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1) What do you think is a language rich environment?

2) What do you think your setting is already doing well?

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Objective for Today

- Understanding what is a language rich environment
- Different learning styles
- Explore multimodal communication
- Learn practical implementations strategies

This isn't SEND teaching

This is GOOD teaching

What is a language rich environment?

A **purposely designed** physical and emotional space that maximizes communication through resources, interaction, and high-quality exposure.

The 5 Pillars

1. **Exposure:** High-quality stories and routines

2. **Deliberateness:** Intentional word choices.

3. **Recurrence:** Repetition across contexts.

4. **High-Quality Input:** Varied and complex language.

5. **Responsiveness:** Validating every attempt.

Key Features:

•**Physical:** Labelled classrooms, sensory bins, and open-ended wooden toys.
•**Interactive:** Adult "narration" and modelling of speech.
•**Visual:** Gestures, speech bubbles, and visual schedules.

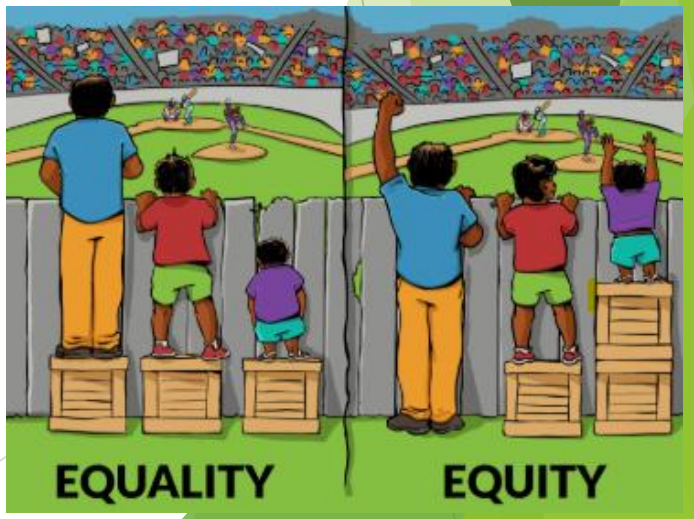
Why It Matters – The Case for Equity

The Universal Benefit	The Science of Support
Mainstream + SEND: Strategies that support specific needs actually enhance learning for everyone.	**Reduces Cognitive Load:** Visuals act as a permanent reference, lowering anxiety and mental fatigue.
Supports All Learning Styles: Visual, Kinesthetic, Auditory, and Reading/Writing.	**Builds Independence:** When children understand the environment, they engage without constant adult prompting.

The Core Concept: Equity Over "Effort“

- **Physical Disability:** We provide a ramp for a wheelchair.
- **Communication Disability (SLCN):** We provide a language-rich, visual environment.

Neither child needs to "try harder"—they need the right tools.



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Visual - these people learn best by **seeing**, responding to visual cues like images, graphs or charts. They might be distracted by seeing things outside.

Auditory- these people learn best by **hearing**, responding to auditory cues like verbal instruction, discussions or songs. They might be distracted by outside noises.

Read/Write - These people learn best by **reading and writing**, responding to written cues like lecture notes, books and cue cards. They might be distracted by poorly worded text, or text that doesn't match speech.

Kinesthetics -- these people learn best by **doing**, responding to tactile cues like movement, actions and real-life examples. They might be distracted by uncomfortable seats or room temperatures.

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What are learning styles?

Learning styles are grouped together in different ways individuals prefer to learn. They categorise people based on their style of learning or the way they learn best. Every individual has a unique learning preference that falls into one, some or all of these categories

Consider this scenario:

Imagine someone is explaining a new concept to you and your having trouble understanding them What will help you understand the best is it:

- Seeing a diagram or illustration about the concept?
- The person repeating themselves or explaining things verbally in further detail?
- Seeing a written explanation?
- Connecting the concept to a real- life example?

Multimodal Communication – The "Communication Mix

The Definition	The Two Branches
Using **more than one method** simultaneously to convey or receive a message. It moves beyond just speech to ensure meaning is "wrapped" around the learner.	**1. Unaided (Body-Based):** Facial expressions, body language, gestures, and vocalizations. **2. Aided (Tools-Based):** Low-tech symbols/boards and high-tech AAC devices or iPads.

