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Mentally Healthy Schools
Sensory space toolkit

A guide for planning, designing, introducing and using spaces to promote emotional regulation in schools.

Contents

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Social and emotional learning

Students' ability to learn at school can be impacted by their emotions. Emotions can impact ability to focus, process new information, store information in long term memory, think rationally and make decisions.

Negative emotions, such as stress and anxiety, tend to inhibit normal brain functioning by raising cortisol production and compressing the frontal lobe, which is responsible for attention, decision making and emotional regulation.

When students feel negative emotions, it is difficult for them to process and store new information, as working memory is reduced. Positive emotions help students to learn optimally as working memory is increased, leading to improved processing and better problem-solving skills. This enables students to actively participate in rich learning experiences, where they are able to generate ideas and extend their knowledge.

It is therefore crucial that students are supported to develop their social and emotional skills early in their schooling life, as such skills benefit learning, build self-awareness, emotional control, social skills and improve resilience.

Students with strong social and emotional skills are better able to build and maintain healthy relationships, show empathy, resolve conflict and accept and respect others' differences.

Students who recognise and understand their emotions are often better at expressing and managing their emotions in appropriate ways and are more likely to have higher academic outcomes, a positive sense of self, stronger teacher-student relationships and stronger friendships.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation occurs when an individual can recognise their feelings and emotions, understand why emotions occur and can manage their emotions appropriately and effectively.

This means emotions and behaviour are intrinsically linked as behaviour is usually the result of emotions. When an individual learns to manage their emotions, they can control their behaviour and their responses.

Individuals that have strong self-regulation skills generally have higher executive functioning skills, greater empathy for others, tolerance for differences and stronger personal relationships.

The way students behave at school is detrimental to their learning and the learning of those around them. Schools have behavioural expectations and rules in place to enhance the learning of all students and keep students and staff safe.

It is crucial that in early primary school, students begin to develop social and emotional skills and continue to build their self-regulation skills throughout primary and secondary school. School belonging can be enhanced when students feel strong in their self-regulation skills, as it leads to a sense of control and motivation within their learning environment.

Social and emotional learning: Teaching emotional regulation strategies

It is important for learning and for social and emotional development that students learn how to regulate their emotions in safe, appropriate ways.

The following strategies can be used to teach students about social and emotional skills:

Modelling

Everyone has emotions and it is okay for students to see their teachers experiencing emotions (to an extent and in an appropriate manner).

Teachers modelling emotional regulation strategies has several benefits, including students' having an increased understanding that adults also have emotions and need to work through them, which helps to increase empathy and demonstrate appropriate strategies to use when regulating emotions.

Explicitly teaching emotional regulation strategies

It's important that students are taught and given opportunities to practise emotional regulation before utilising sensory spaces, to ensure they use the space purposefully and positively.

Students need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and strategies required to emotionally regulate during times of distress and dysregulation. The strategies on pages 6-7 can help develop students' social and emotional skills, including emotional regulation skills.

Emotional regulation strategies

Naming emotions

It is important to introduce students to emotions and identify how different emotions look, feel and sound to students. This is particularly important in early to middle primary school.

Students' ability to name emotions can empower and help students learn a variety of strategies that may help them regulate when dysregulated.

It is important to teach positive and negative emotions, and it is recommended to teach only 1-2 emotions at a time.

Act Belong Commit have developed a **Feelings Chart (Primary)** and **Check-In Activity** to support student learning (page 17).

Gratitude

Focusing on gratitude can help students experience a greater sense of happiness and purpose, leading to increased abilities to self-regulate and improvements to mental wellbeing.

Gratitude activities help students focus on positive, important parts of their life, rather than dwelling on anxiety, which helps to build a healthy mindset.

Students need to be explicitly taught to reflect and practise gratitude to experience the benefits.

Act Belong Commit **Gratitude Activities** are available for schools to utilise and encourage students to practise gratitude (page 19).

Visual stories (Primary)

The use of visual stories helps students understand a situation, identify emotions related to the situation and have the opportunity learn about the choices available when reacting to situations.

Teachers ask guiding questions and ask students to consider how they might respond during different situations.

Positive responses and choices are reinforced. To extend learning, students could make response-related goals.

