



# Parent and Caregiver Sensory Regulation and Transitions Resource Guide



University of  
South Australia

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## Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge and respect the Barngarla people as the traditional custodians of the ancestral land of which the project took place. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present within Port Lincoln.

## Introduction



We are Hannah (left) and Sophie (right), fourth year occupational therapy students from the University of South Australia (UniSA). We spent nine weeks between February 6<sup>th</sup> to April 6<sup>th</sup> in 2023 undertaking a community project placement at Port Lincoln Primary School, where this resource was developed.

Within the nine weeks, we collaboratively worked with the PLPS community to carry out the project with a focus on supporting students learning and wellbeing, through improving sensory regulation. We discovered, through community consultation and feedback, that families had limited understanding, knowledge, and access to resources regarding sensory regulation. This led us to discover that parent and caregivers were interested in information on how to best support their child, specifically relating to transitions. To support transitions, we developed weekly handouts that summarised knowledge from reliable resources and experts, that we presented back to parents and caregivers on Seesaw and Facebook. These handouts can be found on pages 6 to 9. Following discussions with Port Lincoln Primary School community members, we decided to create a resource guide where information on sensory regulation and transitions can be found. This was to ensure parents and caregivers are getting access to reliable resources and information.

We would like to thank the PLPS community for welcoming us on site and thank additional staff and experts, including occupational therapists and members of the Department for Education, who supported us in developing this resource. All resources and websites recommended in this document have all been suggested from occupational therapists.

We hope this resource is of value to you and your family!

## What is Occupational Therapy in Schools?

# Occupational Therapy in Schools

### What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational therapy enables people to participate in the activities that they find meaningful. These activities include taking care on oneself (and others), working, volunteering, and participating in hobbies, interest, and social events.

### Occupational Therapy in Schools

Occupational therapists (OTs) work in schools with children of all ages and abilities to support development, learning and play. OTs may work with individual students, with a whole class or with teachers. They help teachers and students identify goals, strengths, and barriers that may be impacting the way a student learns or plays and they recommend strategies or changes. These changes can be to the environment, routine or learning content to increase the ability for students to participate and engage in learning and playing. OTs focus on having a person-centred approach which is making sure that their support is tailored to each individual child and their needs.

### OTs in Schools Can Help With:

- Developing fine motor skills required for school (e.g., writing).
- Prescribing assistive technology (e.g., communication and mobility devices).
- Working with children to manage strong emotions and self-regulation.
- Work on social skills (e.g., turn taking).

### Value of Occupational Therapists in Schools

- Enables prevention and early interaction for students experiencing psychosocial difficulties or developmental delay.
- Addresses behavioural challenges in the classroom to create productive learning environments.
- Promotes social and emotional wellbeing so students can manage challenges from a young age.
- Help students achieve goals in and outside school.

## What is Sensory Regulation?

Sensory regulation allows children to maintain an appropriate level of alertness to respond appropriately to environments and different people, sounds, colours and objects. How a child regulates and the amount of support they need is very individualised to the child. Children who are hyposensitive seek input and are often moving their bodies, whilst children who are hypersensitive can quickly become overwhelmed by environments (Arky 2022).

If you would like further information about sensory regulation, please see the recommended websites below. Click the links below or scan the QR codes to access the websites.



The Child Mind Institute further explores sensory processing and the related challenges that can interfere with how a child participates throughout their day (Arky 2022). <https://childmind.org/article/sensory-processing-issues-explained/>



Griffin Occupational Therapy additionally provides information on the different types of regulation, including sensory regulation and emotional regulation. They describe various strategies that can support children with regulation based on different needs. For example, they provide strategies to calm and strategies to increase alertness in children.

<https://www.griffinot.com/sensory-regulation-strategies-what-are-they-and-how-can-they-help-your-child/>



The OT Toolbox weblink provides information on regulation strategies that you can use at home. It also has further information on the Zones of Regulation program that PLPS students use within their classrooms.

<https://www.theottoolbox.com/zones-of-regulation-activities/>

## What are Transitions and Why are they Important?

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSITIONS

Our approach for the project is focused on consistency across the PLPS community so that students can experience predictable environments and routines which will support smoother transitions.



#### What are transitions?

Transitions happen when changing from:

- ◆ Home ↔ School
- ◆ Break time ↔ Learning
- ◆ Sport ↔ Home
- ◆ Bedtime ↔ Day activities/routines
- ◆ Play ↔ Eating ↔ Nap.

Managing changes/ transitions can often be difficult for children. Every child copes with and reacts to transitions differently.

#### Why are smooth transitions important?

- ✓ Creates a calm environment, and helps children move smoothly and regulate throughout the day.
- ✓ Children can feel more confident, safe and secure, and experience a sense of belonging through predictable transitions.
- ✓ Children know what to expect and can be prepared for the day or next activity, leading to lowering stress around transitions.
- ✓ Allows for some downtime so they can think, learn, and play better throughout the day.
- ✓ Help prevent meltdowns, challenging behaviours, and big emotions.

