**Structuring the Environment – Some Initial Ideas**

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| **Keep Visual Fields Simple** |
| * Consider the intensity of lighting in the classroom. Use natural lighting where possible. Eliminate glare on the information to be copied (be aware of sunlight glare on the board during different times of the day, and of glare on different types of paper such as glossy magazines or paper).
* Reduce visual distractions in the classroom – Eliminate decorations near child’s desk and between the child and the blackboard. Wash blackboards and whiteboards frequently as even marks from previous work can be distracting.
* Highlight and underline key words and important information presented on the blackboard. Place a plain border around information to help the child to isolate relevant information from irrelevant information.
* Experiment with the child’s desk position in the classroom. – A position in the front row close to the blackboard, and facing front on to the blackboard is best as it enables a clear view and assists the child to identify the direction and orientation of information on the board. Avoid sitting <him/ her> side on or with back to the information being presented.
* Assist the child in keeping the desktop clear – Teach <him/ her> to store all items that are not needed for a task out of sight. Teach the child basic organisational skills. Colour coding of books may help and having a specified place for everything.
* Prepare worksheets free of visual clutter – Limit the amount of information presented on the page.
* Provide auditory cues to support information the child receives visually.
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| **Reduce Auditory Overwhelm**  |
| * Experiment with allowing Child to fidget with hand toy or chew on straw/ tubing while instructions are being given.
* Encourage Child to repeat instructions and explanations to themselves or to the teacher after they have been presented to the class
* Present instructions visually – with a list/ checklist that Child ticks off as he/ she goes.
* Place a corral around Child’s working area to block out surrounding sounds. This can be made from a large cardboard packing box such as a fridge box.
* Allow Child to wear earplugs or unplugged headphones to eliminate classroom noise when working.
* Give a cue to gain Child’s attention before giving instructions such as clap, ring a bell, blow a whistle, stand in front of him/ her.
* If feasible, consider the use of a Sound Field System in the classroom setting – they not only benefit children with hearing impairment, but also auditory discrimination and distractibility issues related to inattention and working memory difficulties.
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| **Simplify Language** |
| * Reduce the amount of material to be remembered/completed
* Keep new information or instructions brief and to the point, and repeat in concise fashion for as needed.
* Increase the meaningfulness and familiarity of the material, relate it to something to with which they are familiar, and if possible link to physical experience – hands on learning helps greatly.
* Use simple visual reminders of the steps needed to complete a task. A visual schedule helps your child become organized and also can become a habit of thinking over time – however you will need to teach your child how to use it.
* Provide information in multiple ways: speak it, show it, and create opportunities to physically work with it or model it.
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| **Organize the Space & Materials** |
| * Place-keeping and organizational strategies e.g. a laminated list for their school bag that you teach them to check off in the morning and afternoon as they pack and unpack their bag; a laminated sheet for their drawer at school that has a place for all their bits and pieces;
* Labelling their toy cupboard, bookshelves and workspaces and attaching photos of what belongs in each spot along with a written label
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| **Consider Seating** |
| * Experiment with different seating options, allow Child to sit on a swivel chair, to stand up at a bookcase or sit on a large gym ball (right height). Also allow him/ her to lie on tummy on the floor and work. These will give movement options while working.
* Limit the length of time that Child is expected to sit still in one position. Intersperse sitting activities with physical activities whenever Child is looking low, bored and unmotivated. (The vestibular system has a fairly immediate effect on the nervous system, and for some children, physical activities can make desk type work much easier.)
* Provide a variety of sensory experiences that involve rapid horizontal, vertical and rotary (circles) stimulation). Wake up activities that include jumping up and down on the spot, running around, shaking heads and bodies can help prepare for deskwork. (These can be incorporated into whole class activities).
* Provide appropriate supportive seating with the desk and chair at the right height for Child.
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| **Chill Out Zone** |
| * Provide a space at home and at school where they can withdraw to regroup and recover with resources and tools that assist in the process – this is not to be used as a punishment or a reward, but encouraged as a way to practice self regulation. For more information about how to set this up you can review [this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Mg9ldD1vM8&t=5s&ab_channel=KidsMatters).
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