

Sensory Backpacks and the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center

Outdoor Family Fun!

For children with sensory differences, choosing to leave the comfort zone of indoor routines can be intimidating—but—with the right resources, all kinds of fun and growth can be achieved! Here we offer suggestions on how to put together a sensory backpack. A sensory backpack contains items that will help a child with sensory differences to feel comfortable outside. We also provide information about the *Inclusive Recreation Resource Center*, an interactive web resource that families can use to explore inclusive outdoor recreation areas. Knowing what to expect ahead of time can help a child with sensory differences to feel more comfortable. The *Inclusive Recreation Resource Center* helps families to plan outings that everyone can enjoy!







Sensory Backpack for Families on the Go!

The Sensory Backpack contains items to aid children with various sensory differences such as Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), sensory processing disorder and other intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. It was developed by the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center headquartered at SUNY Cortland. Items in the backpack were selected based on research that has shown the benefit they can have for calming, de-escalating, communication and/or re-focusing children who need additional support.








Please use this guide to learn the reason and use for each item in the backpack. It is important to remember that your child's needs will vary based on your child's individuality. The Inclusive Recreation Resource Center encourages you to add to and individualize your child's backpack.

Sensory Backpack



Benefit	Item	Use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tactile Stimulation - Sensory Reduction - Enhanced Focus 	 <p>Fidget Toy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides tactile stimulation through push buttons, switches, clickers, and rotators. Tactile stimulation is often useful for sensory reduction and/or enhancing focus for people with ASD and/or ADHD - Use this if there is a lot of auditory input or when hyperactivity is a concern - Not recommended for use during hands-on activities - Closely monitor the use of the toy so it does not become a distraction or projectile
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tactile Stimulation - Sanitary Reassurance - Anxiety relief 	 <p>Pocket Pack Facial Tissues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides a soft object to squeeze, hold, and calm kids with tactile stimulation - Can create a sanitary environment for comfort; tissue provides a way to pick items up, blow nose, etc. - Tissue can be crumpled or torn to relieve anxiety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noise Reduction - Anxiety relief 	 <p>Noise Cancelling Headphones</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Muting noise in loud environments provides a sense of comfort and respite to children with sensory needs - Use headphones to play soothing MP3 audio - Closely monitor the use of this item so it does not become a distraction or a projectile
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sunlight Protection - Sensory Reduction 	 <p>Sunglasses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct sunlight can be overstimulating to children with sensory needs - These glasses provide respite from the sunlight during outdoor activity or in highly fluorescent indoor settings - In addition, if your child engages in repetitive eye-poking or other stereotypic behaviors, eye covering can be useful to prevent this behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anxiety relief - Comfort and Relaxation 	 <p>Album of Calming Nature Photos</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A photo album filled with pictures of relaxing scenes from nature - During times of escalation this album can be used as a quiet activity and redirection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tactile Stimulation - Stress Reliever 	 <p>Stretchy Smiley FacePeople</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides tactile stimulation through texture, stretchiness, and squishy sound - Use this if other fidget toy is too distracting. Stretchy fidget toys helps kids who are soothed by texture and feeling - Can be used as a stress reliever for anxiety, or as a fidget toy when your child does better with an object in hand

