



SENSORY "QUINKS" FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

by Carol Stock Kranowitz, MA

Every new school year brings new “what ifs.” What if the teacher has a loud voice? What if the overhead lights flicker? What if the classroom is near the smelly cafeteria? What if recess is briefer than ever?

For children and teenagers with Sensory Processing Disorder, many of whom are gifted learners, the academics part of school is “easy as pi.” It’s everything else that puts kids “in a pickle”!

Parents can help by connecting with teachers before school begins. Tell teachers that SPD causes your child to respond in atypical ways to ordinary stimuli. (Perhaps show them the two-part “SPD Primer” in previous AASD issues.) When teachers understand that loud sounds, strong odors, unexpected jostling and insufficient movement breaks bother your sensory-challenged child, they may become more understanding.

Also suggest sensory strategies to benefit not only your child, but also all the other students and teachers. I call these “Quinks” (short for “Quick In-Sync” activities). When teachers intersperse Quinks into the school day, they will quickly see how sensory-motor activity promotes learning. If your child receives occupational

therapy using sensory integration techniques (OT-SI), and if you provide a sensory lifestyle at home that includes alerting, organizing, and calming activities throughout the day, you will have your own Quinks to suggest.

A QUINK FOR EACH SENSORY SYSTEM

Vestibular — The Runaround
 Before lessons begin, have children run or speed walk around the gym or playground perimeter. This mini-workout will get kids physically and mentally organized and ready to settle down for learning.

Proprioceptive — Heavy Lifting
 Provide heavy objects to move. Students could shove or drag desks (on padded feet) from one classroom spot to another, lift and place books in cartons, carry cartons to the school library, fill and lug watering cans to water the philodendrons, and so forth. Hard work like *Heavy Lifting* is essential for developing strong young bodies. Mistakenly, we try to make things easier for children when, instead, we should make things more challenging. How else will children learn to judge a carton’s weight and to grade their own movements to push, pull, lift and carry it effectively?



Tactile — Yes, a Mess
 Offer hands-on activities that are reasonably messy. Over-responsive children shun tactile learning opportunities because their nervous systems react negatively to wet and sticky sensations on the skin. To entice these children to try messy art, science and cooking projects, offer options such as wearing vinyl gloves; using a spoon, stick or q-tip to make contact with gooey materials; or experimenting with ingredients secured in zip-up plastic bags.



Auditory — Vowel Growl
 **A** — Place hands on thighs. Rise slowly while calling, “AAAAA,” long and loud. Bring fingertips together overhead to suggest capital “A”; then lower voice and hands.
E — Hands on knees. Call, “EEEE.” Pose as lower-case “e” by placing left fingertips on head and curving right hand to side. Lower voice and hands.
I — Hands on ankles. Clasp hands overhead for a tall “IIII.” Lower voice and hands.
O — Hands on toes. Do “OOOOO.”
U — Fingertips to “heart center.”

Face partner. Call, “UUUUU” while stretching hands in “U” shape toward partner and back to self. “U” is all about YOU — a sweet way to help socially awkward kids relate to another person.

Visual — The Thumb Thing
 Touch thumb to nose. Watch thumb while slowly stretching it forward; your eyes will diverge (spread apart). Slowly return thumb to nose; your eyes will converge (come together). Convergence is a basic reading skill. (Poor convergence is common in kids with SPD as well as kids who use excessive screen time.) This visual-motor exercise helps children process what they see far away on the blackboard and up close on their worksheet, what is moving outside the window, who is approaching, and how they should respond.

Olfactory — Swell Smell
 Let children have a special smell-good item in a zip-up plastic bag to bring out and sniff when needed. A cotton ball scented with Mom’s cologne or Dad’s aftershave may comfort a child with SPD. Another child may prefer pine, lavender, mint, or lemon. A favorite smell not only alleviates anxiety but also helps kids remember what they just learned. Truly!



Gustatory — Yummy Gum
 Let students chew fruity or tingly gum. Their favorite flavored gum will promote concentration, provide calming

proprioceptive input, and improve oral-motor skills such as speech articulation. To monitor where gum goes, teachers can draw a grid, write a child’s name in each box, laminate the paper, and post it by the door. When a gum-chewer leaves the classroom, the gum stays behind, stuck to the child’s name.

Interoceptive — In and Out
 Take a moment to pause and breathe. Place hands above navel. Breathe in through the nostrils while counting to four. Hold for four. Exhale through the mouth for four. Feel the diaphragm fill and empty. Repeat, counting to six and eight.

With Quinks sprinkled throughout the day, the child with SPD may be less anxious about starting school. Many teachers will welcome these classroom management tips, and all teachers need to understand how SPD affects their students. Educate the educators, and look forward to a sensational school year. ■



Learn more about these activities and many more in three of Carol’s books, *The Outof-Sync Child Has Fun*, *The Out-of-Sync Child Grows Up*, and *The Goodenoughs Get In Sync*, and in two books she co-authored with Joye Newman, *Growing an In-Sync Child* and *The In-Sync Activity Cards Book*. Carol is available for workshops on how SPD affects children and on fun and functional sensory-motor activities to get kids in sync.

www.CarolStockKranowitz.com