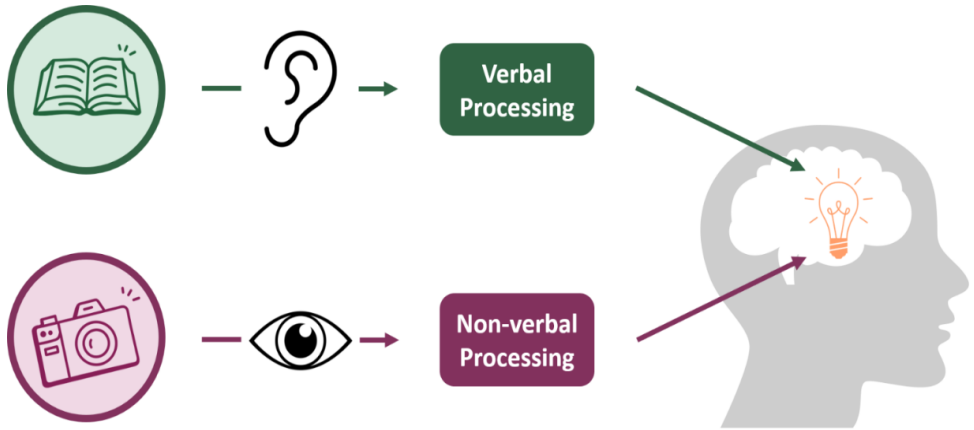
Why It Works:

- **Intentional & Systematic:** We don't wait for speech to fail; we use all modes together.
- **Supports Understanding:** Multiple "inputs" make it easier for the brain to decode meaning.
- **Total Communication:** Every gesture or sound is recognized as a valid message.

Key Takeaway - We don't wait for one method to fail before we try another.

Why Multimodal Communication Matters

The Science: Dual Coding	The Impact: Universal Benefits
Double Encoding: Storing info in both visual and verbal subsystems creates a "backup" for memory.	**Reduces Frustration:** Provides an "exit ramp" for children who have thoughts but can't find words, preventing behavioral outbursts.
Lowers Cognitive Load: Offloading work from the phonological loop to the visual cortex frees up "brain bandwidth" for learning.	**Increases Processing Time:** Unlike speech, which is transient, visuals stay in the field of vision, giving the brain more time to decode.



Universal Design for Learning (UDL):

- **SEND:** Essential access for those with processing disorders.
- **EAL/Mainstream:** Supports those learning English or feeling overwhelmed.
- **Inclusion:** Shrinks the gap between verbal and non-verbal peers.

The Benefits in the Classroom

Reduces "Communicative Frustration"
When a child has a "word" in their head but cannot physically say it, behaviour often becomes their communication (hitting, screaming). Providing symbols or signs gives them an immediate "exit ramp" for that frustration.

Increases Processing Time
Spoken words disappear the moment they are said.
•**Visual/Physical modes** (like a sign or a symbol) stay in the child's field of vision longer.
•This gives the brain more time to decode the "What" and the "How.“

Builds a "Total Communication" Culture
In a language-rich environment, multimodal communication isn't just for the "SEND kids"—it’s for everyone.
•**Mainstream Benefit:** It supports EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners and children who are tired or overwhelmed.
•**Peer Inclusion:** When all children learn a few signs or use symbols, the gap between "verbal" and "non-verbal" students shrinks.

Supports Literacy Foundations
Seeing a symbol alongside a printed word and hearing the spoken word creates a **triple-coding** effect. This strengthens the neural pathways for reading and vocabulary acquisition.

Why Talking Isn't Enough

Small "Mental Workbench": The brain can only hold a tiny amount of spoken info at once (usually between 5 and 9 small pieces).

The Overload Effect: If you speak too fast or give too many steps, the brain "overflows." New info literally pushes the old info out.

Now You See It, Now You Don't: Spoken words are **temporary**. If a student gets distracted for one second, they lose the data forever because there is no "replay" button.

The Bottom Line: To help people learn, we need to stop just *talking* and start *showing*.

