

● QUICK GUIDE ●

Setting Up a Sensory-Friendly Space in Your Classroom



Neurodiversity
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Neurodivergent learners of all ages rate having a sensory-friendly space in every classroom as one of the top things teachers can do tomorrow to support neuroinclusion.

Setting one up isn't difficult, expensive or time-consuming. You just need to create a dark, quiet and comfortable nook for students to take a 'sensory break' in as and when they need it.

Who

It's not only neurodivergent learners who need a sensory break! Any student can be dealing with issues - emotional, physical, social - that from time to time limit their sensory resilience. Being inclusive about the opportunity to use the space is a great way of destigmatising and helping all students to talk about what their brains need. Don't 'send' a student to use a sensory-friendly space! Make it open for any student to use as they need to, but just one at a time!

When

Once you're set up, introduce ALL of your students to the sensory-friendly space and talk through respectful ways to use it. As much as possible, allow your learners to access the space as and when they need. Being able to take themselves in and out of it calmly is a great way of building agency and self-regulation skills. Be open also to students creating "half-way" variations too - such as sitting next to the sensory space, or staying in the main learning space but using headphones, wearing a weighted item or playing with a sensory toy.

What

Here are some low-cost, tried and tested ideas for making an in-classroom sensory-friendly space:

Dark



- Create a darkened nook under a large table by pushing a table into a corner or at least against a wall
- Tape large dark sheets or thin blankets over the table so they create a 'tent' style space underneath - that's the start of your sensory retreat.
- You could even pop a few little glow-in-the-dark star stickers under the table, or pick up an inexpensive salt lamp from Kmart.

Quiet

- Provide sound-dampening headphones.
HINT - hang them on a hook under the table itself or on the table leg so they don't get accidentally sat on
- Layer up plenty of soft furnishings to dampen classroom sounds



Comfortable



- Put a soft rug or picnic blanket on the floor under the table
- Layer up a few big floor pillows or large cushions
- Add a couple of weighted items, like a shoulder hugger or lap blanket, and a weighted cuddly toy.

Calm



- Add mindfulness resources like colouring books and good coloured pencils. **HINT - remember to replenish these frequently so they are kept in an attractive condition**
- Pop in a couple of silent sensory toys - small fidgets or oozy tubes
- Add a small basket of browsable books

Top Tips

- Your sensory-friendly space is most likely suited to one student at a time - in a larger modern / innovative learning environment you may need three or four of them
- Your sensory retreat should be a device-free zone! Taking a digital break really supports students of this age group to regulate their sensory systems.
- Be prepared for a student using the space to doze off quietly. This is a sign that your space is working really well!
- Check out the great sensory resources at Sensory Sam (sensorysam.co.nz)! All purchases support the Young Neurodiversity Champions.



Building A Neuroinclusive School is a FREE learning platform and community-building programme for primary and secondary school leaders and teachers. Check out more FUN and PRACTICAL resources at www.neurodiversity.org.nz/bns



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