Visual stories are important to teach students positive and appropriate ways to respond to difficult situations.

Teaching mindfulness

Mindfulness is described as purposefully paying attention and focusing on the present moment, while tuning into the body and calming the mind by focusing on breathing, emotions and sensations in the body in a non-judgemental way.

Using mindfulness strategies regularly can decrease anxiety, stress, pain and depression.

Mindfulness practice is recommended for school students for 5-10 minutes per day and can increase social and emotional skills.

Mindfulness strategies for emotional regulation are included on the next page (page 7).

Mindfulness strategies for emotional regulation

Mindful breathing

Mindful breathing involves repetitive deep breathing, while focusing on breath and the body.

Practising mindful breathing helps to slow the heart rate and promote internal focus. Regular and consistent practise can increase positive thinking and reduce negative emotions, such as anxiety.

Teachers can introduce mindful breathing into the classroom as a regular brain break for students at the start of the day, after break times or during lesson transitions.

Act Belong Commit Mindful Breathing Posters (page 18) are available for classrooms and sensory rooms to encourage students to practise breathing strategies.

Visual breathing strategies, such as videos or breathe bubbles, can also help students focus on breathing.

Mindful colouring

Mindful colouring involves focusing on colouring, design and the experience of participating in art.

This activity helps students focus consciously on the present moment and purposefully let go of negative emotions or past and future worries.

Mindful colouring can help reduce stress and anxiety and improve mood, sleep, focus and fine motor skills.

Act Belong Commit Colouring Sheets (page 18) are available for schools to use to encourage mindful colouring.

Meditation

Meditation is a type of mindfulness that provides opportunities to relax, develop self-awareness, refocus and disconnect.

Meditation can help refocus and train the mind to reduce unnecessary negative thoughts and focus on the present moment.

Other benefits include increased self-control, reflection abilities, regulation skills and academic performance.

Additionally, meditation can lead to better developed skills, including improved sense of self, enhanced social skills and better relationships.

Act Belong Commit recommends GoNoodle (Primary only), the Smiling Mind website or app and Headspace's YouTube Channel for free meditation videos.

Promoting a calm school and classroom environment

It is important for students' social and emotional development and emotional regulation progress that school staff and classroom teachers provide a calm school and classroom environment.

This includes avoiding bright colours on classroom walls, ensuring the classroom is not too busy with displays and promoting a calm space through language, volume and tone.

This will ensure students are not overstimulated by the classroom or distracted by displays on the wall, minimising dysregulation through their environment.

Promoting a calm school and classroom environment

Classroom routines and structures

Creating classroom structures and routines that students are aware of and consistently follow allows students to know what to expect each day, which will assist in minimising dysregulation.

The use of visual daily schedules, written schedules on the board or student diaries can assist this.

School and classroom expectations

Collaborating with students to develop classroom expectations and/or school expectations can be important to ensure students know the behavioural expectations and boundaries required of them.

This can be helpful to refer to throughout the year to reset expectations and remind students of what they agreed to.

Similarly, ensuring students are aware of the learning and achievement expectations during a lesson is important, as it provides students with the knowledge of what they need to achieve to be successful with their learning. Generally, students are more focused on their learning when expectations are clearly defined.

Brain breaks

Allowing brain breaks throughout the day is important for students and provides them with an opportunity to switch off from their learning and focus their energy and attention elsewhere. A brain break can be achieved through physical or mental exercise and could include:

- Dancing
- Stretching
- Mindful breathing, meditation or colouring
- A gratitude task
- Yoga
- Another form of physical activity

Brain breaks are intended to increase engagement and memory processing, improve mood, refocus students, improve behaviour and strengthen classroom culture.

Modelling calm behaviours

Finally, when school staff and teachers model calm behaviours, students often feel calmer and are able to learn.

When teachers are calm during stressful situations and demonstrate appropriate and calm ways to deal with situations, students can see appropriate behaviours in action and develop an understanding of what appropriate behaviours and responses look like.

This not only benefits the teacher, as it creates a calmer classroom environment, it also benefits students by having positive behaviours modelled to them.

Sensory spaces

A sensory room is a controlled and intentionally created space that provides multi-sensory resources to support a student's sensory needs to enable them to engage in learning.

