

Alerting and calming strategies

We all have internal levels of arousal (otherwise known as alertness levels). These levels can be thought of as on a scale of 0-10. Zero would be very sleepy or even asleep maybe how you feel last thing at night or first thing in the morning and ten would be really hyperactive, high energy and unable to sit down and concentrate. For most activities during the daytime the ideal level of arousal is at level 5, we call this the "just right" level as it means you are alert enough to pay attention to things around you but calm enough to be able to sit and concentrate for an extended period of time. We will all vary along this scale throughout the day as our energy levels peak and wane however for some children this may be more severe fluctuations and they may need additional strategies to help them maintain their arousal at the just right level.

The general principle is that activities that are fast, cause a sudden change of direction or are unpredictable increase your arousal levels and activities that have a steady rhythm and are predictable reduce your arousal levels. Some examples of activities could include:

Alerting Activities

- Swinging fast on a swing
- Being on a rollercoaster
- Hanging upside down
- Running around frequently changing direction
- Jumping quickly on a trampoline
- Being in an environment with sudden loud or unpredictable noises
- Being in an environment with bright contrasting colours, bright lights or lots of clutter
- Being in an environment with lots of unusual or strong smells
- Tickling or light touch
- Messy play activities
- Looking at moving objects

Calming Activities

- Slow rhythmical swinging
- Rocking back and forwards over a gym ball on your tummy or in a rocking chair
- Slow jogging
- Being in an environment with quiet rhythmical music or background noise
- Being in an environment with dulled colours, lights and reduced clutter
- Being in an environment with your favourite smells
- Spending supervised time under heavy blankets
- Weight bearing activities such as pushing, pulling or carrying heavy objects
- Massage
- Squeezing play dough or putty with your hands
- Chewing hard foods or oral chews

This is not an exhaustive list and there may be many other activities you have found that either calm or alert your child! Please also be aware that not all children will react in the same way and what may be calming for one child may be alerting for another. When trying strategies introduce strategies you use will

need to be continually monitored and changed as require. Seek further advice or support from your Occupational Therapist if you are unsure.

Contact details

Children's Therapy Services

Telephone number: 0300 019 2936

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

The Health Information Centre
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Longfleet Road
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We can supply this information in other formats, in larger print or have it translated for you. Please call the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499 or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk for advice.

If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499, write to the Patient Experience Team (address above) or email patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk

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