

B E S T P R A C T I C E S

# *hawai'i & pacific* **DEAF-BLIND** *project*

## **Sensory Diet**

### **What is a Sensory Diet?**

A sensory diet is a thoughtfully designed, individualized daily schedule of sensory rich activities with the goal of helping to maintain focus throughout the day. Many children who are Deaf-blind have trouble adjusting to day to day activities both at home and in the classroom. Some children are overly responsive, too “hyper” and other children are under responsive, too “sleepy”.

A lot of Deaf-blind children have sensory difficulties that are unique and special. For example, they may not like the way different clothing materials feels or like being touched in a certain way or they may not like a change in their schedule, the way something looks, or different textures of foods, smells and sounds. Deaf-blind children may need additional planned activities that will help them focus their attention and be redirected.

### **How to Create a Sensory Diet.**

It is important to remember that a sensory diet is individualized and based on what the Deaf-blind child likes. This “diet” will ideally provide the right amount of sensory input to help the child function at their best level. After engaging in sensory diet activities, the child is usually able to focus and participate better because s/he is now “ready”.

The most important part of creating a sensory diet is providing motivating activities, for the right amount of time at the right time during the day. The child’s team (family, teachers and service providers) should spend time both observing and interacting with the child in a variety of activities and throughout the day and consider the following questions:

- Is it hard for the child to transition/change from one activity to another? If yes, when does that happen?
- Does the child have specific food or clothing likes and dislikes? What are they?
- Does the child have a hard time with making and playing with friends? Does s/he play too rough with other children or prefer to play alone?
- Is the child sensitive to things on her/his hands and face? For example, is s/he upset by shaving cream, glue, dirt or food?
- Does the child overreact to nail cutting, hair washing or brushing, brushing teeth or bathing?



The Team should use the things the child enjoys then develop a sensory diet and a schedule of when the sensory activity will take place. For example, if a Deaf-blind child enjoys jumping up and down or getting his/her shoulders massaged, before a new activity is going to start, teach the child to jump up and down a certain number of times or massage his/her shoulders for a specific time period. Once the child starts learning this, teach the child to start asking for what kind of sensory s/he would like. By providing choices to the Deaf-blind child they are learning to take care of their sensory needs.

Everybody has sensory needs that are unique and special. Deaf-blind children with sensory needs should have their own individualized diet, once the diet is introduced the effects are usually immediate. Activities that wake up your Deaf-blind child or calm him/her down are not only effective in the moment, they actually help to restructure the child's nervous system over time so that he/she is better able to participate in situations that were previously challenging. A good sensory diet can help regulate alertness and increase attention span and handle transitions and change in the child's schedule with less stress.

### **More Sensory Activities**

#### **Touch/Deep Pressure/Massage**

Backscratch  
Warm bath  
Scrub with washcloth/scrubby  
Water play  
Wear certain fabrics  
Explore various textures  
Sit in the sunshine/shade  
Play with stuffed toys  
Use foamy soap/shaving cream  
Pet a dog, cat, or other animal  
Weighted blanket, vest, lap pad  
Roll up in a blanket  
“Sandwich” between pillows  
Play with dry rice & beans or other materials  
Vibrating toys

#### **Movement/Proprioception**

Rocking (in your arms, hobby horse, or rocking chair)  
Crawling on hands and knees  
Jumping  
Dancing  
Hopping  
Wheelbarrow walk  
Jumping jacks

Push ups  
Sit ups  
Swinging  
Tree climbing

#### **Listening/Auditory**

Listen to favorite music  
Bang on pots and pans  
Play musical instruments  
Listen to sounds of nature outdoors  
Singing  
Humming  
Whispering  
Blow whistles

#### **Looking/Vision**

Look at mobiles, lava lamps, bubble lamps  
Colored lightbulbs  
Make a “Safe space” with minimal visuals  
Look at photos  
Look at picture books  
Look at nature - fish tanks, farm, zoo, ocean

#### **Smell/Taste/Oral Comforts**

Essential oils and scented candles  
Smell flowers  
Sniff spices and herbs  
Explore tastes: sweet, salty, sour, spicy, bitter

Information adapted from:

Biel, Lindsey. *Sensory Diet Activities* (2008)

Peske, Nancy. (2015) *What is a Sensory Diet?* Retrieved from: <http://www.sensorysmartparent.com/sensorydiet.html>

Biel, L., M.A. OTR/L, and Peske, N (2005). *Raising a Sensory Smart Child: The Definitive Handbook for Helping Your Child with Sensory Integration Issues.* Retrieved from: <http://www.sensorysmarts.com>



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