



OT Pulse

THIS MONTH'S EVIDENCE INVENTORY & FIELDWORK INTERN HIGHLIGHT



Evidence Highlight: Sensory Strategies

What are the big takeaways from current research?

- **Sensory assessment is necessary prior to sensory intervention:** AOTA's Choosing Wisely campaign emphasizes the importance of sensory assessment (to determine sensory systems most affected and sensory vulnerabilities) prior to sensory intervention, to ensure effective intervention.
- **Alternative seating:** A systematic review by Grajo et al. (2020) found that although stability balls are often used to improve in-seat and on-task behavior, standard chairs were found to be more effective than stability balls in the classroom. There is emerging evidence to support use of stability balls with students with ADHD.

- **Fidgets:** Research has demonstrated the importance of fidgeting/movement for students with ADHD. Educate staff and families on how students with ADHD may need gross motor activity more frequently to meet cognitive and academic demands (Rapport et al. 2009; Sarver, 2015). As research shows that fidgeting increases with time on-task, consider offering a fidget mid-way through a lesson that the student has difficulty attending to (i.e. 15 minutes into a 30 minute writing lesson). Offering universal fidgets that are always available (e.g. foot fidget tied to chair, Velcro attached to desk) may be an unobtrusive suggestion. Clearly defining the purpose and rules of the fidget to staff and students (e.g. fidgets should help you learn, fidgets must not distract your peers) can help everyone confidently follow through with recommendations.
- **Weighted & compression vests:** As research on weighted vests is extremely limited, and positive evidence on the use of pressure vests and weighted blankets is non-existent, use with caution. Grajo et al. (2020) and an earlier systematic review found insufficient evidence to use weighted vests for children with ASD (Bodison & Parham, 2018). The study with the highest level of evidence and largest sample size for students with ADHD, used a vest at 10% of the participant's weight, worn during the activity that the participant was to attend to (Lin et al., 2014). Based on this information, using a vest at 10% of the student's weight, 1-2 times during the school day when the student is having the greatest difficulty attending, might be a starting point.
- **Wilbarger approach:** As there is limited evidence to support this approach, consider alternative interventions first. Although evidence is weak, research suggests positive outcomes when the complete Wilbarger Approach is implemented which includes parent/child education, a sensory diet, and the Therapressure program. Kimball and Benson (2013) recommend that the Therapressure portion should not be used in isolation.



Intern Highlight: Sydney Landsman

Sydney Landsman is a Master's Occupational Therapy student at NYIT. Sydney completed a literature search and article reviews for the Sensory Strategy section of the Evidence Inventory.

"I had such a wonderful experience at the DOE for my level II fieldwork. My biggest takeaway is to always be flexible, patient, and fully engaged with the students and of course make it fun!

I was able to apply my research findings on sensory strategies to my fieldwork experience. I incorporated evidence-based strategies into my treatment sessions. I also had the opportunity to share my research findings with teachers so they can utilize the strategies in the classroom as well.

I have grown as a student practitioner over the course of my fieldwork at the DOE and it helped me become more confident in my practice. I gained so much knowledge that will prepare me for a future position as an occupational therapist in a school setting. I am so thankful to have had this experience and I would highly recommend the DOE for a fieldwork placement!"

Interested in becoming a Fieldwork educator?

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