

CEBM Tools vs Toys Resources Guide

Difference between a tool and a toy

It is important to make the distinction between a TOOL and a TOY to students and school staff:

- TOOLS are items used to help meet a need, to help effect change.
- TOYS are for pleasure and entertainment.

Both require that they be handled with care to have a longer life span.

** A same item can be used as a tool or a toy depending on the objective. Adults need to be clear and explicit when introducing an item as a tool.*

A tool can be considered as inappropriate for the classroom if:

- It makes noise/movement that is distracting.
- Takes attention away from instruction.
- Pulls in the attention of the other students nearby.
- Doesn't meet the student's needs.
- However, it doesn't mean that the same tool cannot be useful/beneficial for a student in another time or space within a school setting.

Research

Fidgeting is not a fad that will disappear, nor did it start with the craze of the fidget spinner.

- Psychology research about sensation seeking tells us that people often seek to adjust their experiences and their environments so that they provide just the right level of stimulation.
- In one preliminary study looking at stress ball use, sixth graders who used these fidget toys during instruction independently reported that their "attitude, attention, writing abilities, and peer interaction improved." By Katherine Isbister, The Conversation US on May 18, 2017
- According to a 2013 study published in Frontiers in Psychology, fidgeting is a reflection of a wandering mind. The study followed the behavior of participants as they watched a 40-minute lecture video. Researchers found that while attention to and retention of the lecture material declined with time and as predicted, fidgeting increased. What the researchers didn't predict, however, was that fidgeting and retention were related. Fidgeting helped the participants retain more of the material.

Here are a few resource links for brain breaks:

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/brain-break-activities>

<https://www.edutopia.org/video/the-mysterious-power-of-brain-breaks>

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/more-dozen-ways-build-movement-learning>

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/research-tested-benefits-breaks>

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/move-body-grow-brain-donna-wilson>

Fidgets and adults

Fidgeting in adults is often interpreted as a nervous habit, particularly those with anxiety disorders. People with anxiety often feel a constant need to be on the move which can create challenges in the workplace. Fidget toys are self-regulation tools which can help the individual exercise the impulse for motion without negatively affecting attention and focus.

- Pen used as a fidget
- Doodling
- Shake/bounce leg while seated
- Tapping hand or foot
- Twirling hair

Loss of play

- According to David Elkind, in *Power of Play*, over the past two decades, children have lost twelve hours of free time a week, including eight hours of unstructured play and outdoor activities. Free unstructured play, spontaneous pickup games, and self-initiated dramatic play are replaced by digital devices.
- Stuart Brown, *Status of Play*: outdoor play has decreased by 71% in one generation in both the US and the UK.
- Peter Gray, *American Journal of Play* 2011: Escalating diagnoses of childhood anxiety, depression and ADHD has paralleled the loss of play.

True Play

- Not all types of play are equal.
- True play does not involve work or a focus on outcomes.
- It is not for task mastery or learning.
- True play allows a child to project what is within. Providing opportunities for emotional expression without repercussions.
- One of the most important functions play serves is in the development of a child's emotional system and preserving psychological well-being.



Play and emotional well being

- The defense response to a mortal threat and the excitement of play share their roots in the same branch of the autonomic nervous system (Porges & Buczynski, 2011)
- When children are “stirred up” emotionally, their play can reflect themes they are struggling with.
- Play is how they naturally make sense of all the emotions they are experiencing.
- In play, pictures are drawn, structures are made, and games are engaged in to ALLOW EMOTIONS TO COME OUT in safety.

Play and emotional regulation

- According to Jaak Panksepp play facilitates the maturation of the frontal lobe inhibitory skills that enable a child to reflect, look, listen, and feel before acting on primary-process emotional urges.
- Play, including rough-and-tumble play, appears to shape the Prefrontal Cortex and have an impact on self-regulation and planning (Bell, Pellis, & Kolb 2010; for reviews also see Pellis & Pellis, 2007; Pellis, Pellis, & Himmler, 2014)

- Research has shown that self-regulation skills were better in those children who were allowed to play without interruption.