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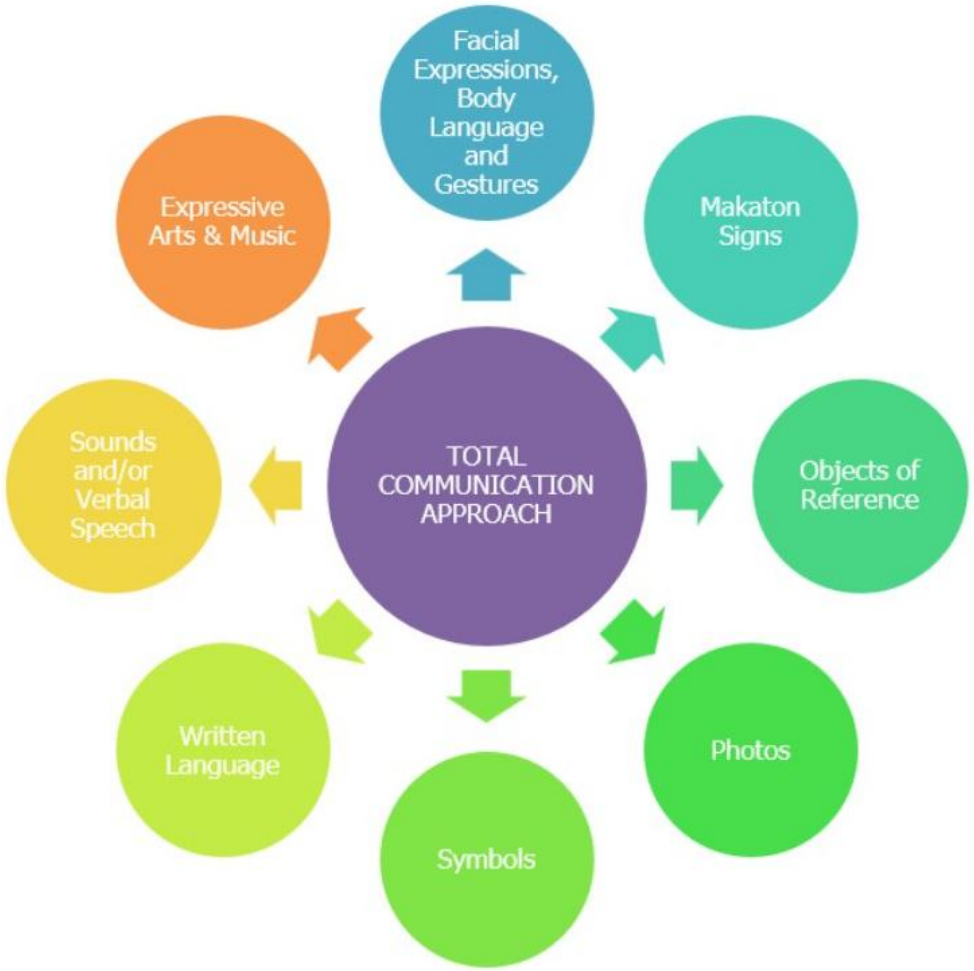


Total Communication Approach

In language-rich environments, we acknowledge that **all behaviour is communication.**

Makaton/Sign Support: Use signs for key functional words (e.g., *more, stop, please, thank you*). In mainstream settings, this supports EAL (English as an Additional Language) students and kinesthetic learners.

Objects of Reference: For students with profound or multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), use physical objects to represent activities (e.g., showing a swimming cap before going to the pool).

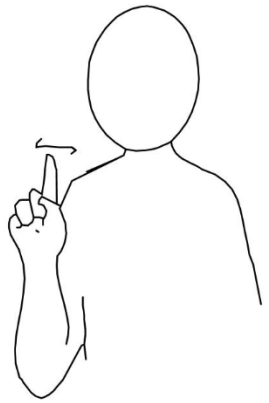
A Note on Success: A language-rich environment is measured not by how much the teacher talks, but by how many opportunities the students have to express themselves—be it through speech, sign, symbols, or AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication).

Workshop Scenarios: The "5-Minute Fix

Instructions:

- In your groups, read the scenario
- Identify **two barriers** to communication
- Identify **two immediate "fixes"** to make the environment more language-rich.

What might this look like?




We're Going on a Bear Hunt
Discovery Bottles
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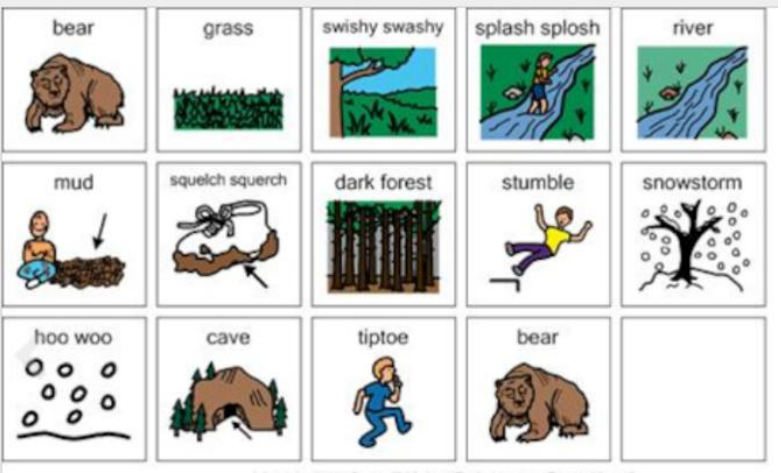
bear
grass
swishy swashy
splash sposh
river
mud
squelch squerch
dark forest
stumble
snowstorm
hoo woo
cave
tiptoe
bear