(Department of Education Victoria, 2022).

Sensory room at Belmont City College ⟶

Sensory spaces

What is a sensory room?

A sensory room, space or corner is a safe space students can use to regulate their emotions when they are feeling overstimulated, stressed, anxious, angry, upset or showing aggression.

A sensory room should be in an area that is accessible to students, is quieter than the classroom and created to be a calming space. Furniture and sensory equipment/toys can be used to help regulate student emotions (see page 13).

Focusing energy on sensory toys can reduce restlessness and provide a positive way for students to release emotions and energy.

Resources should be available to remind students of strategies to regulate their emotions, such as breathing posters, mental wellbeing check-ins and mindful colouring (see page 16).

This helps to build students' regulation skills and contributes to their social and emotional learning. Sensory spaces should be safe and comfortable. They should not be used during punishment or to isolate students.

Benefits of sensory spaces

Sensory spaces allow students to better develop their social and emotional skills, and more specifically develop their emotional regulation skills.

Students can learn about and practise different emotional regulation strategies in a safe space such as the classroom, before trying these strategies independently in a sensory space.

Sensory spaces can be safe spaces for students with physical and intellectual disabilities to take a break when they are overstimulated or need a brain break.

Students who can understand emotions, respond appropriately to different situations, and can emotionally regulate, may experience:

- Enhanced self-control and behavioural control abilities.
- Improved focus and working memory.
- Resilience skills and better coping skills with normal stressors.
- Increased confidence and self-esteem.
- Increased emotional intelligence including empathy.
- Improved academic performance.
- Improved social skills.
- Better relationships with peers.
- More positive student-teacher relationships.

It is important for student learning to increase social and emotional skills, however it is crucial for positive relationships, self-confidence and cognitive function that students learn such skills, inclusive of emotional regulation strategies.

Setting up a sensory space

Sensory spaces can be set up as a sensory room, used by an area within the school or the whole school.

A calm corner can be set up within a classroom or block. Whichever type of sensory space is chosen, it should be set up in an area or room where students feel comfortable and safe to regulate their emotions.

Equipment, furniture, toys and other resources can help to make your space more comfortable and calming for students.

It is important to note that sensory spaces do not need to be furnished with expensive items, simple inexpensive resources can be used.

Use second-hand or donated furniture where possible to keep costs low.

Setting up a sensory space

Furniture

Soft furnishings should be used to create a comfortable welcoming space for students, for example:

- Bean bags
- Blankets
- Cushions
- Rugs
- Weighted blankets
- Soft toys
- Yoga mat
- Tents
- Couches/chairs

Sensory room at Ursula Frayne Catholic College

Equipment/toys

Equipment and sensory toys can help to calm students who are emotionally dysregulated by engaging their senses, including sight, touch, sound, taste and smell.

Sensory toys can help students focus by using energy, reducing restlessness and providing a positive outlet for students to release emotions. Sensory toys promote open-ended play, help with problem-solving skills and enrich cognitive development.

There are a variety of sensory toys and equipment available, such as:

- Bubble blowers
- Playdough
- Clay
- Sand
- Fidget toys
- Stretchy toys
- Squishy toys
- Toys
- Water beads
- LEGO
- Wooden massagers
- Blocks
- Puzzles
- Stress balls
- Lava lamp
- Foot chair bands
- Popper fidget

Finding sensory toys and equipment

Your sensory room can be made with toys and equipment you have at school and/or donations.

There are also a range of retailers that provide sensory toys and equipment (in Western Australia and online). If possible, source local suppliers.

Examples include:

- Sensory Space Australia
- Calm Store Australia
- The OT Store
- The Therapy Store (NDIS Approved)
- Sue Larkey
- Sensory Superstars (based in Ellenbrook, WA)
- The Happy Giraffe (based in Albany, WA)

Include emotional regulation strategies

Resources and activities to support students' emotional regulation skills should be available, including:

- Mindful colouring sheets
- Colouring pencils
- Paper
- Mental wellbeing check-in activities
- Emotional regulation strategies poster
- Breathing posters
- Stretching posters
- Gratitude activities
- Feelings chart
- Puzzles
- Books (general books and books about emotions)
- Positive affirmation cards
- Timer or visual timer
- Visual schedules

Please note, students should be introduced and explicitly taught the above strategies as a class prior to using them in a sensory space. It is important for students to know the benefits and understand how participating in the activity will benefit their mental wellbeing through emotional regulation.