Play and learning

- Play provides the ideal situation for a child to develop the ability for sustained engagement in an activity by staying selectively focused on the situation at present, tuning out distractions, and holding the information in our heads (Diamond, 2013).
- We can observe the effects of active engagement on Executive Function Skills in a study comparing children assigned to Montessori and non-Montessori schools, which discovered that the Montessori children, who had fewer interruptions during their self-directed play, performed better at EF tasks than the other group (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006, as cited in Carlson, Zelazo, & Faja, 2013)

Other benefits of play

- Many traditional games support interactive play and social skills such as communication and turn-taking when playing together, children learn to compromise, share, and collaborate as well as develop their language and communication skills.
- Tools (games, fidgets, activities, building and creating materials) offer our students time to switch gears and process their emotions.

Importance of introducing, trying, and setting expectations

- Do not expect students to know how to use tools (including how NOT to use tools).
- Providing explicit details and modeling will help avoid misuse.
- Explaining the why; the purpose of the tool to them.
- Making an agreement that the tool will be removed (or substituted) if it is distracting and unbeneficial to their learning.
- Use of a visual to remind students of the rules.
- Verify if the tool is answering the student's need/challenge.

** When students know what is expected of them, they will use the materials appropriately and demonstrate that you can trust them to use materials well. Structure and routine also go a long way in helping to manage students with challenging behaviors.*

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/child-development-what-is-a-fidget-toy/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/introduce-fidget-toys-classroom/>

Expectation poster • Make your own



Importance of introducing and practicing - A few things to keep in mind:

- There needs to be structure and procedures to access these tools.
- They need to be introduced. These are 'tools' that need to be explained, modeled and safety is always the top consideration.
- They need to be requested by the student or offered by the adult – no taking and grabbing, otherwise they will be considered as 'toys' to which they have access.
- Acknowledge the proper use of the tools by providing feedback to the student after they have used them.
- All items need to be handled with care in order to optimize a long duration.

** When students know what is expected of them, they will use the materials appropriately and demonstrate that you can trust them to use materials well. Structure and routine also go a long way in helping to manage students with challenging behaviors*

Importance of making a plan when trying out tools

<p>Step 1: Identifying the student's need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student's profile and specific challenge • Student's sensory preferences/needs • Context impacting the student (sensory overstimulation) • Objective (purpose of the tool)
<p>Step 2: Choosing the 'right' conditions for student success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tool will be used? Is it safe? Is it the right size? Is it discreet? Does it distract? • When/where will it be used? • Does the use of the tool require supervision? • How/for how long will it be used? (specify the conditions of use) • Do the staff need to be trained to accompany the student in using the tool (support from an OT)? • Are there any counter-indications or elements of caution to consider around the use of the tool (time limit, for specific purpose only, not for students with certain health conditions, etc.)?
<p>Step 3: Putting the plan in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure all the adults involved are aware of the plan (including the parents). Making sure the student is on board. • Introducing/modeling the use of the tool (rules and parameters) • Accompanying the student with the use of the tool until it becomes a new routine. • When needed, reminding the student of the why and the how to use the tool.
<p>Step 4: Reviewing the use of the tool</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifying whether the tool is being used correctly. • Reviewing whether the use of the tool is meeting the set objective. • Evaluating whether the type of tool, or the way it is being used, needs to be tweaked or changed. • Reviewing whether a different tool all together would be helpful.

Importance of having materials available

- The best way to ensure that materials will get used is to have them out/available, organized and at the student's disposal. Needless to say, this does not mean that they can touch everything all at once!
- We want to teach students that although things are out and available, some things are always available for touching and using, meanwhile others require a request to an adult. All need to be returned to their proper place when they are finished using them.
- These parameters, structures, and routines are key to maintaining order. By taking the time to 'teach' these structures and routines, they become welcomed life habits and help to create a sense of community. All are involved in taking care of the materials.
- A personal choice board can help with structuring choices for students <https://www.cebmmember.ca/personal-bin>
- You may decide that for some of your regular students, you will want to organize a personal bin with items that are 'reserved' just for them <https://www.cebmmember.ca/personal-bin>. This often

is beneficial as they are 'guaranteed' to have the items they prefer and benefit from. This also helps to reduce their anxiety and frustration.

