This week’s sensory topic is: Organizing & Calming: Setting a Foundation for Learning

We have all seen the “Keep Calm and…” posters everywhere. This poster reminded me of the importance of being calm and organized when learning. Learning requires sensory organization and optimal arousal. Too much or too little stimulation results in difficulty attending to and completing academic work.

Here are some strategies to try:

- Create organizational systems in the home, classroom, and workspaces. Organizing the environment helps individuals to organize their brains. Being organized creates a calm sensory response.
  - Work spaces should have clear visual boundaries
  - Supplies and belongings should be organized in specific locations

“Finish Later” Image from article: Transition Time: Helping Individuals on the Autism Spectrum...
Consider using structured work tasks and systems
Organize work in containers by finished, to-do, or in progress/finish later
Use visual supports to prepare, inform, teach, and self-monitor
Assist a student in staying on task by using visual sequencing and schedules

- Create calm spaces with soft materials, low light, and closed areas where an individual can take time to organize their system when overwhelmed
- Provide opportunities for movement that organizes, such as rocking in a rocking chair or taking walks.
- Remember that getting adequate sleep and meeting other biological needs contributes to maintaining an optimal arousal state.
- Pair movement with learning: Use movement activities to learn and to prepare to learn.
- Use weighted blankets or weighted backpacks to provide calming and organizing input.

- Gum, suckers, or mints can provide calming and organizing oral input during quiet work during designated times. Other options are crunchy and chewy snacks. Be aware that mint and strong flavors can increase arousal.
- Break Time! Schedule talking, movement, and choice activity time breaks. Provide a set amount of time for students to draw, move, talk about favorite topics or chat, etc. throughout the day.

- “Heavy work” (carrying, lifting, pushing, & pulling) calms the body. This heavy work can be in the form of daily play or work activities at home or in the classroom. These can be exercises and should be included in the schedule, as needed or tolerated. Some individuals become excited with movement, so activities following movement should include heavy work to calm. It may help to have a time of heavy work scheduled daily after recess or PE to help students calm before it is time to learn again. Some examples are:
  - Putty & Dough Activities & Exercises
- Drawing or carving in media, such as modeling clay
- OT Sensory activities involving whole-body and muscle movements
- Carrying bags of groceries or boxes of materials
- Pulling a wagon
- Stacking & carrying books
- Erasing the classroom chalkboard or whiteboard

Arousal levels fluctuate throughout the day. Low arousal may appear as floppy, sleepy, bored, or uninterested. Over-arousal may appear as agitation, anxiety, silliness, or inattentiveness. Calming and organizing the senses helps individuals more easily participate in learning.