

## Sensory Diet Activities

# Using Chewy Tools



When we're feeling overwhelmed or needing some type of input to help us feel centred and calm, placing something in our mouth, chewing or sucking can be the "just right" input we're looking for.

In developmental terms the mouth is a very "organising" place and utilising the muscles around the mouth while coordinating a suck, swallow and breathe pattern can assist in regulating energy and focus.

## WHAT are chewy tools?

- These refer to a variety of heavy duty oral motor tools which are specifically designed to be placed in the mouth for chewing and sucking.
- They now come in a wide variety of styles including necklaces, pencil toppers, bangles and hand held items.
- These items are specifically designed for chewing and will tolerate a moderate degree of chewing. Some may not be suitable for vigorous chewers and biters.
- Sugar free gums also fit into the category of "chewy tools" and can be used very effectively.

## Who would use chewy tools?

- Children who need some input through their muscles and joints to assist them in regulating their energies and focusing throughout the day.
- Children who are easily overwhelmed or anxious and would benefit from an organising and calming tool.
- Children who actively seek oral motor stimulation and may tend to suck on shirt collars, chew vigorously on pencils or place non food items in their mouths
- Children who are under the guidance of a therapist for the development of oral motor skills relating to language, eating or general motor control around the mouth
- Chewy tools for self regulation are not typically recommended for children under the age of 3 for safety reasons.

## WHEN would you use chewy tools?

- In a class environment children might have access to their chewy tools at set times throughout the day to assist them with focus and regulation. These times might include
  - Quiet desk work time
  - Reading times
  - Mat time for younger students
- Children who become readily overwhelmed or anxious may benefit from access to chewy tools at busier times of the day such as:
  - Assembly hall
  - Transitioning between activities

## Safety and Chewy Tools

- Chewy tools should be regularly checked to ensure they are not cracked or broken in any way. They need to be removed and replaced if they are found to be deteriorating.
- Monitor a child's safety when utilising chewy tools placed on a lanyard around their neck.
- If a child tends to place the entire chewy tool in their mouth, consider the type of tools you are using and perhaps modify this to a larger and more robust style.

As with all sensory tools, chewy tools should be trialled across a variety of environments. Guidelines may have to be set in place to help the child understand the role of this tool and when it may be best utilised.

This resources series is brought to you by Magnetic Moves. We develop and supply tools, practical information and workshops to aid parents, teachers and carers with interest in Sensory Processing Disorders in pre-school and school aged children.

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