Differentiating between rewarding vs. fulfilling a need

- Too often we get confused about the purpose of a particular tool
- As many tools can be seen as toys, we need to look harder at how it can be fulfilling a need before judging it has a reward
- Tools support and answer a need to: move, concentrate, calm, shift gears, etc.
- Rewarding with toys are for pleasure without purpose

Considerations

- Set up opportunities to explore and try out different tools (especially those that are viewed as toys), and have a group or one-on-one discussion about their pros and cons.
- Avoid taking away the item because it's being misused. Find time to privately discuss your observations with students and create a plan together to accompany them with it.
- Remember that there is a trial-and-error period. It's not always easy to find the right fit and be mindful that it's not one-size-fits-all.
- Just like many of our student's interests, the lifespan of a given tool may change. Certain tools are exciting and wanted at first, but they can lose their shine quickly or over time. We can re-introduce it in the future if it worked previously.
- Tools are not meant to contain or shut down the need to stim/release. These behaviors will find their way out in other outputs.
- Verify the parameters around the use of the tool before introducing it.

Links:

[accompanying a student with the use of a sensory tool.docx](#)

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/23-ways-to-create-a-sensory-friendly-classroom/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/classroom-ideas-for-kids-with-sensory-issues/>

Use of tools within the RTI model

The RTI model is a 3-tiered approach to accompanying students:

- At Tier 1, the support measures are offered universally to all students within the classroom setting. Although some students may need tools more than others to succeed in the classroom, all students can benefit from accessing these tools some of the time.
- At Tier 2, the measures are offered to some students who need more targeted support in the classroom, hallway, and other spaces within the school. At this level of support, those students benefit from accessing specific tools, which are assigned/scheduled to them. Some tools may be used in a small-group setting.
- At Tier 3, the measures are offered to few students who require more individualized and intensive support throughout their day at school. Tools are often used on a one-to-one basis and may require adult support and supervision. At this level of support, these students benefit from having a formal plan with well adapted objectives and support measures, which are reviewed regularly. Communication and consistency of approach among all the adults involved with the student is key.

- Depending on the tier of support, certain tools may be more appropriate than others. It is suggested to check with an OT (or other trained consultants/professionals) for their input.
- Depending on the time (class-time vs. Transitions) and space (classroom vs. Tech or Resource Room), certain tools may be more appropriate than others.
- If some school staff are not on board with the use of certain tools and view them as play/toys, it is advised to share with them the purpose, objective(s), benefit(s), and ways to measure the progress of each of the tools assigned to the student.

Now let's explore the different categories of tools and their benefits

Why flexible seating?

- **Physical health:** Children need to move. Flexible seating allows them to wobble, rock, bounce, lean or stand, which increases oxygen flow to the brain, blood flow and core strength. In turn, this burns more calories and increases metabolism. It also helps keep young minds more alert and focused.
- **Comfort:** An uncomfortable student is a distracted and unproductive student. Flexible seating encourages students to find their best spot to stay calm, focused, and productive.
- **Sensory input:** Many flexible seating options stimulate students' sense of touch. This type of stimulation can help children focus and process information. Sensory input is especially helpful for students with ADHD, ADD, and ASD.
- **Students are engaged in their learning:** students who were typically less attentive can work on their tasks for longer periods of time in their chosen seats. Better grades.
- **Options:** it helps students feel that they have choices and can control how/where they will get their work done.
- Roadblocks to investing in flexible furniture include cost and space.
- It is important to consider the right size when choosing flexible seating, as the student may not benefit fully from the height of the tool if it is too small or too big.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/flexible-classroom>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/alternative-seating-classroom/>

Flexible seating options:

Ball chair



Allows the child to bounce and to roll side to side or front to back. Provides vestibular stimulation through bouncing and rolling for students who need to move to stay alert. Promotes core strength, balance, and functional posture. The ball chair can have feet or be immobilized by a stand/ring, so the student benefits from the bounce only.



Wobble Stool

Allows subtle rocking and wiggling motion. Provides vestibular stimulation through rocking and wiggling for children who need to move to stay alert. Promotes core strength, balance, and functional posture. Different sizes are available. Some stools come with the option of adjusting the height.



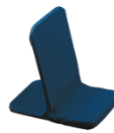
Ergo Ergo Seat

The accordion-style base compresses slightly to allow continuous small movements forward, back, and side to side. Different sizes are available.



Rocking chair, Rave Rocker, and Scoop Rockers

This type of seat helps students, through the motion of rocking, to focus and calm. It's a great seat for reading, relaxing or sensory processing.



Ray-L chair or the folding floor chair

Multipurpose chair, ideal for the reading corner, story time or nap time. These types of seats offer the option to sit on the floor while having good back support.