wood
brick
straw
huffed and puffed


Going On A Bear Hunt

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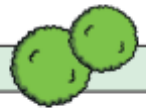
Sensory Story to Support Teaching on Bear Hunt

Start the lesson by playing the song 'Beautiful Day' by U2.

	Suggested Resources	Activity
Read "We're going on..."	A drum, a tray, legs, table. 	Lead adult to tap out the rhythm with a drum. Other adults to tap out the beat on students legs, tables or trays.
UH OH!	Chime.	Repeat to indicate start of each activity.
Grass	Pom-poms 	Pom-poms on knees.
River	Icy or cold water.	Splash using hands/feet.
Mud	Jelly or real mud.	Walk through with feet or manipulate using hands.
Forest	String, net curtain or fabric hung from ceiling.	The idea is to move through the material and have the experience of going through the 'forest'.
Snowstorm 	Fake snow/ice. Silver recovery blankets. Scrunch up paper to makesnowballs.	Feel the snow/ice onhands/feet. Move over materials where appropriate, using different parts of the body.
Cave	Torches, mirrors. 	Use torches to look around the room, look at own faces in the mirror and track lights.
BEAR!	Quick drum beat or tapping.	

Routine and Now & Next (and "Then") Boards

These are the gold standard for reducing anxiety and building "transitional language." They break the day into digestible chunks.

- **Now (The Demand):** The task the student needs to complete (e.g., Math).
- **Next (The Motivator):** The activity immediately following (e.g., Snack).
- **Why it works:** It reduces "cognitive load." The student doesn't have to process the whole day—just the immediate future.

Practical Implementation:

- **Physicality:** Use Velcro. When the "Now" task is finished, let the student physically remove the card and put it in a "Finished" box. This provides a clear linguistic and physical marker of completion.
- **Progressing to "Then":** Once a student masters Now/Next, add a third column (**Then**). This builds the linguistic concept of **sequencing**, which is a precursor to storytelling and complex sentence structure.

ZONES OF REGULATION

The Language of Feelings

The Zones of Regulation framework categorizes feelings into four coloured zones. In a language-rich environment, this moves beyond "behaviour management" and becomes **emotional literacy.**

- **The Blue Zone:** Sad, tired, bored, or moving slowly.
- **The Green Zone:** Calm, focused, happy, or ready to learn.
- **The Yellow Zone:** Frustrated, anxious, silly/wiggly, or losing some control.
- **The Red Zone:** Angry, terrified, or out of control.

Practical Implementation:

- **Check-in Stations:** Have a wall where students place their name or photo in a zone as they enter.
- **Adult Modelling:** Narrate your own zone. *"I'm feeling a bit Blue today because it's raining, so I'm going to drink some water to wake up."* This teaches students that zones are fluid and manageable.
- **The "Toolkit" Link:** Beside the ZOR display, have a "Toolkit" (visuals of strategies like deep breathing, a heavy book, or a 5-minute timer). This bridges the gap between *identifying* a feeling and *communicating* a need.

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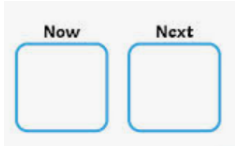
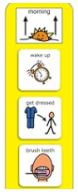
Communication Tools - Comparison Table

Tool	Purpose	Language Skill Targeted
 **Now & Next Board**	Predictability & Transition	Sequencing, understanding "first/then" logic.
 **Zones of Regulation**	Emotional Self-Regulation	Expressing internal states; "I feel..."
 **Visual Timetable**	Whole-class structure	Understanding time, routine, and "later."
 **Choice Boards**	Empowerment & Decision Making	Naming preferences; "I want [X] instead of [Y]."

The "10-Second Silence" Challenge (Pair Work)

Timing: 3 Minutes

The Activity: Ask everyone to find a partner.

Partner A asks a slightly complex question (e.g., *"What is the most challenging part of your morning routine and why?"*).

The Catch: Partner B **must** wait a full 10 seconds (timed by me) before they are allowed to start speaking.

