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# Winter Wonderland? Meeting Sensory Needs During the Winter Months

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## **Reestablishing Routine and Promoting Calmness**

After surviving the snow and an extended Holiday Break, we are finally back and beginning to establish a routine. Hopefully you have started off the New Year energized and organized. Perhaps you and your students have been stuck indoors, unable to meet movement and sensory needs. Reestablishing routine and activity will help ease this transition.

Many of your students return to school wondering what to expect. Consistently using your visual supports to communicate what activities are going to take place each day will allow individuals to transition back into a routine.

## **Use a Visual Schedule**

Remember to use visual schedules consistently and daily, even if it seems that an individual knows the typical routine. This is essential in preparing for change. For example, there will continue to be changes in routine in the coming weeks, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day, next Monday.

There are two attached narratives that are written for schools that are open and for schools that are closed on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Please use the narrative that pertains to your school calendar. Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a School Day for those who have school and Martin Luther King Jr. Day for those who are out of school.

Use of a social narrative to prepare for changes in vacation schedule can help you avoid or reduce meltdowns and anxiety brought about by changes in routine.

In addition to preparing for the change in schedule, you may wish to explain the use of a daily schedule for those students who do not seem to understand why and how to use their schedule. See the attached social narrative “Why I use a Schedule.” For more on Visual Schedules, visit our webpage Visual Supports: Schedules.

### **Create a Calming Space/Calming Bin**

Lastly, remember also to use calming sensory strategies in your classroom to help reduce anxiety and to meet sensory needs. It may be helpful to set up a special calming space or to use a calming bin in your classroom.



Image from [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

Some ideas for creating your calming space/bin:

- Name the space/bin something students will recognize.
- Keep this area separate from a time out area used to manage behavior.
- Consider using a corner away from activity.
- Use visual boundaries to reduce stimuli.
- Include fidgets, stress balls, and putty as activity options.
- Provide drawing or coloring pages.
- Set limits and expectations: Use a timer to indicate allowable time in calming area.
- Include a bean bag or rocking chair in corner, if possible.
- Use pre-printed fill in emotion/calming journal entries to process.
- Post a 5-point scale and a calming sequence visually.
- Post a list of sensory calming activities to complete.
- Provide headphones with books or music on tape.
- Provide short, calming books to read, such as “When My Worries Get Too Big!” or “Cool Cats, Calm Kids.”
- Consult with your OT for calming activities to incorporate in the classroom.

For additional sensory strategies, visit the IRCA webpage: <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/>

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