

The low arousal approach aims to reduce individual stress responses to triggers in the environment. It helps the individual to feel more in control and so increases a sense of calm and confidence, reducing overwhelm and adverse reactions to the environment. It can be particularly useful for autistic children, ADHD children or those with sensory processing difficulties. It provides a gentle approach self-regulation and positive behaviours by addressing some of the causes.

Remember – children do not yet have the tools to cope with the things that trigger their overwhelm, strong emotions or meltdowns, otherwise they wouldn't have them.

## Essentials to remember with the low arousal approach:

- Predictability
  - Sensory input for the individual (smells, sights, textures etc)
  - Organisation
  - Evaluating our own responses
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- Make a list of known triggers for children – this could be loud noises, physical touch, direct eye contact etc. The more you can eliminate or compensate for these, the less on edge a child will feel.
  - Reduce visual overwhelm – this could be backing all displays in the same calming colour, ensuring the walls are free from clutter and unnecessary posters, reviewing the décor and replacing busy wallpapers with calm neutral colours such as white or cream.
  - Organise the environment – put toys into drawers with clear picture labels; not every toy has to be available continuously, some could be requestable. If you have large open shelves add a sliding curtain to reduce overwhelm of choice.
  - Have a predictable rhythm to the day – this does not mean activities have to be the same everyday. Establish key parts of the day and keep them predictable – for example at a mealtime the steps to the meal will happen in the same order every day. Children will learn the order and feel calmer having the predictability.

- Provide a quiet retreat – a book area, cosy corner, dark den, sheet over a table, giant cardboard box! You can create this in many different ways, make a place with some sensory toys, a child's calm box, a choice of cushions or blankets that they can go to on their own or with their key person when they feel overwhelmed.
- Try not to make anything too exciting or overwhelming – sometimes the anticipation and excitement around an announcement can be enough to overwhelm a child as they are triggered by their high emotional response or that of those around them. Instead look at how you could make things low key.
- On overwhelming days reduce demand and increase calming opportunities – try strategies like calm music, deep pressure massage, dark spaces with lights or physical activity such as pushing, jumping, spinning or swinging.
- Address sensory difficulties through a sensory diet – regularly schedule opportunities to meet a child's sensory needs throughout the day. This could be a physical activity, safe objects to mouth, calming experiences. Many children with sensory processing difficulties are often on high alert all day which triggers many meltdowns.

*Every child is unique and highly individual; what is overstimulating for one child will be fine for another. Know your children, reflect on their individual needs and support them to thrive.*