Partner A must remain silent and just "Observe" during that time.

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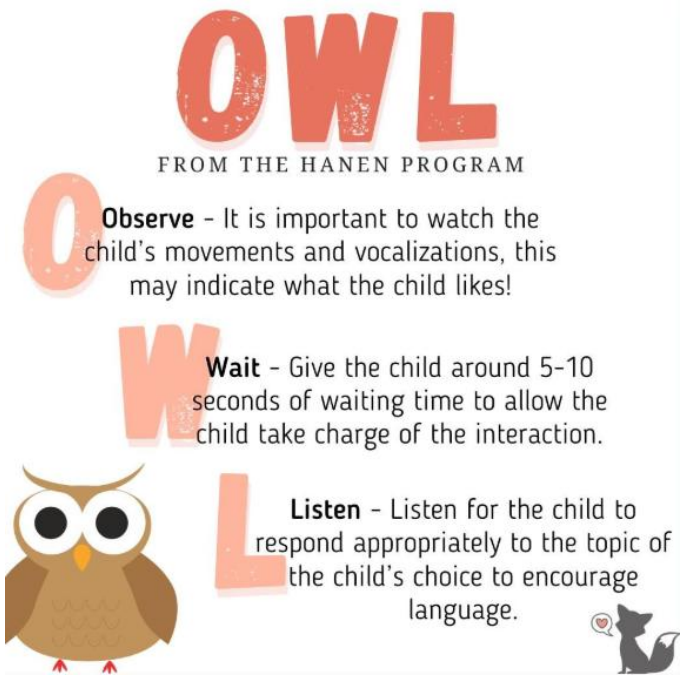
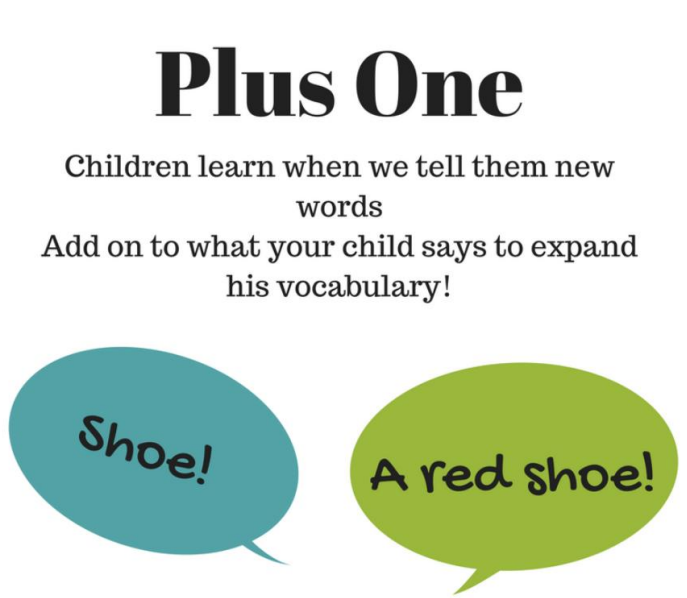
These strategies work across the board to build confidence and fluency.





The "OWL" Technique: Observe, **W**ait, and **L**isten.

Give at least **10 seconds** of processing time after asking a question. In SEND settings, this might need to be **20+ seconds**.

Narrating the Day: Act like a sports commentator for the student's actions.

Example: "You're picking up the blue brush. Now you're painting big circles." This maps language directly onto lived experience without demanding a response.

The "Plus One" Rule: Respond to a student using one more word than they used.

If the child says "Car," you say "Red car.'

If they say "I want juice," you say "I want apple juice."

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The 4 S's (Adult Strategy)

Say Less: Use the "Plus One" rule. If the child speaks in 2-word phrases, you speak in 3.

Stress: Make the key information stand out phonetically.

Slow: Remind them of the **10-second rule**. Silence is a tool, not a failure.

Show: Never speak "naked." Always have a prop, a gesture, or a symbol.

Randomizing and rotating when calling on students

We want to lower students' effective filter, so they are less stressed and willing to take my risks.

