

Tools for School

Here are some of the fun school tools you will see our teachers using with all the children at different times in our classrooms. These tools help them to strengthen their muscles, learn balance, sit and listen at group time, and even calm their “motors” when they are too wound up to focus on an activity. These “sensory helpers” assist kids in making the best use of our learning environment at Mandala.



Lap Buddies and Lap Animals

Weighted lap animals or “lappers” are filled with sand. They sit on children’s laps and provide deep touch to the skin. They are very effective tools for helping fidgety children stay attentive and remain their seat, especially at group times. Lap buddies, as we call them, also help children focus on their work at Work Time.

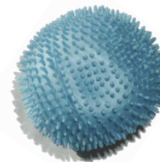


Cozy Cube Chairs

Have you seen our new cube chairs? These chairs give children stability and security when sitting and listening, especially at Music, Story and Circle Times. They also help kids stay focused and keep their hands to themselves. Kids can be better listeners when their body is more fully supported.

Finger Fidgets

Having something very tactile for little hands to play with while sitting helps calm and focus them. Many children feel an uncontrollable urge to fidget and move around. Fidget toys allow a child to experience movement without having to actually get up and move around. Finger fidgets can be squishy balls, tickly balls, balls with lumps or bumps, or any fun stretchy manipulative toy. A small, simple toy that can be manipulated during story time, group discussions (or whenever concentration and focus is desired) is often just what kids need to give them the tactile stimulation their mind is craving which can calm their mind.



Oral Fidgets



Kids who are always chewing on their sleeves, putting their fingers in their mouth, or who seem to bite on everything are helped by having rubber “chewies” available to them. These can be tied on to a child’s belt loop where they can be used as needed throughout the day. Oral fidgets give kids the oral sensory stimulation they crave – but in a more appropriate way.

Superman and Batman Belts

These are “cool” belts that are weighted with some extra heaviness. The extra weight provides grounding for many children. The extra weight has a tendency to calm a child and often curbs their need to wiggle. This allows a child to remain still, but still calms the brain and helps with focus and attention. They also provide children with good proprioceptive input.



Hopping Ball

These balls give children hopping and balance practice, and they work on developing equilibrium. They provide a special kind of sensory input called vestibular stimulation (which happens in the inner ear) that is responsible for balance and responding to changes in movement. When kids who like to crash and jump get regular input to their muscles and joints in an *appropriate* way, they can actually settle their bodies down better to work on inside jobs later on.



Push Carts and Wheelbarrows

Active kids who like to jump and move and shake a lot are helped by “heavy work” activities, like pushing carts and pulling wagons with heavy objects (gallon bottles, phone books, 2-liter bottles filled with water, etc). These help children’s bodies receive good input (proprioceptive) for their bodies. Once they get the right input, they can settle their bodies down to do quieter work. It’s always best to do a sit-down task after doing some “heavy work.”



Scooter Boards and Mini Trampoline

Other “heavy work” activities are scooter boards, mini trampolines, and things to climb or hang on. These activities give proprioceptive input to muscles and joints, too. We use these for planned small group activities.



Sit and Spin

Sit n Spin is truly an exhilarating “ride” for all children. Spinning is just plain fun – and it gives kids vestibular input. Some kids really crave this input. (Vestibular input involves sensory receptors of the inner ear telling us how our body is moving in relationship to space and gravity.)



Riding Toys

Perhaps you have noticed our new fenced “riding area” in the play yard? This is a new area created to give children a safe place to experience the large motor benefits of pushing, pulling, pumping, and riding. The resistive input obtained through these heavy work activities is generally organizing and can improve attention, arousal level, body awareness and muscle tone, as well as decreasing sensory defensiveness.



Sensory Brushes



Occasionally, our OT may recommend a brushing program for a child. She may train parents or teachers to brush a child before or during school. Being brushed on the arms with a sensory brush gives children deep pressure (tactile feedback) that helps organize their sensory system and increases their focus and their level of alertness. It can improve behavior and their comfort in

the environment. Many parents use a “brushing program” with their children at home to give their children extra sensory feedback.