Sensory space design and set-up considerations

Keep colours neutral

To avoid students being overwhelmed or dysregulated by the room avoid bright, stimulating colours and use neutral, pale colours to ensure it is a soothing, calming space for students.

Choose a private area

If setting up a sensory room, choose a private space away from noise and foot traffic where possible. Ensure the space is relaxing, but ensure it is not too private that it becomes unsafe (see more on this on page 21).

Avoid bright light

Ensure the space is comfortable and a little darker than classrooms and other spaces in the school. Bright light can dysregulate some students, it is recommended to make the space less bright using curtains or tents in the space.

The use of timers

Timers can be used to time students use of the room. Teachers can ask students to come back to class after a certain amount of time. Timers can also be used for emotional regulation strategies, such as watching a sand timer or liquid timer or using timers during breathing.

Act Belong Commit resources

Act Belong Commit has developed resources that can be used within a sensory space to accompany this toolkit.

Find mental wellbeing support

STANDING STRONG TOGETHER

We're a Mentally Healthy School

There are a number of services available to support young people's mental wellbeing.
Find the services that might help you below and pull off a slip to save the details for later.

Take as many slips as you need!

Phone support	

Lifeline
Australia-wide crisis support and suicide prevention service.
13 11 14

Urgent mental health support
24/7 support for young people and their families.
1800 048 636

Kids Helpline
Free and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling for 5-25 year olds.
1800 551 800

13 YARN
24/7 crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
13 92 76

Beyond Blue
Online and phone youth mental health service.
1300 224 636 | beyondblue.org.au

headspace

My check-in

Name: _____ Date: _____

Circle how you're feeling:

HAPPY	SAD	MAD	WORRIED	SILLY	EXCITED	ANXIOUS	CONFUSED	CALM	ANNOYED

Think about how you're feeling and draw or write answers to these questions:

Why do you feel this way?   How can you calm yourself down?

Ways to manage emotions

1 Deep breathing
- Trace breathing posters with finger.
- Breathe in through your nose for 5 seconds, breathe out through your mouth for 5 seconds, repeat.

2 Do something with your hands
- Write down how you feel.
- Do some mindful colouring.
- Squeeze or pull something (play dough).
- Read a book.

3 Practice gratitude
- List three things you are grateful for.
- List three people you are grateful for.

4 Name your emotions
- Name your feelings, if you are not sure, use a feelings chart.
- Think about how this emotion is making your body feel.

5 Talk to a trusted adult
If you have tried lots of ways to calm down and they are not working, talk to a trusted adult about how you're feeling.

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Feelings chart

All feelings are valid.
Can you name your feelings?

ANGRY	ANNOYED	ANXIOUS	CALM	CHEEKY	CONFUSED	DOWN	ELATED	EXCITED

FURIOUS	HAPPY	MAD	SAD	SILLY	SURPRISED	UNIMPRESSED	UNWELL	WORRIED

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Act Belong Commit resources

Ways to Manage Emotions

The **Ways to Manage Emotions Poster** has been designed to be used during and after education on emotional regulation strategies to promote and remind students of the strategies that they can use within the classroom, in a sensory space or at home to manage their emotions.

Strategies include breathing exercises, activities, practising gratitude, naming emotions and talking to a trusted adult.
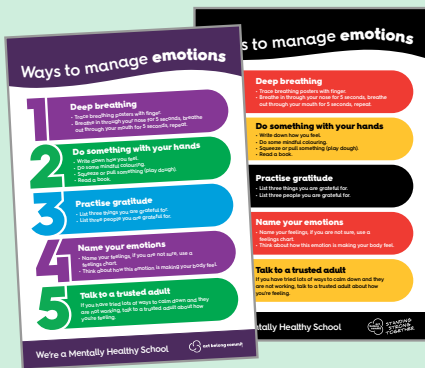
Feelings Chart (Primary)

Naming and understanding different emotions brings awareness and power to students. Knowing how different emotions look, feel and sound helps students know how to manage feelings and how to emotionally regulate when needed.