Floor cushion, Fatboy or Bean Bag chair

Can be used with clipboards or lap desks for written work. Good options for students who need multiple seating options throughout the day. Allows for frequent changes in positioning to promote alertness and engagement. Lying on the floor provides calming whole body tactile and proprioceptive input. Different sizes are available.



Stretchy band for feet

Allows child to kick feet into the band or bounce feet on top of the band. A good option for students who tap or kick their feet. Provides resistive proprioceptive input when child pushes feet/legs into the band. Provides movement input for kids who need to move to stay alert and focused. The band can be placed onto the legs of the desk or of the chair.



Pedal desk

Allows for forward and backward pedaling. A good option for students who fidget and who are frequently out of their chairs. Promotes alertness and engagement. Some pedal desks come with a seat and work surface.



Movin'Sit and Disc'O'Sit

Inflatable cushion to place on chairs for improved posture and attention. It can be used on the floor as well by kneeling or standing to improve core stability and balance skills. These types of tools can help with vestibular or proprioceptive needs.



Hammock and sensory swing

Swinging is a fantastic way to engage a student's vestibular sensory system, which encourages motor planning, balance reactions, core stability, hand strengthening and sensory integration. The swing also offers a cocooning and calming environment for the student to regulate themselves.

Why alternate workstations?

- **Physical health:** allowing students to stand, stretch out and move increases oxygen flow to the brain, blood flow and core strength. In turn, this burns more calories and increases metabolism. It also helps keep young minds more alert and focused.
- **Engagement:** offering clipboards, working on the window ledge, standing stations, dry erase magnetic boards, easels or on the ground will make a huge difference in helping to engage students with their learning.
- **Options:** it helps students benefit from having different locations where they can choose or request to work in.
- Roadblocks to investing in flexible furniture include cost and space.
- It is important to consider the right size when choosing flexible seating, as the student may not benefit fully from the height of the tool if it is too small or too big.

Links:

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/wiggle-worms-a-guide-to-alternative-seating-for-the-classroom-2/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/motor-skills-and-more-working-on-a-vertical-surface/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/creating-a-sensory-motor-study-space-for-kids/>



Standing desk

Tall desk surface (can also be a window ledge) where students can stand while they're working. A good option for students who are frequently out of their chairs. Allows for subtle changes in positioning to increase alertness. A wide window ledge can also be used in the same way. Large standing tables are also available for group work while standing.



Low table

Allows for subtle changes in positioning to increase alertness. Sitting on the floor provides calming whole body tactile and proprioceptive input. Large low tables are also available for group work while on the floor.



Lap tray, Lap desk, and clip board

The lap tray desk is an amazingly convenient and portable activity station that allows kids to work anywhere they are. It provides a stable surface for children to write, draw, craft, game and much more.



Surf lap desk

The one-piece design is kept upright by the bodyweight of the user and the angled tabletop provides writing comfort and supports healthy sitting posture while working.

Why sensory tools?

Sensory tools are items that focus on one or more of a person's natural senses to help bring them a level of comfort. Sensory tools often help with self-regulation, and often, when a student has become self-regulated, they can focus and complete assignments.

- **Sense of safety:** Creates a safe space for the student to readjust.
- **Sensory input:** This type of stimulation is helpful for students, whether to provide visual stimulation, to give tactile and proprioceptive input, to help focus or to help relax (emotion regulation).
- **Engagement:** Helps decrease sensory seeking behaviors and increase cognitive function (supports participation and engagement). It also helps improve attention and focus.
- Keep in mind student's sensory needs and preferences when looking at these types of tools. Consider where the student situates themselves within the hyper to hypo continuum.

Links:

[accompanying a student with the use of a sensory tool.docx](#)

[SensoryRoomPoster-1 \(1\).pdf](#)

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/sensory-materials>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/23-ways-to-create-a-sensory-friendly-classroom/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/paying-attention-30-sensory-strategies/>

Sensory tool options:



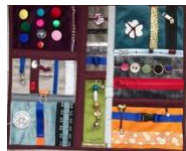
Visual Stimulation

Watching things move and change is satisfying. Slow moving objects are very calming. Examples include glitter jars, liquid timers, sand timers, and a Slinky.