The following are helpful hints for your classroom to keep that effective filter low:

- Display the question on the board that you are asking students
- Gives students think time to think about their response tell students if they have an answer to keep their hands down while we are thinking
- Allow students to practice their answers with a partner or a small group before asking them to share with the class
- Allow at these 10 seconds of thinking time. This will further support students that require processing time

The Sensory Environment

Creating "Brain Space" for Learning

- **The Processing Lens:** Students have finite mental energy. If a room is "visually loud" (glitter, neon, mobiles), the brain focuses on **sensory survival** instead of learning.
- **The "3-Foot" Audit:** Don’t design from an adult's height. Sit in a student’s chair.
  Check: Is the board blocked? Are posters too high? Is it cluttered? Can you read the writing on the wall? Colour links are there children these colours effect visually?
- **Managing Noise:** Use **Noise-o-meters** to provide a visual cue for volume, reducing the need for verbal shushing.(silent work, partner voice, table voice, classroom, voice, inside or outside voice)
- **The "Rest" Rule:** Keep **20–30%** of wall space blank.

A calm room isn’t just an aesthetic choice—it’s a biological requirement for language.

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Creating a sensory environment

Alerting- provides stimulation	Organising- requires sensory processing. Can help increase focus/attention span	Calming- helps centre the individual
• Running • Jumping • Sports/exercise • Skipping • Spinning a hoop • Trampoline • Scooter	• Puzzles • Sports/exercise • Heavyload work • Blowing bubbles • Activities (horses/animals) • Throwing bean bags • Balancing activities	• Massages • Deep pressure • Car journeys • Deep breathing • Heavy blankets • Burying in blankets • Aromatherapy • Safe space
Sensory difficulties: -sounds -smells -harsh lighting -colours -patterns -temperature -pressure -movements	Movement breaks are important! -ensure they are regular -break up long activities -provide fidget toys	What should a sensory space/safe space look like? Dim lights, calm music, sensory lights, NIce smells (lotions or sprays), heavy objects such as weighted blankets, big soft pillows
Notes : All activities should follow up with a calming exercise to ensure the base level is reached. This can be done by simply ensuring that the environment is sensory friendly e.g. lights are dim, talking is minimised, calm music is on and a fidget toy or weighted object is provided if required These shouldn't be forced on the individual but should be easily accessible. Some things can easily be done e.g. lights dimmed and verbal language reduced.		

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Sensory/Calming kit

Alerting fidgets to be used when he is looking for sensory feedback to be used after transitions at the start of the day and after lunch.	Organising fidgets to be followed from the alerting fidgets as part of the diet to always be made available and easily accessible, prompting to use these may be required	Calming fidgets to be used when an individual is in the yellow or red zone and feels overstimulated or dysregulated. This follows use of organisational fidgets and to be used to support emotional regulation. To be offered after break or play times or during busy transitions/ activities such as assembly.
• Fidget slug • Rubber snakes/ noodles • Light up toys • Musical/ noisy toys • Fidget spinners • Games These toys will stimulate and cause escalation in emotions e.g. moving from green zone to yellow zone but this allows individuals to meet their sensory seeking needs and therefore is necessary.	• Puzzle balls • Pop its • Fidget cubes • Rainbow ball • Tangles • Fidget rings • Marble fidgets These toys should be made available when an individual is completing work or is expected to sit down or focus on an activity. Prompting needed to use and make available and in reach.	• Putty • Therapy sand • Stress balls • Massage toys • Pop its • Weighted toys/ toys filled with beading • Weighted items such as a weighted lap pad • Sensory tent **DEN** Dim lights, calm music, sensory lights, **in a separate room or location from class**, heavy objects such as weighted blankets, big soft pillows

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Sensory Diet								
OVERSTIMULATED/ SENSORY SENSITIVE	VISUAL	AUDITORY	SMELL	ORAL	TACTILE	PROPRIOCEPTION	VESTIBULAR	INTEROCEPTION
	-Keep environment simple -Avoid bright harsh lights -Avoid clutter	-Transition at quieter times -Prepare if possible for sudden noises/changes in noise -Have a quiet zone -Use ear muffs/loops	-Avoid strong smells such as perfumes or refuse areas -Give relaxing smells/oils	-Drink bottle with bendy straw -Blow bubbles	-Avoid touch to gain attention -Avoid messy play activities -Transition at quieter times -Give space to avoid accidental touch	-Self hug or wrap in a blanket -Fidget toys/ squeeze balls -Tuck up tightly in a ball -Rock slowly or sway -Chair and table push ups	-Allow work in different positions (sat on floor) -Sit on a beanbag/ wobble cushion/ yoga ball -Small obstacle course	-Zones of regulation/ emotion thermometer (track emotional changes) -Use visuals for timetables -Mindfulness/ breathing exercises
UNDERSTIMULATED/ SENSORY SEEKING								
	-Provide near bright playful lights -Use spinning/flashing lights -Visual cues and prompts -Brightly coloured resources	-Use name to cue speech -Provide an outlet for noise e.g. tapping -Sound jars e..g rice or beads -Play soft music/ white noise when working	-Provide scented bag for child to hold -Use of diffusers/ air fresheners	-Use of chew toys/ rings -Provide hard crunchy foods -Fizzy, spicy, sour snacks	-Use of a pencil grip -Soft blankets with texture (fleece) -Weighted objects such as scarf, lap pad and blanket -Reminders of personal space	-Regular movement breaks -Use of resistance items e.g. bands -Load bearing exercises such as yoga or carrying heavy objects -Clapping, stamping and jumping games	-Regular movement activities such as sensory circuits	-Visual cues -Play feelings charades or use flashcards -Read feelings stories -Model internal thoughts