The **Feelings Chart** can be used in the classroom to help students learn different types of emotions and can be used alongside the **Mental Wellbeing Check-in Activity** in sensory spaces to reinforce learning.

Mental Wellbeing Check-In

It is important that students have opportunities to reflect on their emotions and feelings, what causes different feelings and how they can emotionally regulate.

The **Mental Wellbeing Check-in Activity** is a useful activity for students to practise checking in with themselves.

Explicit teaching of how to complete this activity is recommended before introducing this to the sensory space.

Act Belong Commit resources

Breathing Posters

Mindful breathing is an important strategy in developing emotional regulation skills.

The **Breathing Posters** provide seven different breathing techniques for primary and secondary students to learn to practise mindfulness. The posters are useful in classrooms and in sensory spaces to encourage mindful breathing.
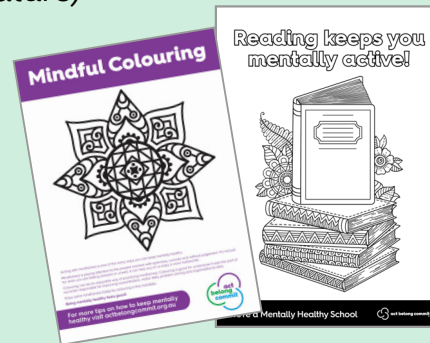
Mindful Colouring

Mindful colouring can help reduce stress and anxiety and improve mood, sleep, focus and fine motor skills.

Act Belong Commit have the following **Mindful Colouring** activities available:

- Mindful mandalas
- Mentally active colouring (art, reading, physical activity and nature)

Collaborative Colouring

The **Collaborative Colouring** is an activity for a group of students (or classroom) to undertake together.

It promotes belonging by focusing on colouring, design and the experience of participating in art together.
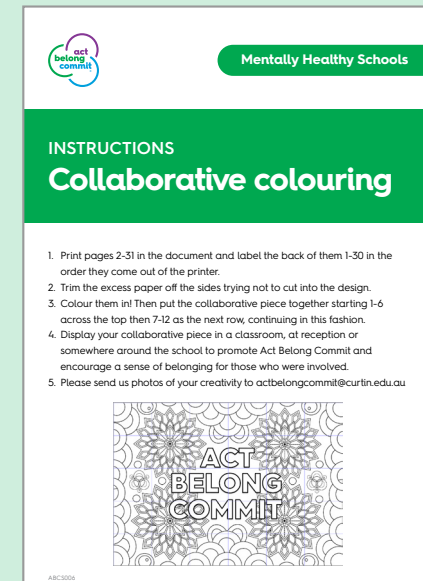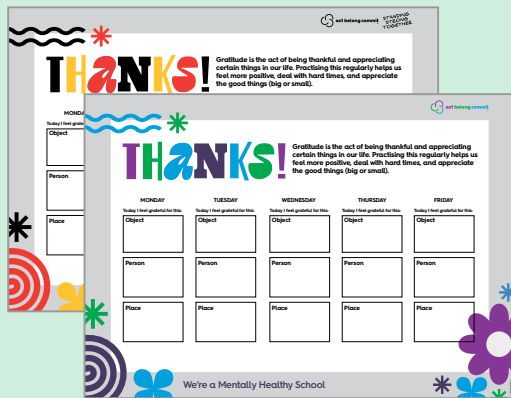
Act Belong Commit resources

Gratitude Activity

Focusing on gratitude can help students experience a greater sense of happiness and purpose, leading to greater abilities to self-regulate and improve their mental wellbeing.

Act Belong Commit's **Gratitude Activity** can be used in classrooms and sensory spaces to encourage students to practise gratitude.

Find Mental Wellbeing Support (Secondary)

The **Find Mental Wellbeing Support Poster** provides students a list of reputable mental wellbeing support services, including phone and online support.

Building positive environments and providing support to students will help to reduce stigma around mental health issues and promote help-seeking behaviours.

Use this poster in places such as admin, student support services, sensory spaces and other visible areas.

These resources (and more) are available on the School Portal

The School Portal is a password protected, dedicated area providing school Partners access to a wide range of Act Belong Commit resources and assets.

