

Multisensory Environments

What is a multisensory environment (MSE)?

A **multisensory environment is a space for a person with sensory sensitivities**. It is a predictable, controlled area that helps a person interact with objects and other people without distractions. When everyday sensory experiences become overwhelming, multisensory rooms allow a person to explore at their own pace.

What are the benefits of a multisensory environment?

A **multisensory environment provides a relaxing and calming effect by using sensory supports in a controlled and predictable space**. The MSE can help improve concentration, focus attention and improve memory for people who need help with self-regulation. MSEs have also been shown to promote brain and motor development and coordination. There are often opportunities to develop social interactions and communications with peers and caregivers.

Sensory Haven at the Dallas Museum of Art

At the Dallas Museum of Art, our multisensory environment is called a *sensory haven* and it is located in the Tech Lab. Our sensory haven contains objects that provide touch, sound, sight, smell, and movement. These objects provide a variety of sensations, such as back and forth movement, deep pressure touch, and body warmth.



Some of the items that you might see in a sensory haven:

- **Light displays**
- **Sound systems**
- **Furniture with textures**
- **Swings and rockers**
- **Weighted blankets**
- **Lightweight comforters**
- **Aromatherapy**

Encourage the person to:

- Touch different objects as they explore the sensory haven
 - Listen to different sounds that are in the room
- Experience the equipment by rocking, climbing and crawling

Sensory Haven Agreements

- Take care of the items in the sensory haven
- Put items away neatly after using them – they stay in the sensory haven
- Give broken items to a staff member
- Take off your shoes if you want to
- Share the items with others
- Have fun!

What can I do when someone is overstimulated at the Dallas Museum of Art?

- Decrease sensory stimuli to a minimum
- Visit the sensory haven which includes calming sensory tools
- Allow him/her to come out of the sensory haven on his/her own terms

What are easy and mindful sensory strategies to support a person's self-regulation to avoid meltdown?

- Get the person moving
- Get below the person's eye level and whisper
- Give firm hugs from behind or deep pressure to the body
- Change the environment or situation

Simple ways you can engage in the multisensory environments in your own community

- Physically explore outdoor environments
- Walk barefoot on different surfaces
- Visit an aquarium
- Play in ball pits
- Use playground equipment like swings, seesaws, merry-go-rounds
- Visit perfume counters
- Interact with animals

References:

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