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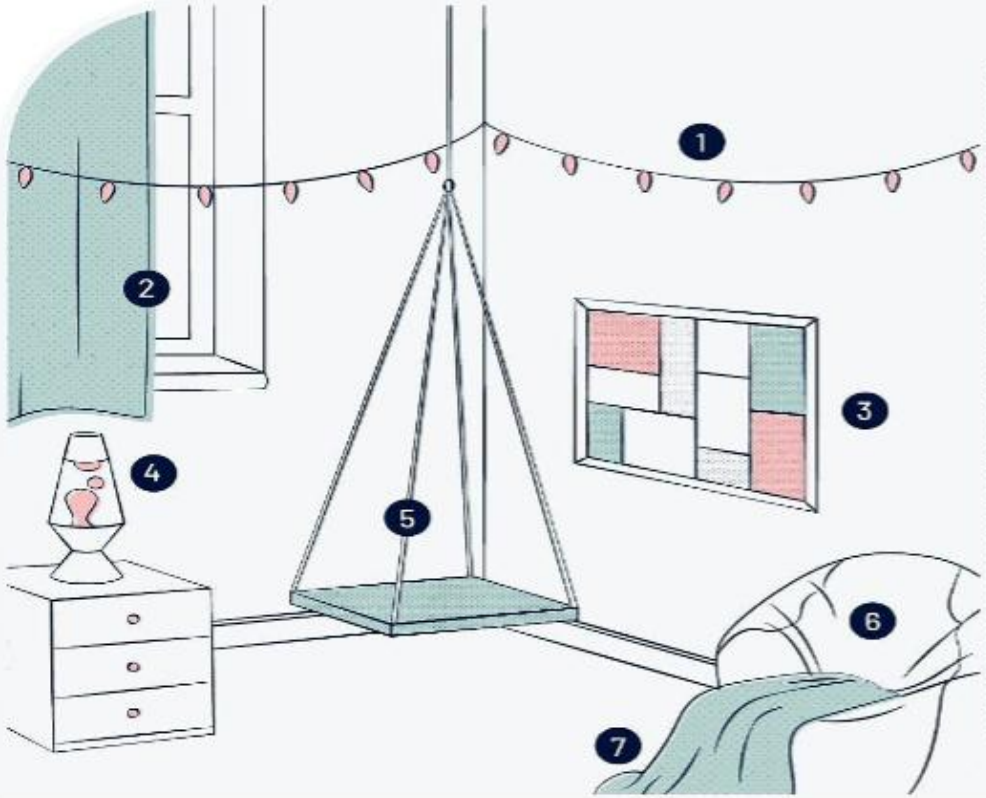

MODEL SENSORY ROOM

1. Holiday lights
2. Blackout curtains
3. Sensory board
4. Lava lamp
5. Swing
6. Bean bag chair
7. Blanket

1. Lights- make sure there is not just the main bright light and dim lights can be put on
2. Blackout curtains to reduce harsh bright lights when needed
3. Sensory board or sensory toys- this is something to keep you busy for example a fidget toy or activity that keeps hands busy
4. Sensory light- doesn't have to be a lava lamp but soft, pretty lighting such as a star projector would work
5. Swing- doesn't have to be a swing but is good to have something to help regulate- this could be a yoga ball or wobble cushion
6. Bean bag chair- is very comfy and allows you to relax- giant soft cushions are great to have
7. Blanket- to make the environment cosy
8. Weighted items- such as blanket/lap-pad or snake- these can provide deep pressure for calming and help bring someone back down to baseline

Myth-Busting Multimodal Communication

Fact vs. Fiction

❌ **The Myth:** Multimodal tools are only for students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).
✅ **The Reality:** These tools support **all** students by grounding spoken language in something concrete.

