**Helpful Handy Hints — Finding Reinforcers**

This is an area that is often problematic for many of our learners. The key is to observe their behaviors when left to their own devices and then to use these as a starting point. Remember that a learner’s reaction to sensory input can vary between days and even within a day, and therefore whenever sensory strategies are being used, careful observation of the learner’s reactions is advised. For learners with variable or inconsistent reactions to sensory input, an assessment with an Occupational Therapist may be advisable.

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| Behaviors Observed | The learner gazes at lights or out of the window, fixates on rotating objects, looks at his hands or flaps his fingers in front of his eyes. | | |
| **Type of sensory preference** | **Visual** | | |
| Spinning discs  Laser discs  Spinning toys  Sand Egg timers or oil droppers  Snow globes  TV or video  Computer screensaver programs | | Light toys (such as spinning fan or ball)  Flashing toys (such as bouncing ball or stress toy)  Spinning tops  Wind-up toys  Colored acetate sheets | Executive toys (such as swinging balls)  Sparking toys (such as toy gun or spin toy)  Kaleidoscope  View Master®  Coil toys |

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| **Behaviors Observed** | The learner vocalizes, hums, clicks his tongue, taps furniture or clicks fingers | | |
| **Type of sensory preference** | **Auditory (Sound)** | | |
| Drum  Triangle  Musical instruments  Radio  Push-pull toys that make noise | Toys that make noise  Clackers  Bells  Whistles  Tambourine  Hair dryers | Talking toys (such as Furbies®)  Buzz toys  Toy piano or keyboard  Music boxes  TV or video | Stethoscopes  Music  Conversation with another person  Talking books  Walkman or CD player |

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| **Behaviors Observed** | The learner touches his own or another person’s body parts, pinches oneself, places fingers or objects in mouth. | | |
| **Type of sensory preference** | **Tactile (Touch)** | | |
| Shower scrunchies  Soft toys  Puppets  Talc  Electric fan  Shaving cream | Items that touch the learners’ body  Koosh ball  Silly putty  Vibrating or buzz toys  Massager | Hand painting  Face painting  Blankets  Make up brush  Hand or foot massage  Hand lotion | Sand or water play  Off cuts of different textured materials (such as fur, felt, cotton, nylon etc.)  Scrubbing brush  Pan scourers |

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| **Behaviors Observed** | The Learner rocks, bounces or spins his body. He has strange postures (such as head stands or upside-down), toe walks, holds head on one side or head bangs. | | |
| **Type of sensory preference** | **Vestibular (Movement) or Proprioceptive (Body Sense)** | | |
| Items that recreate motion or body position  Rocking horse  Rocking chair  Firm stroking or patting of body parts Learner allows or seeks | Therapy or Pilates ball  Hammock  Swing  Action rhymes  Vibration or buzz toys | Barrels to roll in or on  Pedal cars  Spinning office chair  Balance ball | Slide  Roundabouts  Trampolines  Push/Pull games against resistance (such as another person) |

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| Behaviors Observed | The learner smells self, other people, items or equipment | | | |
| **Type of sensory preference** | **Smell** | | | |
| Items that smell  Scented pens and crayons | Aromatherapy oils, Incense | Play dough  Scented candles | | Flowers  Make a “Smell Kit” |
| To make a “Smell kit” use some small containers with lids (such as empty camera film containers), place some scented items in the container and top with cotton wool. Keep lid closed until needed. | Some ideas could be:   * Herbs and Spices * Peppermint * Onion * Citrus-oil extracts | | * Soap or Washing up liquid * Cake essences (such as vanilla, coffee, coconut etc.) | |
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| Behaviors Observed | The Learner licks himself or other people. He may lick objects or put them in his mouth. | | | |
| **Type of sensory preference** | **Oral-motor or Taste** | | | |
| Sweet and sour contrasts (such as lemon or lime juice)  Hot and cold contrasts (such as fried ice cream!) | Items that have different tastes  Strong flavored crisps or sweets | Put lots of ice into cold drinks  Thick shakes through a straw | | For oral stimulation try:  Aquarium air tubing to chew  Teething rings and toys  Chewing gum or sweets  Textiles to chew  Tooth and tongue brushing    Try an electric toothbrush |