Sensory Break Cards:

Introduction and examples of how to use the resource.

What it's for: The sensory break cards are a visual tool that offers simple options for taking a break. They can support your young person, or your class, to feel more calm, alert, organised or tuned in to their senses - depending on what they need. If your young person isn't interested, this might not be the right tool for them right now; that's okay. But if it feels right, here's a guide for how you might explore sensory breaks together.

What to do: There's no single right way to use this resource. Here's a guide you can tailor to your young person.

1. Introduce a few cards at a relaxed time, when your young person has space to look and choose. There's no need to try the whole deck at once.
2. Invite your young person to choose something that interests them, or offer two or three options if that's more manageable.
3. Try the activity in a way that feels comfortable for your young person. You might try it together, model it first (your young person might join in), or give them space to try it themselves.
4. Offer to notice how it felt. Stay curious, without expecting a particular response, e.g. "How was that?"
5. Keep useful or enjoyable cards somewhere easy to find, like on a ring, a choice board or a device. Offer familiar options when your young person wants or needs a break.

About the codes: Cards marked (A) are generally alerting and may help your body feel awake or energised. (C) are generally calming. (O) are generally organising and may help bodies feel steady and "just right". (N) invite body noticing. These codes are a starting point for adults, not a rule: how your young person finds each activity is what matters most.

Tips, tricks, and scripts:

The invite:

- A casual invitation: "I found these activity cards! Would you like to have a look through them with me and see if anything looks interesting?"

The delivery:

- Keep it optional: "You can stop whenever you like."
- Make room for dislike responses: "That's good to know. We can [cross it out/get rid of it]."

In a classroom: Discard cards marked with an * on the bottom left as these are more individualised, then sort the deck into the three remaining catagories (C, O, A). You will now have a deck of activities that you can integrate into daily routines, such as transitions between activities or spaces, to support the whole class.

This resource shares general information and isn't a substitute for individual advice. For relevant cards, check that activities are safe and suitable for your young person, e.g. allergies and small objects.

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Printing note: for best results, print on A4 paper in colour, in portrait orientation and double-sided. Select "Flip on long edge so the card front and back line up, and set the scale to 100% (Actual size).

Looking



Hidden Picture

There are a lot of things hiding in this picture. A bird, snail, butterfly, ladybug, flowers, and rocks.

*

O

Looking



Colour Spotting

Have a look around for things that are all the same colour. Any colour. How many can you find?

C

Looking



Sideways Eight

Drawing a sideways eight (∞) in the air with your finger gives your eyes something different to follow.

O

Looking



Near and Far

Looking at something far away, then something close, gives your eyes a little break. You can go back and forth as many times as you like.

O

Looking



Cloud Shapes

Sometimes clouds look like animals or objects. There might be some shapes hiding up there right now!

*

C

Looking



Eye Rest

If it feels okay, cup your hands gently over your closed eyes. It makes a dark little den for your eyes to rest in.

C

Listening



Listening In

Your ears can pick up on so many sounds, near and far. Close your eyes - if it feels okay. How many different things can you hear?

C

Listening



Clapping Rhythms

Clap, clap, clap-clap, clap. You can make up rhythms, copy someone else's, or pass them back and forth.

A

Listening



Quiet Taps

Even tiny, almost-silent taps on the desk can give your hands and ears one small thing to focus on.

O

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Listening



Whisper Countdown

Counting down slowly in a whisper, from any number, can give your brain and ears one small thing to focus on.

C

Listening



Humming

Try humming a favourite song, something you made up, or even one long, slow note. Your lips might even start to tingle!

C

Touching



Leg Taps

Try tapping a pattern on one leg, then copying it with the other hand on the other leg. It keeps both hands busy.

O

Touching



Palm Drawing

Your palm can be a tiny drawing board. You could trace a circle, square, star, flower... anything you choose!

O

Touching



Toasty Hands

Rubbing your palms together really quickly makes them warm up fast. How long until you feel the warmth?

O

Touching



Butterfly Hug

With your arms crossed over your chest, try tapping each shoulder - one side then the other - like a butterfly's wings.

C

Tasting & Chewing



Straw Sips

Sips through a straw give your mouth some hard work. Thick drinks take the most effort, and cold drinks can be refreshing!

O

Tasting & Chewing



Pom-Pom Puff

Even a tiny breath through a straw can move a pom-pom - so a big one can send it a long way!

C

Tasting & Chewing



Crunchy Snack

Crunch, crunch, crunch... A few bites of a crunchy snack you like could be a good reset.

A

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Tasting & Chewing



Something to Chew

Lots of people find that chewing something helps them focus.

*

O

Tasting & Chewing



Fish Lips

If you like, suck in your cheeks and pucker your lips: you made a fish face! A big smile will stretch them back out.

O

Tasting & Chewing

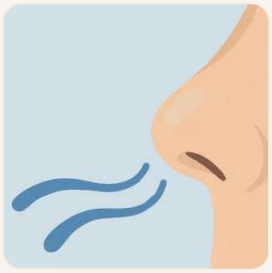


Cheek Puffs

If you fill your mouth with air, your cheeks can puff up like a pufferfish. Can you move the air from one cheek to the other?

C

Smelling



Favourite Smells

You could have a look around for something with a smell you like and notice what it reminds you of.

