

# Final thoughts...

**The mouth is one of the most overlooked sensory tools that can make a BIG difference to children's levels of concentration. Using the mouth can help children who are 'fast' or 'slow' to get back to 'just right' so they can concentrate. And it's not just for concentration. Tools for the mouth can also assist in emotional self-regulation and can assist in meltdown / emotional recovery.**



Implementing sensory strategies can make a big difference in helping a child learn how to concentrate and 'cue in' to listening and learning at home, school or preschool.

Often the children who struggle with concentration, wiggle in their seat, get up and down, have meltdowns, tend to react or over react or may be identified as having a 'behaviour' issues may also have sensory processing difficulties.

By introducing some sensory strategies such as suggested in this flyer we can provide the nervous system with the sensory input that their body is needing and craving.

Having a good understanding of how the nervous system works is important for knowing what strategies are best suited to a child. In addition, having parents and the teaching team being 'on the same page' is extremely important to provide the best sensory and learning supports for children.



## In this issue >>>

- Alternatives for kids who chew collars
- After school snacks to help homework
- Mouth tools to keep kids concentrating
- Mouth activities for the whole class
- Using the mouth to help co-ordination



# Using the Mouth as a Sensory Tool to Increase Concentration

Sensory Tip Sheets from Debbie Hopper. Occupational Therapist

## Want to learn more? >>>

### Sensory Processing Workshops

*Deb Hopper is a passionate Occupational Therapist who can train and inspire your team to know exactly how to help the students you work with.*

A variety of workshops are available or can be tailor made for your team or parent group.

Topics include:

- Sensory processing
- Handwriting development incorporating the Handwriting Without Tears Program.

Contact us at [workshops@lifeskills4kids.com.au](mailto:workshops@lifeskills4kids.com.au) for more info.

## Current topics >>>

**Mouth tools are one of the most effective ways to help children stay on track, feeling grounded and in that 'just right' space so they can participate in learning activities.**

In this tip sheet we will explain more about tools and strategies for the mouth that can greatly assist children to move their nervous systems from 'fast' or 'slow' into the 'just right' zone, ready for learning.



## Fast tracking concentration

### Using the mouth as a sensory tool.

Concentration, attention to task and class / homework engagement. These are four of the most common issues we hear that parents and teachers struggle with every day. Deb Hopper takes a look at mouth strategies to help kids cue into learning.

Why is it that many children who struggle with concentration and fidgeting in class also often chew their shirt collars, their pen or their drink bottles?

Many children grind their teeth, prefer crunchy or chewy foods, or may bite at the side of their cheek. Children are clever beings who work out that if I do this, then my body feels more alert, or calmer or grounded. Their body feels better.

**Why is this?** What have they worked out? They have worked out that muscle work (proprioception) using their mouth muscles helps them to stay in the "just right" zone.

When we use our muscle or proprioception system, we are using a tool that can keep our nervous system 'just right'.

**Mouth tools can help us to be alert, decrease anxiety and help our body feel 'ready' for learning and listening tasks.**

So what is this 'just right' zone? The 'just right' zone is when we are alert and ready for action or learning. We are not stressed, not tired or not feeling too fast or hyperactive.

We feel alert, relaxed and ready to work, study or listen. When we are in the just right zone, we feel grounded and ready for tackling new or novel tasks. **Mouth tools can help get us 'just right'.... fast!**



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Tools for the whole class >>>

## Mouth Tools in Class – Ideas for the Whole Class

Using Mouth Tools regularly in the classroom will not only help those children whose bodies are 'too fast' or 'too slow'. It will help everyone in your class stay 'just right'



### Mouth Games

Mouth games are not just for preschoolers! Children of any age find it fun to use the mouth as a tool for games for learning. You just need to be creative and keep the goal in mind – mouth input increases concentration and engagement!

- Create science experiments with straws and ping pong balls, blowing the ball through a maze.
- Use cotton wool balls and straws for maths class. Pick up and place the cotton wool balls for counting activities. Pretend to "count sheep".
- Practice deep breathing as a whole class when things get a bit too noisy.
- Do some mouth monster faces. Squish those lips together, furrow the eyebrows. Funny and a great face break to increase engagement.



## Mouth tools to use WHILE you learn.

*Kids and adults often seek out mouth input while they are needing to focus. It's not only kids though, it's adults too! Do you need to go to the fridge and grab a snack before focusing at work?*

Our nervous system responds to using our mouth to increase concentration. Whether it is food, a pencil, our collar or something chewy, we concentrate and focus much better when we have something in our mouth. Some children need to have mouth input WHILE they are doing something. They can't wait until after they are finished to have a reward, and although having some sensory preparation before homework or class might be helpful, many kids need to have more regular mouth input WHILE they are concentrating.



Pencil toppers or chewable necklaces are often helpful for kids to use in class, rather than chewing on their short collars or being seen to 'mis-behave'.

Chewable necklaces also used as mouth tools also help reduce anxiety in children.



**Mouth games are fun and will make a big difference to your homework time or class attention levels.**

### Did you know?

Did you know that using activities that include breathing, having something in your mouth and looking at something can assist in getting the body 'just right' and ready for concentration?

Activity ideas might include:

- Blowing a ping pong ball or cotton wool ball through a 'maze' on a desk,
- Blowing bubbles and popping them,
- Drinking through a straw and watching the smoothie go lower in the cup.
- Blowing dandelion flowers!



### Do you know? >>>

## Why chewing your shirt collar is good for concentration (and options!)

*We see it all the time. Students who chew their shirt collar, pencil, fingers, necklace, hair to name just a few. Our reaction as adults is often, "Take that out of your mouth!" But did you know that putting things in your mouth actually increases alertness and decreases anxiety?*

When we put something in our mouth, we are actually enhancing our sensory system to get in the 'just right' zone for concentrating.

If we are feeling tired or low in energy, mouth / oral input can increase our level of alertness. If we are stressed, anxious or feeling too excited, mouth input can help calm, centre and focus us.

A fun straw for drinking after school can help us get 'just right' and ready for homework time.



## Pencil Toppers

Tools such as pencil toppers can help us get "just right" and ready for learning.

For more information on tools for the mouth to help concentration and save shirt collars see <http://www.lifeskills4kids.com.au/product-category/activities/mouth-oral/>

### Fine tuning – mouth tips >>>

**Q:** *How do I help a child who doesn't like to have things in their mouth?*

**A:** *Toys that vibrate help to desensitize the face. Try our toy vibrating jigglers. They are fun and give the nervous system specific input that builds up the neuronal pathways for desensitisation.*