Sounds

Soothing sounds can calm a student immediately. Music has amazing calming effects on our bodies. Sound reducing tools (noise cancelling headphone, protective earmuffs, earplugs, etc.) can be an asset with some students, particularly when they are overwhelmed on a sensory level, or they are trying to focus on specific tasks.



Tactile Stimulation

Unexpected surfaces and interesting textures are pleasing to the hand and provide calming satisfaction. Examples of fun things to touch include “mermaid” pillows, textured bin (kinetic sand, rice, lentils, beans, Orbeez), textured frame (soft, bumpy, rough), bubble wrap, soft pillows, Play-Doh, slime, and any bumpy toys.



Breathing

Focused breathing brings in the oxygen we need for improved concentration, better memory, and focus. Examples include visual cards with breathing tips, bubbles, a kazoo, party blower, and pinwheels.



Weighted objects

Some students benefit from the weight on their laps when doing seat work. Others may also use them when sitting on the ground or lying down – having it on their belly or their back.



Oral motor stimulation (e.g. chewy, pencil topper, Springz bracelet, etc.)

Some students benefit from the use of these tools to help fulfill an oral stimulation need. Others may use them to help them concentrate better during a task. These tools can also be beneficial to help manage stress.

Why fidget tools?

Fidget tools are self-regulation devices that can increase a person's focus and attention to a task at hand (Ferry, 2017). These tools can provide a calming effect for a student who is feeling dysregulated, such as agitated, or anxious. Fidget tools should not be confused with toys that provide entertainment and take focus away from an important task (Understood, 2019). They come in various shapes, sizes, and textures. These devices can also encourage movement and sensory input, which are important for children's development. A fidget tool does not necessarily engage a person's senses, like a sensory tool does, but it does fulfill the need to 'fidget' while staying focused.

Benefits of fidget tools include:

- An outlet for unchanneled energy
- Improved focus.
- The repetitive movement is familiar and calming.
- Improves readiness to participate in learning.

Elements to consider when choosing fidget tools:

- What is the device made of? Is it durable? Is it expensive?
- What is the size/weight of the tool?
- Is it quiet or loud when in operation?
- Is it regulating or will it be more distracting?

Fidget tool options:



Squeezable

The squeezing and releasing of muscles relieve stress and calm the student. Examples include stress balls, putty, pool noodle slices, and any small object that fits in the hand.

Stretchy Things



There's just something soothing about pulling on something and watching it return to its original shape. Examples include a rubber ball, stretchy bands, gummy worms, stretchy man, koosh ball, and other stretchy toys.

Manipulatives



Some tools are simple and don't take a lot of thought to complete.

Examples of these tools include fidget cube, Rubik's cube, fidget ball, infinity cube, tangle, fidget snake, chain fidget, marble fidget, marble maze, etc.

Examples of these tools



- Bubble pop fidget
- Pencil Top Fidgets
- Ono Roller
- Marble Fidget
- Tangle Jr.
- Wacky Tracks
- Fidget Rings
- Stretchy String
- Stress Ball

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/how-to-make-pencil-fidgets-for-kids/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/diy-fidget-toys/>

Why fine motor activities?

- Whether a student is making a friendship bracelet, an origami figurine or a bead pet. They are manipulating different materials. They have choices of colors, textures and the manner in which they will create their object.
- Students benefit from having blocks of time to think, try out and work through creating different objects. The process of touching and creating something within your hands is a very calming and gratifying experience.
- The key is not with the end result, but the benefit of the time spent experiencing their activity. For some, patterns can be provided, but please be careful to invite and allow their creative energy to spread beyond.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/fine-motor-quiet-activities>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/category/kids-activities/fine-motor-activities/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/11-awesome-fine-motor-activities-for-teens/>

Pencil-paper games and activity pages

Coloring and drawing activities both help students improve fine motor skills and train the brain to focus. These simple and fun activity pages are calming and can unlock creativity while supporting physical, emotional, and cognitive development. They are visually appealing and encourage learning without letting the learners know that they are actually learning.

- Coloring pages
- Mazes
- I Spy
- Find the differences
- Crossword puzzles
- Oversize paper (mural)
- Dot-to-Dot
- Mandalas
- Doodling
- Sketching
- Color by numbers
- Paper cutting activity

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/basic-drawings-for-kids-why-drawing-matters/>

Why building and creating activities?