To access the School Portal:

Head to actbelongcommit.org.au/school-portal

Password: PurpleGreenBlue

Sensory space considerations

When sensory spaces are introduced correctly and used appropriately by students, they can provide positive, safe spaces for students to emotionally regulate.

The strategies on pages 21-23 should be considered when creating and introducing sensory spaces within the school and to students.

Sensory room at Belmont City College →

Sensory space considerations

Developing clear rules

Creating, introducing and reinforcing rules to ensure the space is used appropriately and fairly can assist in positive and purposeful use of the room.

Collaborating on the creation of the rules with staff and students can be an effective way of ensuring everyone is clear on the rules and understands the importance of them in relation to using the room.

Ensuring the rules are clearly communicated and displayed is also important. It is recommended to have the rules on the door of the space (if possible) or within the space. Common rules include:

- Mobile phone or technology use.
- Time limits.
- Number of people in the sensory space at once.
- Activities allowed in the space.
- When students and year groups can use space (particularly if one sensory space per school).
- If the space is open at recess/lunch.

Positive use of the space

Ensuring the space is not used for consequences or punishments of behaviour is crucial. It is important students associate the space with positive, calming and safe feelings.

This will allow it to be used for the purpose of providing a safe space for students to regulate and re-join their learning environment when they feel ready.

It is also important to encourage use of the space and ensure students feel comfortable requesting use (if applicable). Students should feel safe to make requests to use the space and these requests should be met with understanding and trust by school staff.

However, appropriate ground rules need to be established. Students should not have unlimited access for unlimited amounts of time. There needs to be a mutual agreement between students and staff that those using the space will be responsible and not take advantage of access.

Safety

- Ensure Duty of Care responsibilities are always met and harm minimisation is considered.
- Sensory spaces should be in areas with windows and doors should always remain open.
- If the sensory space is used at recess and lunch, ensure the duty teacher includes this in their route.

Break times

If the space is open for students at recess and lunch, ensure this space is not simply used for students who don't want to go outside.

Sensory space considerations: Introducing a sensory space

Before introducing the sensory space

It is important that students are explicitly taught about the purpose and benefits of a sensory space before they are introduced to, and able to access the space.

Teaching students social and emotional skills and self-regulation strategies (as advised on page 5), as well as practising strategies and providing positive reinforcement when students demonstrate them is crucial to the success of the space.

Deciding on the circumstances that students can use the sensory space and how the students request to use the space is useful before introducing it, to ensure it consistent and clear for all students.

This is particularly important if the space is shared between a few classes or the whole school. It is important to develop clear rules around using the space (as outlined in page 21), and ensure these are communicated to staff and students.

Access to the sensory space

Access to the sensory space should be agreed upon at a school level and may vary between school communities.

Some schools only allow access to the space via a teacher request. This includes teachers asking individual students to take a break and spend an agreed amount of time in the sensory space to emotionally regulate before re-joining the class and participating in their learning.

Other schools allow students to request use of the room. Student requests are usually introduced once the teachers are confident students will be respectful of the space and responsible to return to class.

There are a number of strategies schools and classrooms use for students requesting use of the space, including:

- Using a hand signal.
- Tapping a sign on the wall (e.g. I need a break sign).
- Handing the teacher an 'I need a break card'.

It is important students understand teachers do not have to allow access to the space at all times and it is acceptable for the teacher to say no.

It is recommended that some emotional regulation tools are available in the classroom for these occasions. Initially, is it a good idea to implement a previously agreed upon time limit for students using the room (e.g. 5-10 minutes), so that students do not miss large chunks of lessons in the sensory space.

Act Belong Commit recommends finding an approach that works for your school and cohort. It can be useful to start with teachers asking students to use the space, and once students are familiar with the process and can see benefits in their emotional development, they can begin to request access to the space.

It is important that the sensory space is an equitable space, hence if students are able to request access this should be open to all students within the school.

How to introduce the sensory space

The way the sensory space is introduced to students is important for its success and student respect of the space. It needs to be communicated to students as a space where they can develop their social and emotional skills and learn to respond appropriately to different emotions.

If teachers have been educating students about social and emotional skills and emotional regulation, the sensory space will tie in nicely, and students will have a better understanding of how to use the space than students without that prior knowledge.

