

# School Sensory Rooms

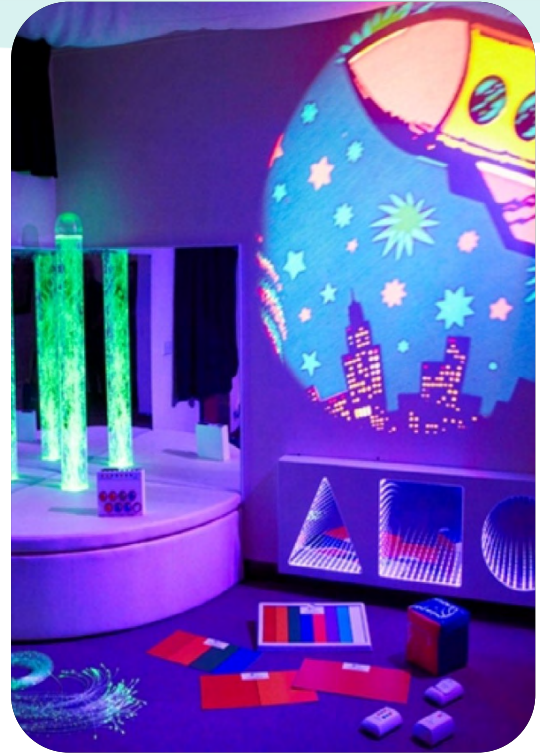
Provide students an environment to explore together, develop key skills, and promote well-being.

## What is a sensory room?

[Sensory rooms](#) are now common in schools, hospitals and community centers. These rooms use sensory equipment to create a controlled sensory-focused environment. These environments allow sensory experiences to be individually tailored to meet the specific needs of an individual.

Good sensory rooms are well structured so that the amount and intensity of a sensory experience can be easily controlled and monitored. This is essential when using a sensory room to manage overstimulation and stress or to provide sensory integration therapy to individuals with sensory processing challenges.

Too much stimulation can further escalate problem behaviors. Conversely, not enough stimulation can render the experience ineffective.



## What is the purpose of a school sensory room?

Sensory rooms can serve multiple purposes. They can promote self-organization, be a calming area, provide leisure, help with sensory integration, or act as skill training centers. They also provide great inclusion spaces that all students can explore together. Since the experiences inside a sensory room are not readily accessible to most students most general education students are highly motivated to participate in inclusion activities inside sensory rooms.

## Why have a sensory room and who do they help?

Those with multiple disabilities often have sensory impairments. By controlling sensory input in the room it is possible to eliminate distractions and assist people to attend to specific objects that may help them make sense of their external environment. Cause and effect activities that work with switches or controllers, [interactive floors](#), [interactive panels](#), or [equipment with buttons](#) work especially well in these instances.

A well designed room can also serve people of all ages, multiple disabilities, as well as facilitators, teachers, parents, caregivers, and therapists.



## What is the research on sensory rooms?

Research on sensory rooms is ongoing. So far studies have shown they are useful for reducing and managing stress and aggression. Therapists have also used the room for “supporting reflective learning during critical incident debriefing” (1, 2, 3, 4, 8) They can also reduce stereotyped/repetitive behaviors in adolescents and adults. (3, 5, 6, 11) Use of the room can also increase attention and focus. (8, 11)

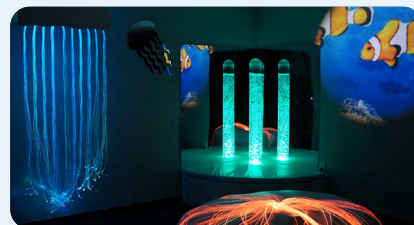
### A sensory room can also provide these additional benefits:



**Creates an Interactive & Comfortable Environment**



**Creates a Safe Crisis & De-Escalation Space**



**Modulate the Environment in a Controlled Space**

### How do schools and mental health facilities use sensory rooms?

- Reduce Stress
- Motivate Learning
- Increase Interaction (12)
- Increase Focus (11, 12)
- Reduce Aggression (9)
- Reduce Stereotyped/Repetitive Behaviors (11)
- Work on Inclusion and Social Skills (12)
- Assist with Sensory Integration Therapy (12)

## How do you set up a sensory room?

Before designing the room it is important to consider:

- 1** The individual needs of the clients who will use the room. What are the ages, cognitive abilities, mobility and educational and sensory needs of the individuals who will use the room?
- 2** How many individuals will need to use the room at the same time?
- 3** How the room will be used. Will the room be a calming area? Will it be used for therapy sessions including occupational therapy, speech, sensory integration therapy, or one on one instruction?
- 4** Who will have access to the room? Will they need training? Will you need to design a room with equipment that does not require special training?
- 5** Keep in mind the long term use of the room. If all of your equipment is static, students can become bored. A good goal is to create a flexible space that allows you to create different scenes or moods depending on the emotional, cognitive, and physical needs of the students. How will the room be adapted to meet changing needs and keep it interesting? [Projectors](#), [interactive floors and walls](#) can be very helpful with this.



