**Making Sense of Sensory**

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Sensory stimulation defined: Use of everyday objects focusing on the five senses (smell, touch, hearing, sight and taste) to evoke a positive response or generate positive feelings.

-First used in 1960’s with individuals with learning disabilities and has since expanded in use with individuals with autism, brain injuries and dementia.

-Based on belief in brain plasticity which is the brain’s ability to restructure and form new connections as well as adjust the strengths of existing connections.

-Sensory sequencing technique focuses on presenting cues in a manner in which can be understood: Smell, touch, vision, hearing and taste.

-Sensory stimulation focuses on two remaining strengths in late stage dementia: ability to respond emotionally and ability to enjoy sensory cues.

-Everyday sensory: Making the most of sensory cues within the environment such as food, sounds and décor.

-Sensory stimulation activities: structured programs utilizing theme based sensory approaches in an organized manner to generate a response or provide pleasure.

***Conducting a Sensory Activity***

\* Prior to starting the process, verbally greet client/elder and let them know what is about to happen. Even if the client/elder is very cognitively impaired, they should be informed of the program about to occur. It can be introduced in friendly terms, such as spending some time to remember some pleasant memories. A tactile greeting can accompany the verbal greeting.

\*When presenting the sensory cues, present one at a time, allowing time for absorption and response. Simple verbal cues should accompany the presentation of the sensory cues, to explain and reinforce what is happening.

\*When talking about the cues presented, ask them what the cue reminds them of. Refrain from asking questions where there is a right or wrong answer or they have to correctly identify a cue.

\*Consider the amount of cues and stimulation being presented at one time. Music can be used as a compliment to the sensory experience or it can act as extraneous over-stimulation for the very impaired. In some cases, quiet is the best compliment to sensory.

\*When using touch, rubber gloves are not necessary. What makes a sensory experience a quality of life interaction is the human-to-human touch. To maintain infection control, using an antiseptic foam or gel in between sessions is acceptable.

\* Be respectful and speak in an adult manner. Maintaining a calm, soothing, conversational tone is most effective.

\*Expect a response, even when one may not be forthcoming. Being aware of small responses, such as increased eye blinking, increased body movement, ceasing of body movement, tensing of body/facial expressions (to name a few) is important.

\*Let them know you enjoy being with them. Finding a personal style of conducting sensory makes the process more satisfying and eventually more successful with the client/elder.

\*Continually analyze stimulation levels to avoid over stimulation. We need to create a balance of active stimulation and passive stimulation. It is not our goal to constantly stimulate the client/elder actively. For very low functioning client/elders, five minutes of active stimulation can be a long period of time. Be intuitive of the client/elder's response and if it seems they have had enough, don't be afraid to stop.

\*We must never forget that each person is an individual and our approach should be based on past interests of the client/elder.

***Setting up the Sensory Cart/Cabinet***

1. Secure a location or cart which will be designated for storage and use of the sensory materials. Designating space will ensure materials are accessible and ready when sensory approaches are to be introduced.

2. Organize materials into storage bins or boxes. You'll need at least four for the senses - vision, hearing, tactile and olfactory. Additional bins can be organized for life themes, seasonal/holiday themes and individual bins for specific needs.

3. Visual Box: Pictures of common objects/familiar things such as animals, babies, people, food, colors, shapes. The pictures can be cut from magazines/catalogs (make sure the pictures are large and not complex). Or many developmental catalogs offer pre-made picture card sets.

4. Olfactory Box: Various scents can be stored in small containers (film containers work well if you can find them or similar size container). Scents to include are cinnamon, vanilla, coffee, vinegar, baby lotion, toothpaste, peppermint and various extracts. For the liquid scents, pour some drops onto a cotton ball and leave in closed container (prevents spillage).

5. Tactile Box : Various fabrics such as burlap, velvet, cotton, silk, wool, fur, corduroy, satin; rocks, pieces of rope, various plastic textures, Styrofoam, sandpaper, feathers, cork, and sponges. Can also focus on temperatures with heated items or balloons filled with warm or cold water. Mushy items such as sand in a balloon or many of the commercial tactile balls.

6. Auditory Box : Various bells; sound containers with various items to make different sounds such as beans, water, rice, bolts; sound buttons.

7. Theme Boxes: A variety of theme boxes should be included in the program. Boxes focusing on the current season and holiday should be accessible on the cart. Some popular life theme boxes should be created based on population need, such as babies, gardening, and men’s interest.