Sensory Backpack, continued

Benefit	Item	Use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactile Stimulation • Reminder to Take Deep Breaths 	 <p>Squeeze Toys</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Squeeze toys are generally used to calm children who are escalating into non-positive behavior • It can serve as a reminder to take a deep breath when experiencing a stressful situation or difficult task. Encourage your child to take a deep breath while squeezing the toy firmly • This toy is not to be thrown or bounced but rather to be held onto tightly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Verbal Communication 	 <p>Communication Board</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This board can be used to communicate a child's needs via pictures and will provide a child's needs via pictures; such as using the bathroom, I want to play, I don't feel well, I need a break etc. • Communication boards are often used for children who are non-verbal communicators or who benefit from additional communication like pictures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calming Strategy • Manage Emotions 	 <p>Calming Strategy Cards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can help your child visualize and/or understand how to manage emotions • Initially, should be used when your child is calm and ready to learn • Go over the calming strategies so your child learns appropriate ways to express and/or cope with their emotions • Have the cards present when your child is experiencing heightened emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calming Strategy • Enhance Positive Thinking • Relieve Anxiety and Overstimulation 	 <p>Wrist Band</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snapping the wrist band is a calming strategy for many people experiencing sensory overload or anxiety • Wristbands can also be used to counteract negative thoughts and focus thinking on positive thoughts • Your child can wear a wristband when they feel themselves becoming more anxious or overstimulated • Teach your child to snap the band on their wrist as they repeat a phrase they choose (e.g., "I am not going to let anxiety control me" or "I am going to take deep breaths now")
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Behaviors • Manage Emotions 	 <p>Stories</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social stories are an effective way to discuss behaviors and expectations through an interactive and fun learning experience. Social stories can be beneficial for many people; however, one population that greatly benefits from this type of interactive learning style are children with Autism Spectrum Disorders • Review this story (daily, if possible) so the child can truly grasp the concept identification of emotions and how to manage them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non Verbal Pictorial Communications 	 <p>Keychain Visuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each keychain card has a different want, need, task, or question on it that both the child and facilitator can use to communicate more effectively • For example, to find out if the participant needs to use the bathroom, you can find that card and show them; and vice versa • Modify each card set to meet individual needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanitary Reassurance 	 <p>Wet Ones Travel Pack</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with sensory disorders or OCD may rely on sanitary environments for comfort; wet wipes or sanitary napkins provide the security of knowing they'll be able to sanitize an environment quickly. • Often used on doorknobs before entering/ exiting rooms or on seats that are used by other participants • Can also be used to sanitize the contents of the sensory backpack after use

The Inclusive Recreation Resource Center

We help people of all abilities play wherever they choose!



The Inclusive Recreation Resource Center is A Free Online Recreation Database

- This database helps people with disabilities and their families and friends better plan their recreation experiences by knowing what to expect before they leave home!
- Public parks, forests and recreation areas are entered into the online database. Families can search this database by activity, venue, and location.
- Certified Inclusivity Assessors have personally reviewed thousands of recreation sites in New York State and even around the World!

Try it! <http://search.inclusiverec.org>

Other ways to get involved with inclusive outdoor recreation:

Inclusion U Online

Inclusion U Online is open to anyone who is interested in contributing to the online recreation database. This self-guided training program teaches you about inclusion and will give you the skills you need to become a Certified Inclusivity Assessor (CIA)! Once you complete Inclusion U, you are able to complete inclusivity assessments and submit the results to the IRRC online recreation database. As a CIA, you can also enroll an unlimited number of people in the free Inclusion Ambassador Training. <https://inclusiverec.org/sites/default/files/temp/Inclusion%20U%20Online%20Handout%202018.pdf>

Inclusion Ambassador Training

The Inclusion Ambassador Training Online is an exciting way for youth and others to earn certificates and badges as they learn how to promote inclusion, whether as a part of a Scout activity, a summer recreation staff training, a junior camp counselor activity, a 4-H project or other avenues. The 3-hour online training is hosted by a teenager with Down syndrome, Jess, who guides students through the 6 units in the training via animated cartoons. Social media is used to post experiential projects and activities. After taking quizzes and a final exam, students become Inclusion Ambassadors. The Inclusion Ambassador Training is available for free to any Certified Inclusivity Assessor who has completed Inclusion U Online. A CIA can invite as many people as they would like to complete the training for free. Ideally, the full-time staff at an agency would complete Inclusion U Online, then invite and mentor their part-time and seasonal staff through the Inclusion Ambassador Training.

<https://inclusiverec.org/inclusion-ambassador-training>

Inclusivity Assessment Tool

With the user-friendly Inclusivity Assessment Tool, Certified Inclusivity Assessors can assess physical accessibility and programmatic and administrative inclusion at recreation facilities and programs.

<https://inclusiverec.org/inclusivity-assessment-tool>

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