Having a table or area that offers different types of building games is of top value. This offers movement, creativity, physical work of building, taking apart and trying again. It simulates 'real life' where things don't always work out how we would like! The constructions can be kept for some time, community building when judged appropriate. Please remember to take pictures of the constructions before they are taken apart to create a new one! This can be individual or in small groups with supervision.

Links:

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/building-creating-activities>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/happy-healthy-kids-free-play-toolkit/>

Building activities

Here are some examples of building/construction activities:

- Peg Board Marble Maze
- Foam Tunnels
- Popsicle Stick creations
- Woodworking projects
- Cardboard boxes
- Stacking cups
- Blocs and Lego

LEGO can be a quiet brain break activity that will help students 'reset' and be more available for additional learning. They act as a medium to go 'hands on' with learning - reducing felt vulnerability and defenses triggered by learning struggles/challenges. Legos provide an opportunity to 'play out' emotions, problem-solve situations without repercussion or fall out. They offer an agent of change, a problem-solving venue, inspire creativity.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/lego-resource-package>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/lego-gross-motor-activity-kids/>

Creative outlets

- Having materials ready and available is an asset. Some students gravitate towards building and creating crafts. Others seek to draw, sketch, paint, and doodle. By having different materials on hand, we offer students another avenue for expressing their emotions. By teaching some individual crafts (e.g. Corking, knitting, Rainbow looms) these can become therapeutic in helping students manage their emotions, meanwhile creating different items.
- The act of creating something is very calming. Try out journals, coloring books, sketch pads, clay, and any other craft.

Yarn creations

- Crafts with yarn have a special appeal. One can find so many different colors and textures to touch and play with.
- There are so many different ways to get creative with yarn. We encourage lots of exploration through touch in this area...but it is often a feast for the eyes at the same time.

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/christmas-crafts-for-kids-yarn-wrapped-ornaments/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/10-things-to-do-with-yarn-to-promote-developmental-skills/>

Knitting

Whether with needles or a loom, the rhythmic movements provide a deep calm and meditative-like state. It is comforting and a portable tool that helps reduce stress and anxiety. One must focus, plan, and work one stitch at a time.

Weaving

These can be done with looms or cardboard shapes of different sizes. The use of different yarns is again beneficial, touching, feeling, getting a visual effect as it grows. The rhythm and movement of going under, over, under, over renders coming to a calm and focused state.

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/fine-motor-activities-simple-outdoor-weaving-loom/>

Why imaginative play?

This type of play is a tool to be used to practice and further develop language skills, problem solving, and self-regulation. It can help older students with public speaking and coming out of shell. It provides all children with a moment to express various feelings without any repercussions. Providing an area for Play-Drama-Dress-Up is often 'common practice' in the younger grades as students have 'play time' integrated within their day. However, having opportunities for Play-Drama-Dress-Up are beneficial at all ages as they provide a venue to express one's emotions in a less vulnerable way and within the context of a 'role or character' which allows one to express with intensity without being constrained to being socially appropriate. Extravagant faces and voices are expected and appreciated in Play-Drama-Dress-Up! Examples of imaginative play include:

- Dress-up (costumes, hats, props, etc.)
- Masks
- Puppets (hand and finger puppets)
- Drama, role play, improvisation

Why Board games, card games, and puzzles?

Board games

Board games enhance social skills, communication, boost self-esteem, develop fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, teach numbers, shape, color, word recognition, and encourage flexible thinking and problem-solving.

<https://www.playpartyplan.com/best-board-games-for-kids/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/10-board-games-turn-handwriting-games/>

<https://usergeneratededucation.files.wordpress.com/2022/01/screen-shot-2022-01-30-at-6.44.08-pm.png>

Card games

Playing card games promote socialization, reduces stress, helps with building patience and learning to lose, improves concentration, memory and cognition (strategic thinking), and enhances motor skills.