# TRANSITION STRATEGIES OF THE WEEK: FROM HOME TO SCHOOL

## HAVE YOU TRIED?



### ESTABLISHING A DAILY MORNING ROUTINE

- E.g. make bed, eat breakfast, clean teeth, get dressed, reading time, leave for school etc.
- Have a visual of this routine on the fridge/in their bedroom.
- Let them know of any changes in routine before the morning.
- This makes sure there is predictability for your child and decreases stress levels.

### CHILD INVOLVEMENT

- Give your child a chance to be involved in the preparation for school, consider what they can do the night before and the morning of
- This can allow them to increase independence and communicate what they need to be prepared for the day.

### ARRIVING TO SCHOOL

- Get to school with time for them to settle in, set up and touch base with teacher and peers before the school day (5-15 minutes before bell).

# TRANSITION STRATEGIES OF THE WEEK: FROM SCHOOL TO HOME

## HAVE YOU TRIED?



### ESTABLISHING A DAILY EVENING ROUTINE

- E.g. head home, have a snack, do homework, eat dinner and pack lunchbox, have a shower, go to the toilet, brush teeth, read a book, and go to bed.
- Have a visual of this routine on the fridge/in their bedroom and highlight any changes in routine.
- This makes sure there is predictability for your child and decreases stress levels.

### COMING HOME FROM SCHOOL

- Give your child time to transition from school to home and process the day they have had. This can be done through encouraging play time before homework and screen time, especially as students spend a lot of the school day sitting. Also consider keeping screen time to a minimum (Australian Institute of Family Studies **recommends no more than two hours per day**).
- Give an opportunity to have a snack and share any thoughts they have about their day. You may share a high and a low of your day and ask your child to do the same.

### CHILD INVOLVEMENT

- Give your child a chance to be involved in the evening's activities, whether this be cooking dinner or preparing their lunchbox for the next day
- Consider what they can do independently to get ready for bed and for school the next day. This can allow them to increase independence and



## General Tips for Transitions

# TRANSITION STRATEGIES OF THE WEEK: AT HOME AND GENERAL TIPS

## HAVE YOU TRIED?

### VISUAL TRANSITION TOOLS:

- Visual schedules with images →
- Visual timers and reminders - set the timer for how long they have before the next activity. →
- Read books that help with going to school (younger year levels). Some examples:

- The Things I Love About School by Trace Moroney
- The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn
- Going to School by Anna Civardi



### GENERAL TIPS:

- Give warning - warning when moving from one activity to the next and even an overview of the whole day e.g., daily visual schedule.
- Allow extra time - give plenty of time for the child to finish what they are currently doing.
- Make the transitions fun and tailored to interests e.g., let's hop like a kangaroo to the bedroom or let's sing whilst getting dressed.  
Allow time for sensory breaks between activities.

### SENSORY REGULATION STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES AT HOME:

#### Activities:

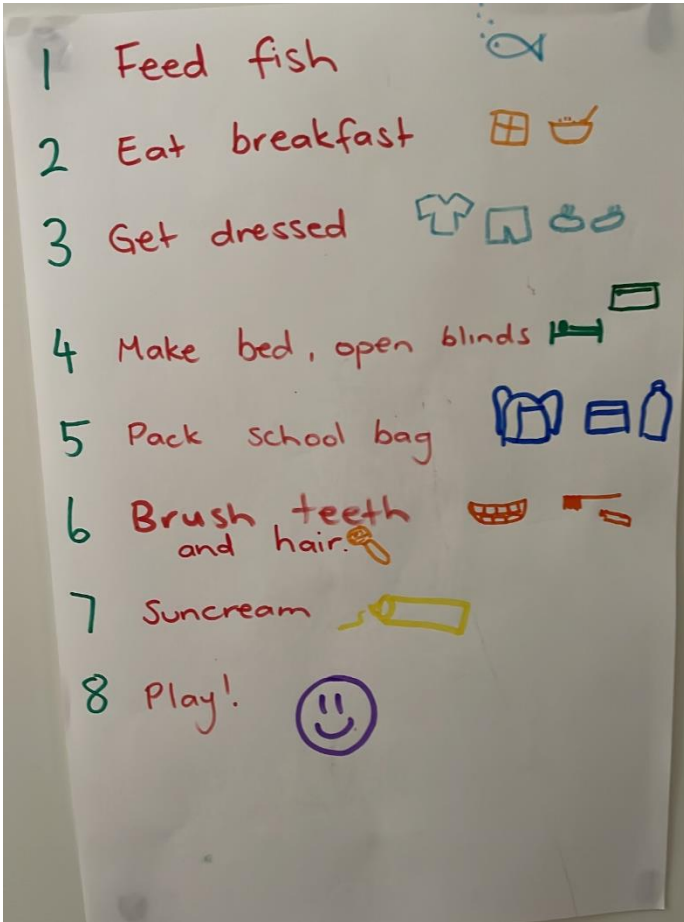
- Cooking/playing with food.
- Finger painting.
- Play with playdough or kinetic sand.
- Yoga/stretching.
- Obstacle courses (can make own).

