggestion- I Hear a Pickle AND SMELL, SEE, TOUCH, & TASTE IT, TOO! By RACHEL ISADORA
• Dr. Pearl meditation-- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjfCS88Gc7Q
• Grounding tips- https://gramho.com/media/2147095874931727150
• Kids Body Scan- Kids/Teens Body Scan- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIC-Io441v4
• Sleep Hygiene Resource- https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene
• Mindfulness- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzKryaN44ss

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