<https://frugalfun4boys.com/card-games-for-kids-families/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/use-card-games-kids-promote-movement/>

Puzzles

A community puzzle table can be a wonderful tool. As students look for pieces and gradually place a few, it helps them switch gears as their mind has shifted to something else. The goal is not to complete the puzzle in one setting. It is to have some with sufficient pieces that will grow over time with different individuals contributing some time and effort along the way. For some students, the puzzle table is their 'entry point' as they are not ready to talk. After some time working on the puzzle, adults can approach and gently come alongside to offer their support.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/puzzle-activities>

<https://empoweredparents.co/benefits-of-puzzles/>

Sentimental Items

A sentimental item is referred to as a comfort object, a transitional item or an attachment object. And yes, we always say no toys or stuffed animals from home. However, when we look at the research, we see that they have positive effects on children by reducing their anxiety. How? These items provide psychological comfort during difficult times, times of separation such as bedtime, going to school (especially starting k4 or k5). Often these items are a blanket, a stuffed toy, but it can also be a note or photo. They may even have a special nickname. Therefore, the sentimental item can also be used as a tool to support our students find comfort and gain independence to self-soothe.

- Research indicates that these items have positive effects on children by reducing anxiety.
<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/transition-strategies-preventing-tantrums-during-daily-routine/>

When and where to use these tools?

Having rules and routines about where and when to use specific tools will help maintain order and care of the tools. Clear directions should be given and prior setup, so students know what is expected of them while using the tool. Examples of different areas and times to implement various tools:

- Stations/Centers in the classroom
- Interest clubs (art, girl/boy, Lego, etc.)
- Indoor recess
- Privilege time
- Catch up time

Cocooning area

- When emotions run high, some students seek and benefit from a private place to cocoon to have time for themselves without having others look at them. They are often highly sensitive to regard, and these can quickly fuel situations. By having cocooning options students can progressively come to manage their ranges in emotions without repercussions and consequences. It helps to preserve their dignity. These areas should be enclosed, but still allow adults to see the student inside. Offering a flashlight or some form of dim lighting and sensory tactile items is often helpful.
- Having a space in which to cocoon is often beneficial. It provides a private space for a child to experience their emotions, maintain dignity and resurface when ready to benefit from an adult's support and care.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/cocoon-area>

<https://sensoryintelligence.com/the-benefits-of-a-quiet-space-in-your-classroom/>

Cocooning area options:

Tent: A safe, private place to retreat when in need of some; alone time, preserve dignity, sensory overload, emotionally overwhelmed.



Egg chair: Reduces visual stimulation and sensory stimulation, helps to re-center and re-focus, and provides a safe bubble/cocoon for students.



Brain breaks

Brain Breaks have become an integral way of helping students transition from one type of learning activity to another. It might be easy to dismiss Brain Breaks as being non-essential to classroom learning and student progress, but there is now a wealth of research that informs us that Brain Breaks make a difference for students academically, behaviorally, and emotionally. There are numerous ways of facilitating Brain Breaks. They can be active or quiet and reflective. This session will describe how you can use Brain Breaks with the students in your care both in the classroom or daycare and, if necessary, online.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/brain-break-activities>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/the-best-movement-books-for-kids/>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/creative-indoor-recess-games/>

Emotional release outlets

These activities can support children to: • release their pent-up frustration, which can otherwise lead to outbursts of aggression. • connect to, reflect on, and express their feelings of frustration in a safe way. This helps them to build consciousness around their feelings, which is essential for them to develop impulse control, emotional maturity, and resilience, as well as embark on a path of self-discovery.

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/emotions-intervention-materials>

Video: <https://youtu.be/Tcy1MQVJPqs>

Movement stations

All students (and adults) benefit from regular movement and exercise. This section provides information on its benefits and how movement can be a safe way for emotional expression without repercussion.

Brain Breaks are highly recommended as Tier 1 interventions within classrooms as they help prime the brain for attention and concentration. However, some of our students require greater levels and more frequent physical movement to reach their optimal learning conditions. Tier 2 & 3 Movement Stations within a school or within an intervention room can be a great addition and complement to the interventions already being done within the classroom. This will help Tier 2 & 3 students expend their higher levels of energy without disrupting the learning environment of the classroom.

Examples of movement stations (when the stations are placed in the hallway, the types of activities need to be somewhat quiet to not disturb the other students in class):

- Movement poster
- 10-sided movement dice
- Foam bowling ball and pins
- Rubber band with ball

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/physical-outlet-movement-station>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/category/kids-activities/gross-motor-activities/>

Kinesthetic hallway

Sensory hallways are a great way to add some extra sensory input for fidgeting kids throughout the day. Sensory hallways allow the transitions between lunch, recess, and classrooms to be interactive and designed to give students a brain break. The path activities provide sensory input to help stay on task. Sensory hallways are designed as a preventative measure, improving focus and preventing disruptive behaviors from occurring within the classroom environment.

