



## Transcription of Video: “Easy Sensory Tools and Routines at Home”

SJ: Welcome to our presentation on Sensory Routines. I am Sharon Juenemann from The Shadow Project. We are a local Portland, OR nonprofit that partners with k-8 schools to make learning more accessible and engaging for children with learning challenges. I am also the parent of a child with sensory needs, and like many of you, and trying to figure out ways to support my child’s needs with schools closed.

JW: I am Jessica Wade, and I am a licensed pediatric occupational therapist and owner of The Wiggle Room, an inclusive sensory play space in NE Portland.

SJ: We have designed this video to give you quick, easy to use information to help your child get their sensory needs met at home, using basic things you likely have around your house or apartment.

SJ: All of us use sensory input as a way to manage our bodies and our emotions. That means we use our senses -- sight, taste, touch, sound, smell -- to relax or get more awake or calm down when we are upset. If you chew gum, tap your pencil, jiggle your knee, take a hot shower in the morning or at night, or drink coffee or tea every morning or afternoon, or snack on salty or sweet foods in the afternoon, that’s part of your sensory routine. Understanding your own sensory needs can help you help your child.

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JW: Generally speaking, heavy work can help many kids and adults. Think of heavy work as the big bang for your buck. Pushing, pulling, pushing, carrying are all activities that provide input in the big muscles and that’s what we want to hit... the Big muscles. The sensory activities that we are going to show you are mostly examples of what’s called heavy work.

What is heavy work? Heavy work provides input to the muscles which can help kids feel more grounded, and fill their “sensory cup.” Think about digging in the garden, vacuuming, sweeping,

these all provide input into your muscles. What do I mean by input? I mean your muscles can feel it. Your muscles are activated. This kind of work send signals to our brains through our nervous system that keep us in a place where we can manage ourselves.

Heavy work for kids can be pushing, pulling, carrying. Vacuuming, sweeping are great but not all kids are into those. Weighted containers and moving them around the house. Pushing a laundry basket around the house with books, cans, bags of rice, etc. How much should it weigh? Enough that it's work for them to push it but light enough that they can push it.

JW: Fill a laundry basket with books, cans, bags of rice, anything heavy and have your kiddo push it around the house.

JW: Fill a bin of any size with beans or sand or rocks, and then put little objects in there for your kids to find. They can even do a math or literacy game by finding fridge magnet numbers or letters in the bin, more for the little guys but I see older kids enjoy this as well.

JW: The items from the sensory bin are now in this bottle to add weight to the bottle. Kids can carry this around the house, pull it in a wagon, push it in a cart. I use a laundry soap bottle, and usually glue or duct tape the cap on after I put the weights in the bottle. If your child is older, putting away the groceries is a great way to incorporate this type of work.

JW: Older kids need sensory breaks, too, especially because they may spend more time sitting doing school work, and they are not doing sports or any activities right now. Here you see my son drinking water through a straw while he is working. The straw makes his mouth work, and gives his muscles that heavy work by sucking. Other ideas are to chew gum, suck on hard candy or ice, and eat chewy/crunchy foods like raw carrots, dried fruit, raw apples, Twizzlers, fruit leathers, jerky. Wall push-ups/chair push-ups are good if your kid can do a push up.

Monitor which ones seems to help your kiddo stay in the optimal learning state. Some activities can rev some kids up. Monitor their level of alertness, may change throughout the day. One strategy may work well one day, but not the next. Some things might work well in the am but not in the afternoon/evening. When trying out a new strategy, try one at a time to allow for monitoring of their response.

JW: There is a lot going on in all of our houses right now, parents working from home, siblings at home, video calls, neighbors at home, etc. This is a lot of sensory info that kids need to filter. Kids may enjoy working in a fort, tent, with headphones on, music on, etc. This is all very kid dependent. Just because you can't focus with the music on, doesn't mean your kid can't.

JW: It's pretty typical for kids under stress to go back to old behaviors you thought they were done with. So, if your kid was potty trained, they might start having accidents. If your kid was independently bathing, they might start wanting you to do help them in the bath. If they had started being ok with socks, they might refuse to wear them. They might start demanding that you lay with them to go to sleep at night. It might feel frustrating, but it's a child's normal response to stress, so just try to be patient and know they will get back to their previous levels when this is all over.

You can help kids by thinking of things that comfort them, or that they naturally go to when stressed, and giving them more opportunities to do those things if possible.

SJ: With everyone stressed and being asked to do things we never thought we'd have to do, it's easy to fall into a routine of constantly correcting and commanding. But this can leave us all -- parents and kids -- feeling bad. And kids can tune out this constant criticism, so it doesn't really help their behavior. Try doing what most schools do, which is recognizing and reinforcing positive behavior with praise. Say one positive thing in the morning, one midday, one at dinner, and one at bedtime. Things like: "Great job remembering to put your dish in the sink" or "Way to go keeping up with your math today."

Also, if you can, spend some time just being/doing what your kid is doing. It doesn't have to be some big activity that you've planned. It can just be watching a funny YouTube video or show with them, having a snack with them, or playing a video game with them. Many kids will find comfort in just spending time with you.

JW: Stick with it! Know there are many many families going through similar challenges right now. Also, know every family is different, what is working for one may not work for you and that's ok. If tomorrow doesn't go well, there is always the next day and the day after that. Do reach out to your child's teacher, special education team and therapists if things aren't going well. They are there to help.