SENSORY solutions™

a guide to effective REGULATION SPACES

Beyond Coloring Pages and Fidget Fads

I hope every district, every school has the resources to employ a highly skilled occupational therapist (OT) who has a deep understanding of sensory processing. Ideally, this person would advise leaders about setting up sensory-friendly spaces and provide input and insights for the team related to your most dysregulated students.

Unfortunately, there is a shortage of OTs for outpatient therapy, let alone all the other places they are needed. To help bridge this gap, let's talk about cozy corners, calming centers, zen zones, sensory rooms, and the wide world of spaces intended for increasing self-regulation.

Whatever you call it at your school, I have seen more and more of these regulation spaces popping up. As with all new things, there have been some bumps along the way to implementation. This guide is designed to help you harness the power of a healthy space designed for getting the "think before acting" part of the brain back in charge.

First, let's go over a few do's and don'ts that will set you and your students up for success.



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Do's & Don'ts of Regulation Spaces

Inspired by *Building a Trauma-Informed Restorative School* (Brummer, 2021)

Do

Introduce the space positively and normalize needing time and space to get regulated.

Do Not

Send students to the space as a punishment.

Do

Model using it yourself.

Do Not

Tease or shame anyone for using the space.

Do

Teach students how to go to the space, choose a tool or strategy, reflect, and return to class.

Do Not

Expect students to know how to use the space well without lots of practice.

Do

Practice, practice, practice.

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Do

Have clear visuals and easy-to-access calming options.

Do

Provide options for movement and proprioceptive input.

Do

Create some privacy with a pretty shower curtain or decorative screen.

Do

Provide structure and set reasonable limits with a visual timer or sand in an hourglass.

Do Not

Make it over-stimulating.

Do Not

Rely exclusively on cognitive skills like self-reflection.

Do Not

Use it as a way to isolate the student.

Do Not

Use force or restrain a child in the space.

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Beyond Coloring Pages + Fidget Fads

I frequently get asked what sensory supports I recommend for a regulation space. As you may have guessed from the title of this section, it's not just fidget spinners and pop-its, which often turn into toys instead of tools.

Similarly, coloring can be helpful, but these items alone do not provide a comprehensive menu for feeding stressed senses.

TRY THIS...

When deciding what to include, get students' input and pay attention to what helps them de-stress in difficult moments.

Suggested Sensory Supports

Include an item or two from each of the following categories in your zen den, brain reset toolbox, or sensational sensory room.

1 Vestibular and Proprioception:

- Things to squish and squeeze (large and small)
- Other movement prompts
- Lycra
- Weighted lap pad or wrap
- Yoga ball
- Massage tools
- Sensory floor tile
- Bean bag chair or large cushion



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2 Touch / Tactile Sense

- Sensory adhesive strips and/or Velcro
- Sequin pillow
- Big, squishy stuffed animal
- Silicone sponge
- Something with various textures (search “DIY texture board”)

3 Sight



- Eye cover
- Sunglasses
- Ooze timer
- Liquid bubbler
- Globe (surprisingly soothing!)
- Age-appropriate brain visual

4 Hearing

- Noise-canceling headphones
- Soothing music
- Rain stick



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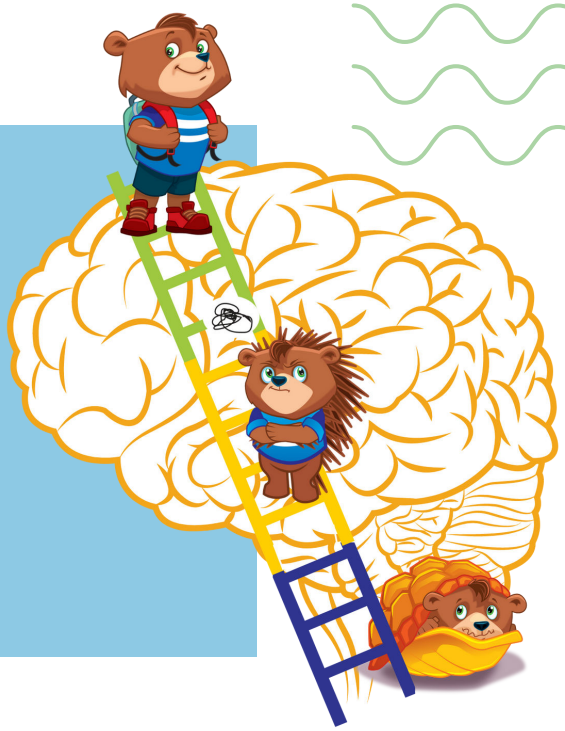
5 Taste and Smell
(+ some interoception and prope)