**Seasonal Sensory Baskets**

***WINTER***

WOOL HAT AND SCARF, EAR MUFFS  
 CINNAMON STICKS, COCOA, PEPPERMINT STICKS  
 STYROFOAM BALL (REPRESENTS SNOWBALL)   
 METAL/BRASS OR SMALL BALLOON FILLED WITH COLD WATER (COLD)   
 MUSIC: WINTER WONDERLAND, BUTTON UP YOUR OVERCOAT

***SPRING***

STRAW BONNET, BASEBALL CAP  
 STRAWBERRIES (REAL OR SCENT)  
 SPRING FLOWERS: TULIPS, DAFFODILS, LILAC (REAL OR SILK)  
 BASEBALL, BASEBALL GLOVE, AND BAT  
 GARDENING TOOLS, TROWEL, GARDEN GLOVES, CLAY POT  
 MUSIC: TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME; RED, RED ROBIN, COMES BOB, BOB, BOBBIN’ ALONG

***SUMMER***

BEACH HAT, SUNGLASSES  
 SUMMER FRUITS.VEGETABLES: PEACHES, PLUSM, GRAPES, TOMATOES  
 SUMMER FLOWERS: DAISES, ROSES (SILK OR REAL)  
 CUT GRASS  
 WARM WATER BALLOON  
 BEACH TOYS, BUCKET OF BEACH SAND, SHELLS  
 MUSIC: IN THE GOOD OLD SUMMERTIME

***AUTUMN***

FOOTBALL HELMET, FOOTBALL  
 AUTUMN LEAVES IN BASKET  
 PUMPKIN, GOURDS  
 CORNUCOPIA  
 MAPLE SYRUP, COOKED PUMPKIN SMELL  
 BURLAP IN FALL COLORS  
 MUSIC: AUTUMN LEAVES, HARVEST MOON.

***Passive Stimulation Programs***

Every sensory program should be a balance of individualized active stimulation (1-1 sensory, theme sensory) and periods of passive stim. The passive stim should be varied and structured according to need.

***Passive stimulation rooms***

-Changing visual stim hanging from the ceiling including wind socks, bright scarves, umbrellas, streamers, white Christmas lights, painted ceiling tiles, 3-D clouds, and 3-D seasonal displays.

-Aroma therapy, changing the scents to match the needs of the residents

-Environmental videos, music videos, baby/pet videos

-Auditory stim through varying music, relaxation tapes, environmental sounds, Gregorian chants, Didgeridoos, frog tapes, cricket tapes, wind chimes with fan.

***Multi-Sensory Rooms (MSR)***

An environmental program designed to blend sights, sounds, aromas and movement in a positive, structured environment. Originally designed in the Netherlands, it creates an environment which offers pleasurable and relaxing sensory experiences at a level the cognitively impaired can enjoy. Do a google search of Multi-Sensory Rooms and many links will come up. Snoezelen is the creator of the concept.

***Individual Passive Stim***

Passive stim poles - creating a portable sensory experience on tube feeding poles (which are not being used for tube feeding). Wrap white lights, hang a wind chime and aroma disc on the pole and it can be positioned in a manner where the resident can enjoy.

Texture pillows - can be purchased from Nasco or created from found materials in the department.

Visual stimulation devices - Lava lamps, wave machines, light machines, water dancers, sound wave machines. Many of the catalogs are now offering these items or visit Spencers, The Nature Company or The Science Store in your local mall.

***Sensory Resources***

Nasco http://www.enasco.com/c/senioractivities/Sensory/

Snoezelen [www.worldwidesnoezelen.com](http://www.worldwidesnoezelen.com)  
  
Multi-Sensory Rooms http://www.multisensoryroom.com/  
  
TFH Multi Sensory Rooms <http://www.multisensoryenvironments.com/sensory-room-design/>  
  
Experia – Multi Sensory Rooms http://www.experia-usa.com/t-multisensoryrooms.aspx  
  
Rompa Multi Sensory Rooms http://www.rompa.com/multi-sensory-environments-rooms  
  
Bedscapes [www.bedscapes.com/](http://www.bedscapes.com/)  
  
Photos of sensory baskets:   
<http://www.dhspecialservices.com/sensorybaskets.htm>  
https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=oa.10150347569267025&type=1