<https://thesensorypath.com/#:~:text=What%20is%20a%20Sensory%20Path,behaviors%20and%20increase%20cognitive%20function.>

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/free-printable-pack-hallway-games-for-waiting/>

Oasis Room/Nurturing Support Centre

Having a physical space that is committed for intervention in a school is an asset. This conveys that interventions are important and an integral part of the school team's effort to support all of their students, with all of their particular needs. It provides a "**Safe Place**" for students to go to when they are emotionally charged or need support. Knowing that there are adults in a predetermined location ready to welcome them and help them is invaluable.

Link: <https://www.cebm.ca/nurturing-support-centre>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKQ2NrA8fV0>

There are numerous sections in an Oasis Room or Nurturing Support Centre that can offer range of tools, including:

- **An ENTRANCE or COLLECTING AREA** so that students can enter the Centre in a manner that does not disrupt the other students, but so they can be easily seen and welcomed by staff.
- **A TEACHING AREA** that contains tables and/or desks for the students as well as workspaces for the adults. Individual workstations are set up as these provide privacy and reduce distractions when students require a quiet space in which to complete their schoolwork. Students who are assigned regularly to the NSC have baskets that contain schoolwork and personal tools, strategies, and intervention materials.
- **An EATING AREA** where students are gathered at recess and lunchtime to eat together and be involved in discussions with the adults in the room. Snacks and fruit are provided to help meet students' needs. Having a fridge, a microwave and a sink is an asset.
- **Two smaller PRIVATE AREAS** that are accessed through the main area. These areas provide some privacy so that adults can meet with, coach and tutor students without peer interference. These are also used as quiet areas for students who need a break from being over stimulated.
- **Two COCOONING AREAS** which also provide space for anxious and stressed students who need a quiet place in which to deal with their emotions. Students are provided with tools for quietly expressing their emotions or with tools for helping them to calm themselves.

Emotions Room or Physical release area

The Emotions Room is a space, usually small in size, that helps lead the child to express, name, feel, and mix their emotions, no matter what they are. As expressing emotions in the presence of many people can be a vulnerable experience (whether in the classroom, hallways, schoolyard, etc.), the Emotions Room allows the child to cultivate a relationship with their emotions in a safe place with an accompanying adult to Emotions Rooms: a safe place for children to express their emotions freely within a school setting. It helps them throughout the emotional process. However, before using such a room in a school, some essential requirements must be established.

Link: <https://www.cebm.ca/emotions-room>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ7j07Fws8g>

- Many students who are emotionally charged need physical release in order to reduce the tension in their bodies.
- An essential element in this intervention is to find the student's personal 'bent' – are they throwers, like to destroy things, stompers/kickers. This will help to determine which specific intervention outlets to introduce to them.
- It is also key to have a variety of materials as students will not always be inclined to use the same items to release their emotionally charged energy.
- Each of these tools are first introduced by the adults to explain, model, try out and encourage students to use the materials properly and safely.
- Keep in mind that for students with very high sensitivity and high alarm, high-energy physical release activities may have a negative impact by increasing their alarm and levels of overwhelm. It is best to provide physical release activities that are low energy and less stimulating. It is also recommended for these activities to be preselected with the student at a time when they are calm and receptive. Some students prefer having a 'bubble' (quiet area) and being involved in a fine motor activity or working on a personal project that is ongoing.

Suggestion of tools to include in the Emotions Room

- **Exercise ball:** benefit from rolling on it, sitting on it, bouncing up and down with it, punching, kicking, or throwing.
- **Pool noodle:** great for swinging around, expending frustrated energy without hurting someone or getting hurt.
- **Target with Velcro darts:** great to expend throwing energy.
- **Soft foam/plastic balls:** great for throwing without breaking anything or anyone getting hurt.
- **Skipping rope:** great way to expend jumping and intense energy.
- **10-sided fitness dice:** demonstrates different ways of expending energy.
- **Bubble wrap:** great for squishing with hands or for stomping on.
- **Large stuffed animal:** some like to hug them; some like to throw them around to get frustrated energy out.
- **Mini trampoline:** great for jumping and expending energy.
- **Sensory swing:** great for cocooning and regulating emotions.