❌ **The Myth:** Using visuals makes students lazy or dependent.
✅ **The Reality:** Visuals actually **increase independence** by giving students a reference to use when they get stuck.

❌ **The Myth:** Setting up these systems adds too much to a teacher's plate.
✅ **The Reality:** While there is a setup phase, it **reduces workloads long-term** by decreasing the need for constant verbal repetition.

Setting the Record Straight

- **Not Just for SEND:** Visuals and multimodal tools are not "extra" supports for specific students; they are a universal way to ground spoken language for everyone.
- **Building Independence:** Visuals are not a "crutch" that makes students lazy; they increase independence by giving students a reference point to solve problems on their own.
- **Workload Reality:** While setup takes effort, these systems reduce teacher workloads long-term by cutting down on constant verbal repetition.
- **The Goal:** Moving from a teacher-dependent environment to a resource-independent one.

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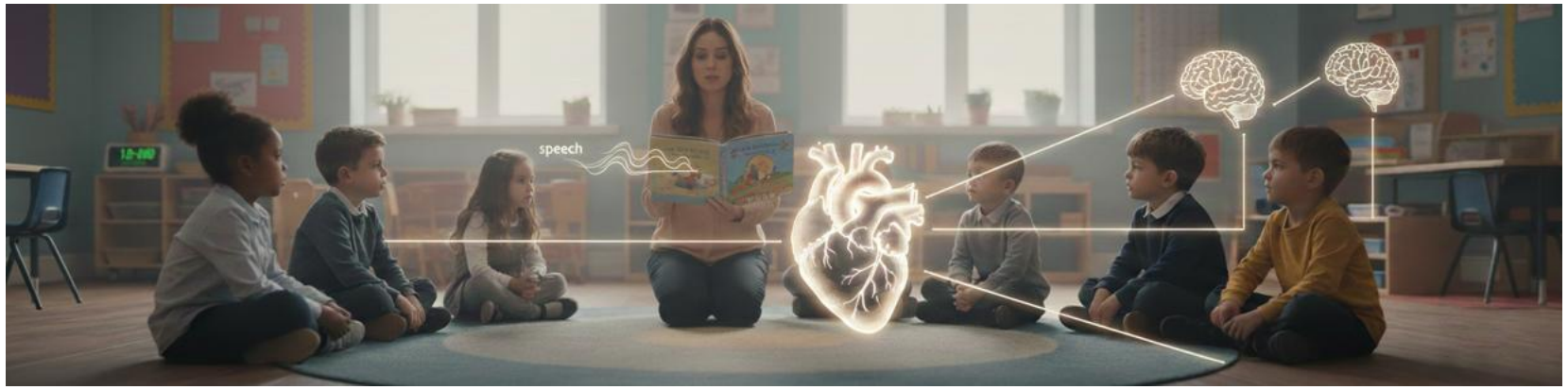
Takeaways

- **The Path to Independent Learning**
- **Universal Support:** A language-rich environment is a "neurological prerequisite" that supports every learner, not just those with identified needs.
- **The Power of Multimodal:** Combining speech with visuals supports information sharing whilst reinforcing memory and fostering student independence.
- **Culture Over Tools:** Whether it's Makaton in EYFS or visual tools for older students, communication must be part of the daily classroom culture.
- **The Bottom Line:** Small environmental changes create massive openings for learning and inclusion.
- **The "Monday Morning" Rule:** Don't strip the whole room. Pick **one** shelf to label or **one** visual timetable to fix to avoid burnout.
- Be **Curious**, find the **Why** and **Adapt** support where needed.



‘’Communication is the heartbeat of the classroom.
If they can't access the language, they can't access the learning.’’

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‘’When we treat Autistic Children the way the world tells us to treat Neurotypical children, they suffer.

But I have never encountered a child of any age or Neurotype who doesn’t thrive when treated like an Autistic person should be treated, with open communication, Adaptive expectations, and respect for self advocacy and self regulation.’’

Marcia Eckerd. Ph.D

"When we implement these strategies borough-wide, we aren't just changing classrooms, we are changing life trajectories. We are ensuring that communication is a right, not a privilege. Let’s make our borough the place where every child feels heard and is given their best chance to thrive, from day one."

What is your **one action** for Monday morning?

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Don’t forget to use the services you have available to support you:

Widgit Online

twinkl

Noun Project

SparkleBox

Pinterest