#### Strategies:

- Earmuffs/noise cancelling headphones for downtime.
- Deep breathing to calm/wind down after busy activity or day.
- Calm corner/space.

## Examples of Visual Schedules

### Example of a Handmade Morning Routine Visual Schedule from a PLPS Family



### Example of a Visual Schedule Template

Can be created in a word document with your own activities added.

Print and laminate table. Use whiteboard marker to tick when activity is completed.

Activity	Completed

## Examples of Morning and Night Routine Visual Schedules

Found at: <https://adayinourshoes.com/free-printable-visual-schedules-for-home-and-daily-routines/#h-reasons-that-parents-may-not-use-visual-schedules-in-the-home>



### My Morning Routine

1. Wake Up 	2. Meditate 	3. Eat Breakfast 
4. Brush Teeth 	5. Play with Toys 	6. Snack Time 
7. Art 	8. Lunch 	9. Nap Time 

### My Night Routine

1. Get up From Nap 	2. Get a Snack 	3. Play Game 
4. Go Outside 	5. Sensory Play 	6. Do a Chore 
7. Dinner 	8. Brush Teeth 	9. Bedtime 

## Resources

*These resources have been collated from research in reliable websites and recommendations from local and Department for Education occupational therapists.*

*Click on the link or scan the QR code on your mobile phone to view the resource.*

### **Positive relationships for parents and children: how to build them**

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/connecting-communicating/connecting-parent-child-relationships>

This resource explains the importance of building positive relationships between parents and children, along with providing suggestions on how to build and nurture positive relationships.



### **Relationships and Child Development:**

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/understanding-development/relationships-development>

This resource highlights the importance of loving, stable and responsive relationships and the long-term benefits of relationships and playing with your child.



### **Self-regulation in Children and Teenagers**

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/behaviour/understanding-behaviour/self-regulation>

This resource further explains what self regulation is, the purpose of it and it's benefit. It also provides ways that a parent or caregiver can support the development of their child's ability to self-regulate.



### **Transitions and Planning for Change**

[https://www.positivepartnerships.com.au/uploads/Transitions-and-Planning-for-Change\\_21.03.22.pdf](https://www.positivepartnerships.com.au/uploads/Transitions-and-Planning-for-Change_21.03.22.pdf)

This resource touches on what transitions and change is. It also explains what transition plans are and provides tips for successful transitions.



### **The Tantrum Takedown: 5 Essential Strategies Every Parent Needs to Know**

<https://otfcgroup.com.au/wp-content/uploads/The-Tantrum-Takedown.pdf>

This resource can support parents in managing their child's behaviour and emotions, specifically during a tantrum.



### **Promoting Positive Education and Care Transitions for Children**

[https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/rs5\\_2.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/rs5_2.pdf)

This resource explores the transitions that occur across children's time at school, the experiences children and parents may have, and factors that may impact transitions.



### **Interoception and Communication**

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/support-and-inclusion/student,-health-and-disability-support/interoception-parent-caregiver-booklet.pdf>

This resource has been developed by the Department of Education South Australia. It has a focus on how activities can be best incorporated into day-to-day life and how families can best engage with and support their child's communication needs.



### **Transitioning and Supporting my Child Through School**

[Transition and Supporting My Child Through School DECD 2016 - YouTube](#)

The Special Education Resource Unit or SERU is a unit within the Department of Education, more specifically in the area of Inclusive Teaching and Learning. This resource is a YouTube presentation on supporting children transitioning through school.



## Websites

*These websites have been collated from research in reliable websites and recommendations from local and Department for Education occupational therapists.*

*Click on the link or scan the QR code on your mobile phone to view the website.*

**Positive Partnerships:** <https://www.positivepartnerships.com.au/>

Positive Partnerships is a project funded by the Australian Government Department of Education through the Helping Children with Autism Program. They work alongside families, educators and communities to work toward positive outcomes and provide online modules, webinars and workshops for parents, carers and school staff.



**Raising Children:** <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>

The Raising Children website provides videos, articles, activities, and apps to support with parenting. The website has supports for parents through all stages of life including pregnancy, pre-schooling, teens and grown-ups. They additionally have pages to support parents who care for children living with disabilities or Autism.



**Emerging Minds:** <https://emergingminds.com.au/>

Emerging Minds is dedicated to advancing the mental and emotional wellbeing of Australian infants, children, adolescents and their families. The organisation leads the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health. Their website provides examples of lived experiences and resources/information to support mental health in children.



**Parenting SA:** <https://parenting.sa.gov.au/>

Parenting SA is a website that has been developed by the South Australian Government. Their website has a range of resources, specifically their 'Parent Easy Guides' that cover a range of topics. They also have a range of parenting videos and links to seminars for further support and information.



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