*

Smelling



Garden Smells

If there are herbs nearby, crushing them between your fingers can make the smell much stronger.

*

Moving



Rocking

Even a few slow rocks back and forth, on a chair, the floor or a bed, can feel nice.

*

O

Moving



Head Tilts

A slow head tilt towards one shoulder... and then the other... gives your neck a gentle stretch.

C

Moving



Spinny Spin

Try spinning around in a circle. Make sure to go back the other way to fight off the dizziness!

A

Moving



Look Up, Look Down

Slowly up to the ceiling... and then down to your toes... and a big shoulder shrug.

C

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Moving



Seated Marching

Left, right, left, right... A seated march can be stompy, quiet, or somewhere in between.

O

Moving



Criss Cross

Right hand, left knee. Left hand, right knee. If you'd like, you can use your elbow instead of your hand!

A

Moving



Reach and Fold

A big stretch up and a slow fold down to the ground can feel good after sitting for a while.

C

Moving



Shake It Out

Shaking out your hands, arms, and legs can help to wake your body up.

A

Pushing & Squeezing



Chair Push

With your hands beside you on the seat, push down to lift your body a little. It gives your arms some hard work.

O

Pushing & Squeezing



Palm Press

Push your palms together for a bit... and then relax. How do your arms feel afterwards?

C

Pushing & Squeezing



Finger Tug

Hook your fingers together and pull gently, without letting go. It's like a tug of war but both sides are you.

C

Pushing & Squeezing



Fingertip Squeezes

Thumb, pointer, middle, ring, pinkie... A firm squeeze on each fingertip, one at a time.

O

Pushing & Squeezing



Foot Press

Sometimes pressing your feet into the floor is a simple way to feel steady or grounded.

O

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Pushing & Squeezing



Arm Squeezes

Firm squeezes from your wrists right up to your shoulders, can feel like a big hug for your muscles.

C

Pushing & Squeezing



Big Hug

Giving yourself a great big hug is an easy way to get a squeezy feeling, and it can be done anywhere.

C

Pushing & Squeezing



Desk Push

With your palms flat and arms straight, pressing down into the desk gives your arms a bit of hard work. You can do it standing or sitting!

O

Pushing & Squeezing



Wall Push

I wonder if the wall can be moved? (It can't, but pushing against it with both hands might feel good.)

O

Pushing & Squeezing



Jump on the Spot

A few jumps on the spot, big or small, can help to get your body going.

A

Pushing & Squeezing



Star Jumps

Out like a star, in like a pencil! A few star jumps, big or small, can wake your body up.

A

Pushing & Squeezing



Putty Squeeze

If there's putty or a stress ball nearby, squeezing it can give your hand muscles some hard work.

*

C

Breathing & Noticing



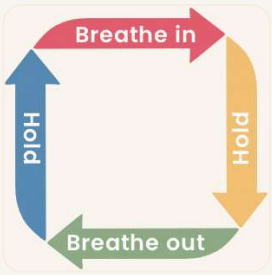
Squeeze and Let Go

Squeeze... and let go. Do your hands feel heavier, lighter, warmer or tinglier?

*

N

Breathing & Noticing



Square Breathing

Tracing a square while you breathe gives your breath a shape to follow. Only hold if it feels right for you.

*

C

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Breathing & Noticing



Temperature Check

Checking how warm or cool your hands and feet feel is a way of tuning in to your body.

*

N

Breathing & Noticing



Body Check-In

Your body might be quiet right now, or it might be sending a signal, like hunger, thirst, or tiredness. Notice anything?

*

N

Breathing & Noticing



Balloon Breathing

When you breathe in, you can let your belly puff up like a balloon. See if you can blow out slowly, like you're cooling soup.

C

Breathing & Noticing



Flower and Candle

Breathe in through your nose like smelling a flower, and out through your mouth like blowing out a candle.

C

Breathing & Noticing



Big Sigh

Sometimes a big sigh is just what your body needs. You could try two breaths in, then a long and slow breath out.

C

Using All Senses



5 Senses Check

Notice something you can see, hear, touch, smell and taste right now, in any order.

O

For Families

What they're for:

These cards offer simple options for taking a break, to help your young person feel more calm, alert, organised or tuned in to their senses. Here's a brief guide:

What to do:

1. Share a few cards at a relaxed time.
2. Try it together, model it first, or give them space.
3. Offer to notice how it felt, e.g. "How was that?"
4. Keep favourites somewhere easy to find.

For Classrooms

What they're for:

These cards offer simple options for taking a break, to help your class feel more calm, alert, organised or tuned in to their senses. Here's a guide:

What to do:

1. Discard cards with an * code.
2. Sort the rest by their letter code: C, O and A.
3. You'll now have a deck of activities to use in daily routines, such as transitions between activities or spaces, to support your whole class!

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About the Cards

The Code:

A means "generally alerting"
O means "generally organising"
C means "generally calming"
N encourage "body noticing"

Note: The above guide is a starting point for adults, not a rule. This resource shares general information and isn't a substitute for individual advice. Always check that activities are safe and suitable for each young person.

About the Cards

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Note: The above guide is a starting point for adults only – not a rule. How your young person finds each activity is what matters most.