### Need Help? Let's Build it Together.

Our professional design consults can work with you to create an inclusive, controlled sensory-focused environment based on your students sensory needs.

**Call us at (877) 249-2393**

## Common Components of a Sensory Room

- [Bubble Tube Corner](#)
- [Projectors](#)
- [Therapy Balls](#)
- [Interactive Floors](#)
- [Swings](#)
- [Weighted Blankets](#)
- [Fiber Optic Sprays or Lighting](#)
- [Beanbag Chairs](#)
- [Aromatherapy Diffuser Kit](#)
- [Vibro-Acoustic Chairs](#)
- [Rocking Chairs](#)
- [Sensory Toys](#)
- [Interactive Wall Boards](#)

### Why do sensory rooms have bubble tubes?

A common component of many sensory rooms is a bubble tube. It is often placed in a corner with two mirrors installed to give the illusion that there are three bubble tubes instead of one. Usually a platform is built around the tube so that students can sit near the tube and touch it.

Bubble tubes are installed in sensory rooms for a variety of reasons:

- **Sensory stimulation-** bubble tubes provide visual sensory stimulation. They often have LED lights that change colors and watching the bubbles float up through a variety of lighting effects provides sensory input. Some bubble tubes also have a vibrating component that allows for a multi-sensory experience.
- **Calming visual focal point-** A common calming activity is to find somewhere to place your attention while you relax and center your mind. Often students will be prompted to focus on their breath, heartbeat, or “visualize” something. However, students that have trouble with abstract concepts have an easier time focusing their attention on an external object. A bubble tube’s rhythmic bubble motion provides a concrete, calming visual focal point.
- **Meet IEP or learning goals-** some bubble tubes come with switches that allow students to change colors, turn on and off, or change light patterns. Teachers will use these switches to teach a variety of IEP goals including cause and effect, colors, or other attributes such as on and off. (1)

### Why do sensory rooms have projectors?

Another common component of many sensory rooms is a projector. Sensory room projectors often have rotator wheels that slowly rotate an image or project images across a room. They are nice to have because you can quickly change the theme of the room by switching out the image. You can often buy a blank projector wheel and print out images of your own to match a theme, season, or lesson. The slowly rotating images also create a calming visual focal point for those who are anxious, over-stimulated, or stressed.



### Do you have to have a bubble tube in a sensory room?

Most assume that if you are going to have a sensory room you must have a bubble tube. This assumption is not true. A bubble tube should be placed in a room based upon the goals of the facility.

### What if you can't afford a bubble tube?

If you can't afford a bubble tube that is OK. You can have a sensory room without one. A bubble tube provides an interesting focal point. You can create an interesting focal point that provides soothing visual movement using an aquarium with fish, a [jellyfish lamp](#), or a [projector](#). Our jellyfish lamp is an affordable alternative to a bubble tube. It works well in sensory rooms, homes, and classrooms.

## What color to paint the room?

It is best to paint a sensory room white. This allows different visual effects to show up better when they are projected on a wall. A note about an all white room. Some sensory rooms are completely white with white walls and white soft flooring. This can be a challenge for those with visual impairments. It limits the number of visual cues making it difficult to differentiate between the walls, floor, door, and doorframe. Also this can make keeping the floor clean difficult!

## More Set up Tips

- Make sure that you have adequate space between equipment so that students can move freely. Quiet and uncrowded spaces are essential for managing overstimulation and stress. (10)
- Before ordering equipment make sure you have budgeted money for installation. Check to make sure the room is set up with adequate electrical outlets. Depending on the equipment you order, you may need to include a contractor and/or electrician in your budget.
- When designing the layout of your room pay attention to where the electrical outlets are located. You can save a lot of money by simply placing equipment near an existing outlet.
- Smaller areas within a larger sensory room can be created that give students an opportunity to explore objects and people close to them. You can divide up the space using sound sponge dividers or hanging curtains with different materials.
- Windows may need to be darkened if light effects are going to be used. You can cover them with dark paper, use blackout curtains, or install blinds.
- Think about your floor coverings. Some room designs cover the entire floor with wall to wall mats. However, this creates an unstable surface that can be difficult for those with mobility issues to move independently and may limit wheelchair access.
- Carpet: go for plain colors if the floor is highly patterned it will detract from other features in the room and could cause overstimulation. For those prone to sensory overload it is important to provide a blank place to look at.
- Any equipment with a heat source should be positioned where there is plenty of ventilation so that the equipment does not overheat.

## Staff Training is a Must

Unfortunately, chaotic and unpredictable environments are sometimes created when a room is poorly designed or personnel are not trained how to properly use the room. It is essential that the support personal understand how to use the room itself, not just the equipment inside it.

It is more important how you use the space not what you have in it. One of the most common mistakes is to go into a sensory room and turn on every piece of equipment. This can be very over stimulating for some. If used incorrectly students can exhibit self-injurious or aggressive behavior. Remember the equipment is only as good as the person using it.

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