It is important to communicate that the space is a safe space to emotionally regulate and calm down, it is not to avoid learning or to chill out and play with the sensory toys.

Act Belong Commit recommends communicating the benefits of the space to encourage students and teachers to utilise the space.

Communicating the space to your school community depends on the type of sensory space you have. If you have a sensory space accessed by the whole school, it is suggested this is announced at assembly, and rules and processes are reinforced in classes or homeroom.

Information should be disseminated to students, families and caregivers; this may occur via class activities, school newsletters, posters in the classroom and assemblies.

It is also recommended that the regulation strategies taught at school are communicated to families and caregivers to promote consistency across school and home.

Adding the sensory space to school policies and Business Plan

Sensory spaces are evidence-based approaches used to develop students' social and emotional skills. It is recommended that schools add the use of sensory spaces to school policies related to mental wellbeing and health, as it is an effective mental health prevention strategy.

It is important to review policies and the progress of sensory spaces. This includes the usefulness of the space, how it is being used by teachers and students and if it has had a positive impact on mental wellbeing.

This could be done through a student and teacher survey, observation or anecdotal evidence. Older students may provide feedback via a feedback box.

Sensory spaces can take time to integrate into the school culture and to be used meaningfully. It is recommended to regularly encourage use of the space, its purpose and rules.

It is also recommended to include the sensory space in the school Business or Operation Plan to demonstrate a strong focus on the development of student social and emotional skills. This will also remind teachers to utilise the space, and ensure the effectiveness of the space is regularly reviewed.

Utilising a sensory tent at school events

Pop-up sensory spaces are a great strategy to provide a safe, welcoming space for students to access during large school events or activities.

Students may become overstimulated or dysregulated at large events and being able to access a sensory tent with sensory toys, calming music and mindful activities can help with regulation.

A space like this also promotes inclusivity by allowing all students to attend and participate in the event in their own way. It is recommended that the space is set up away from the main noise of the event, but not too far that it feels like students are excluded from the event.

Events could include athletics carnivals, community events, student activity days, expos etc.

Calm corner at Athletics Carnival - Ursula Frayne Catholic College

Schools can set up a sensory tent by using a marquee with a wall, and including some of the following:

- Bean bags
- Music
- Headphones
- Water beads
- Mindful colouring
- Mental wellbeing check-in activities
- Bubbles
- Sensory toys - sand, fidget toys, stretchy toys, squishy toys
- Books
- Breathing posters

It is important to promote the space to staff who can encourage students to attend if they need a safe place to emotionally regulate or take a break before returning to the event.