- Sugar-free bubble gum
- Hard mint candies
- Crunchy snacks
- Thin straw to use with a cup of water
- Coloring sheets with scented markers
- Vanilla, lavender, or orange essential oil dropped on a cotton ball in a glass jar

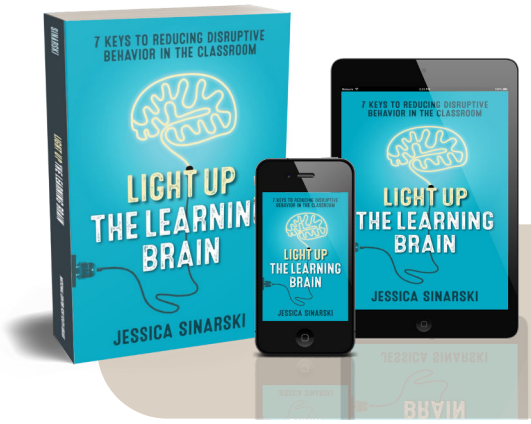


6 Interoception

- **Feeling Faces for Mindful Kids**
- Pinwheels
- Countdown to Calm poster
- Riley the Brave plush
- Chart with easy yoga poses



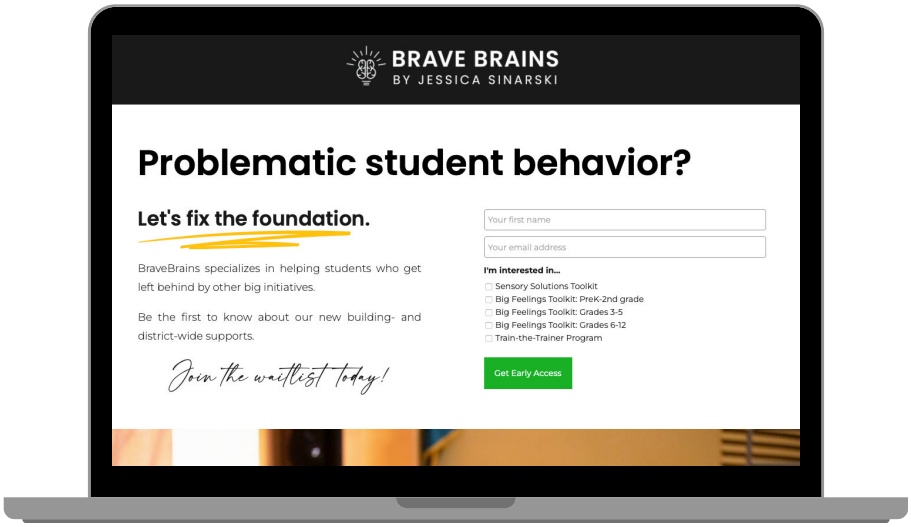
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Find even more sensory solutions in
Light Up the Learning Brain
(also available in **Audiobook** format)

Want to dig deeper?



BraveBrains toolkits help students who get left behind by other initiatives.

Carefully crafted to address SEL and behavior-management gaps, our toolkits contain everything you need to understand what's behind big behaviors and, more importantly, what we can do about it.

Learn more at www.BraveBrains.com/EDU

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