

COMMUNITY PAEDIATRIC OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Handout for Alerting Strategies

Alerting Strategies are those that involve activities where the child needs to 'wake up' some of their sensory systems to perform everyday activities to the best of their abilities

Activities to use

Use 2 – 3 activities prior to the planned activity.

- Up/down movements, jogging/running, fast movement (for short periods only).
- Clapping activities.
- Hard slow stamping/clapping.
- Loud fast music
- Ask child to stretch as far as is possible and then crouch into a tiny ball.
- Try performing 10 x squat jumps. Jumping from a crouched position to fully straight in the air – back to a squat position.
- Perform 10 x star jumps.
- Pat cool water on their face
- Ask child to help move mats, carry equipment, boxes etc.
- Crawling and commando crawling.
- Jumping on the spot.
- Bunny jumps.
- Jumping on a trampet.

Activities to use prior to or during sitting activities for example before pencil, scissor, keyboard skills, craft activities and cutlery skills.

Use 2 – 3 activities prior to task.

- Use a stress ball or playdough and squeeze slowly. Repeat 10 times.
- Chewing gum.
- Making faces e.g. open mouth wide.
- Sucking sour sweet.
- Eating crunchy food.
- Drinking cold drinks.
- Scrunch up scrap paper (A4 sheets) into a tight ball. Initially use 2 hands, do not allow child to use their body/table. As he progresses ask child to use one hand only.
- Use bright lighting.
- Ask child to bend his elbows, rest his forearms on the table, and lean forward so that some of his body weight is felt through his upper limbs.
- Shoulder shrugging.
- Ask child to touch thumb to each finger in turn pressing hard each time.
- Ask child to make a tight fist hold for 5 – 10 seconds and repeat 5 times.
- Ask child to press each thumb and finger in turn on the edge of the table, press and hold for about 5 seconds.
- Ask child to squeeze one hand with the other, ensuring whole hand and each finger is grasped tightly during this process.
- Sit on a gym ball or sit and move cushion.

Specific to pencil hold:

- Ask child to place fingers correctly (in a tripod hold) then try to pull or push the pen out of their hands. Try this with eyes open and eyes closed.

Advice regarding fidget breaks

- These can be used prior to a long period of work or to break up long periods. The fidget break is designed to allow optimum alertness so that the child can participate more effectively on the task in hand.

The fidget break can take the form of exercises:

1. Use activities from the gross motor section as outlined above. Choose 2 – 3 activities for 5 – 10 minutes.
2. Use everyday tasks as an excuse to get up and move e.g.:
 - Hand out books in class
 - Wipe the white board
 - Take a message to another class
 - Get up to put something in a tray
 - Wipe tables
 - Carry mats (in PE)
 - Carry boxes (appropriate to child's abilities)
 - Help lift tables/furniture (appropriate for child)

All these activities need to be tried and tested in order to determine their effectiveness.

Some activities will be more beneficial than others and can be used in combination.

It is important to note that although some children become more alert it is possible it may have the opposite effect (e.g. calming)