Teacher supervision is recommended to ensure the space is safe and that students are not taking advantage of the space.
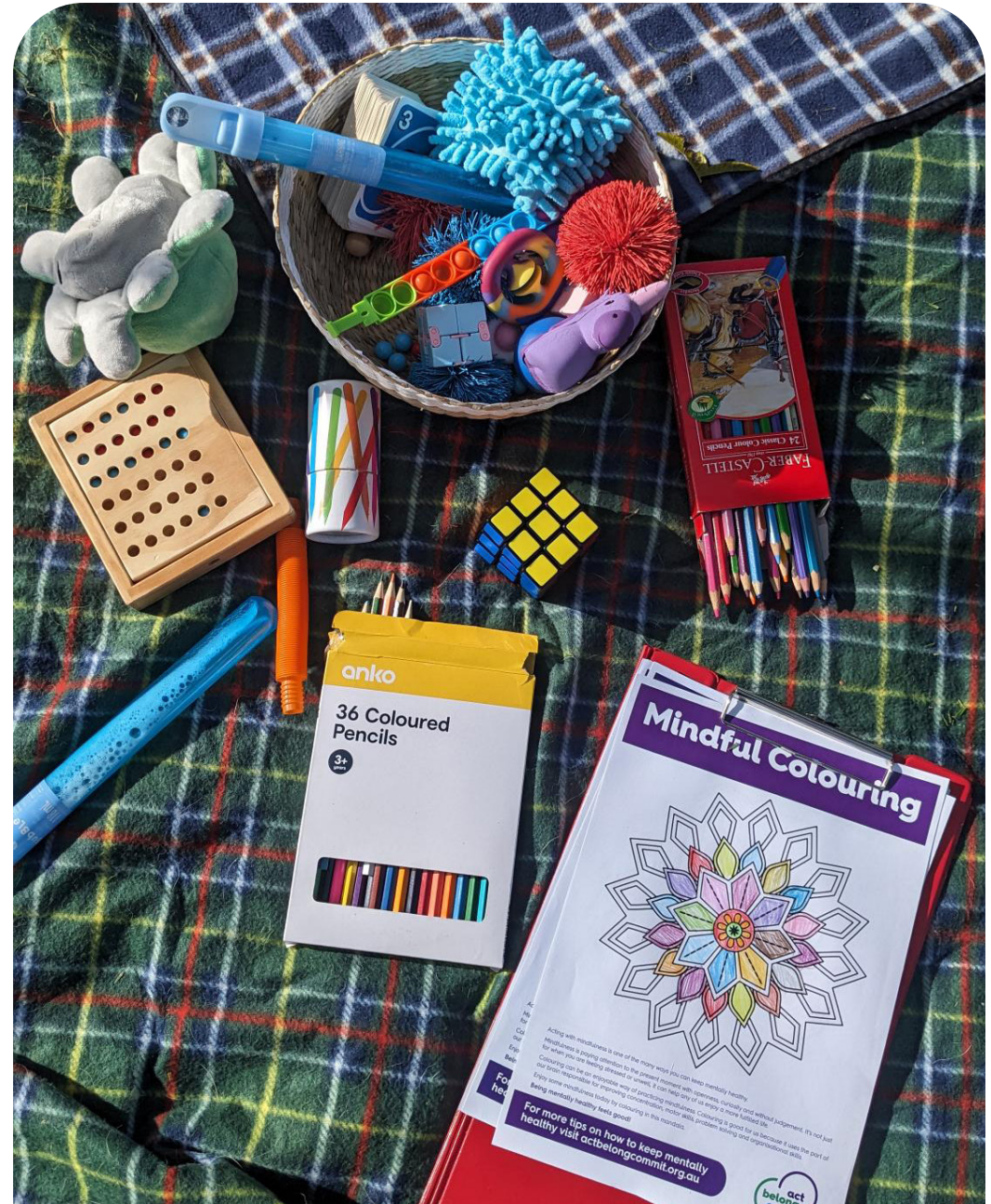
Calm corner at Athletics Carnival - Ursula Frayne Catholic College

Sensory space checklist

The checklist below has been developed to assist the process of planning, designing, communicating and using your new sensory space.

Students' social and emotional development

- ☐ Students have been explicitly taught social and emotional skills (including emotions and how they feel).
- ☐ Emotional regulation strategies have been introduced, practised and positively reinforced.
- ☐ Emotional regulation strategies have been communicated to families and caregivers.

Sensory space design

- ☐ A space within a classroom, within a block of classrooms or a room has been designated and approved.
- ☐ The sensory space has been created away from noisy areas (where possible).
- ☐ Safety has been considered when designing the sensory space.
- ☐ The space has been developed to be a calming space, with calming colours, sensory toys and soft furnishings.
- ☐ Emotional regulation activities have been used in the sensory area.
- ☐ Act Belong Commit resources have been used in the sensory area.
- ☐ Clear rules have been developed for the sensory space.

Sensory space checklist continued

Sensory space processes

- ☐ Teachers and school staff (if applicable) have decided on the sensory space processes, including if students can request access and which strategies will be used for students to request access.
- ☐ Time limits for sensory space use have been agreed upon.
- ☐ If the space will be open at break times (and if so, which duty teacher will monitor the room).
- ☐ How many students are allowed in the space together.

Sensory space communication

- ☐ The sensory space has been introduced to students, staff and families.
- ☐ The purpose and benefits of the sensory space have been communicated to staff, students and families.
- ☐ Rules have been communicated clearly to teachers and students.

Sensory space in health policies/review

- ☐ Add the sensory space to health or mental health policies.
- ☐ Review policies regularly.
- ☐ Review the space and how it is used. Act Belong Commit recommends reviewing the space monthly for the first six months and then every second term thereafter to evaluate its effectiveness, remove unnecessary equipment or update processes.

References

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Mentally Healthy Schools
Sensory space toolkit

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