



Sensory Room Reference Guide

August 2017



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Sensory Room - Purpose and Objective

Historically, sensory rooms have been used mainly with people with moderate to severe developmental disabilities and older adults with cognitive impairments. It is now more widely used in acute inpatient mental healthcare settings with varied populations, incorporating a variety of sensory modulation approaches. Sensory rooms offer a nurturing, recovery-oriented therapeutic environment.

The use of sensory rooms in acute care inpatient psychiatric settings has been endorsed by the Joint Commission in hospital surveys and promoted as an instrumental intervention influencing the reduction of seclusion and restraints in mental health care settings.

The purpose of the sensory modulation room is to provide clients with options for recognizing and reducing levels of distress and for changing their alert states (energy levels) to appropriately meet the demands of the environment.

Sensory-Motor Strategies

Clients will be taught sensory-motor strategies in 3 stages.

STAGE 1 Identifying Energy Levels	STAGE 2 Experimenting with Sensory Motor Strategies	STAGE 3 Managing Energy Levels
Clients will learn to identify energy levels: (See Attachment A) Low – feeling sluggish, sad or depressed Just Right – feeling alert, happy, and able to get along with others. High – feeling hyperactive, anxious, frustrated and/or aggressive.	Clients will have the opportunity to experiment with items from the sensory room that can help change their energy levels. Staff will assist clients in selecting items from the following categories: - o Look–Visual Input - o Listen–Auditory Input - o Smell–Olfactory Input - o Something in your Mouth–Taste / Oral Motor - o Touch–Tactile Input - o Move–Vestibular/Proprioceptive Input	Clients learn to independently select and use strategies to manage their energy levels The goal for optimal functioning is a mid-range or “just right” energy level. They master how to change their energy levels for a variety of settings. Staff provides continued support and guidance as needed.

Using the Sensory Room – For Individual Use

Step 1

Check with the charge RN to determine if sensory room is available and appropriate for the patient based on their clinical history and presenting status

Step 2

Patient to fill out the "Before" section of the Sensory Modulation Room Questionnaire, found on PolicyStat or at the nurses' station.

Step 3

Staff to provide direct supervisor of patients at all times when sensory room is being used.

Step 4

Patient to fill out the "After" section of the Sensory Modulation Room Questionnaire. Staff to fill out feedback portion. When complete, should be filed in medical record after charge RN has reviewed.

Step 5

Patient to clean equipment with help from staff.

Things to consider when using the sensory room:

- Patient must be willing to follow directions by 2 prompts and agree to be safe.
- 30 minutes recommended but flexibility encouraged.
- This is a therapeutic intervention, not a playroom

Using the Sensory Room – Detailed Explanation of Steps

For Individual Use:

Step 1

Check with the charge nurse for availability of room. Charge RN to determine whether the sensory room would be an appropriate option for a patient using the criteria below.

*The sensory modulation room is to be used only as a therapeutic intervention. It is not a playroom.

Criteria for Use	Staff Approach	Patient Safety
CPI Anxiety Level – A noticeable change in one’s behavior. Common causes: • Sense of loss of control • Sense of disconnection • Lack of competence/confidence • Internal conflict Physical symptoms: • Pacing • Withdrawal • Inability to focus • Change in affect/facial expressions • Fidgeting • Loud and attention seeking behaviors.	Supportive – An empathic, non-judgmental attempt to alleviate anxiety. • Know your patient – history, triggers, coping skills, alternative methods or distractions. • Remain in CARE (calm & collected, appropriate, respectful, empathic). • Attempt to engage patient in talking about anxiety. • Offer alternatives such as the sensory room as a positive way to manage feelings and emotions.	Safety considerations: • Must be able to contract to safe and appropriate use of the sensory room. • Must be able to follow staff directions by 2 prompts. • Removal from room once escalating to CPI Defensive Level, i.e. testing limits and challenging authority. General precautions: • Allergies • Open sores • Seizure disorders • Hypersensitivities • Respiratory precautions • Cardiac precautions

Step 2

Instruct patient to fill out the “Before” section of the Sensory Modulation Room Questionnaire (Attachment B) *before* using the sensory room. This form can be found in the sensory room.

- Patients check one box that represents how they are feeling.

Step 3

Staff to provide direct supervision at all times when sensory room in use.

Step 4

Instruct patient to fill out the “After” section of the Sensory Modulation Room Questionnaire *after* using the sensory room. Staff to fill out feedback portion. Place completed form in patient medical record – assessment section, after RN has reviewed.

- Patients check which activities were helpful from the following categories:
 - o Look – Visual Input
 - o Listen – Auditory Input
 - o Smell – Olfactory Input
 - o Something in your Mouth – Taste/Oral Motor Input

- o Touch – Tactile Input
- o Move – Vestibular / Proprioceptive Input
- o Patients check one box that represents how they are feeling.

Step 5

Assist patient in cleaning equipment that was used.
Use hospital-approved disinfectant in spray bottle or sanitary wipes.

- Cleaning supplies are kept at nurses' station.
*Sensory room to be locked when not in use.

Sensory Room Inventory and Cleaning

Inventory to be completed daily by night shift.

- Sign off to account for all items listed
- Check for any missing or damaged items, document any incidents
- Notify Unit Clerk of missing or damaged equipment

Cleaning to be completed daily by night shift.

- Use hospital-approved disinfectant according to manufacturer directions
- Document cleaning has been completed

Attachment A | Stage 1: Identifying Energy Levels

Engines in Low



Feeling sluggish, sad or depressed

Engines in Just Right



Feeling alert, happy and able to get along with others

Engines in High



Feeling hyperactive, anxious, frustrated and/or aggressive