Supporting Sensory Regulation in Pediatric Healthcare Waiting Rooms

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Background

- Our bodies are constantly processing the different stimuli in our environments and from within our own bodies through sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing, vestibular, proprioception, and interoception.[1]
- Many people have sensory processing differences and need more or less stimulation to feel calm and regulated. Sensory tools can help provide regulating inputs.[2]
- Sensory dysregulation can look like an 'outburst' or 'acting out'. Healthcare facilities and interventions can be very uncomfortable for children with sensory processing differences, which can adversely impact their engagement and health outcomes.[3]
- Sensory-friendly healthcare environments promote patient and family trust, engagement, coping, healing, and comfort while reducing patient anxiety, agitation, confusion, and distress.[3]

Purpose

The goal of our project was to enhance the sensory-friendly capacity of the MultiCare Mary Bridge Children's Hospital & Health Network by providing education and sensory tools to help children feel more comfortable and calm in waiting room settings.

Pilot Design & Implementation

Phase 1 - Needs Assessment
Discussed project scope with Mary Bridge community mentor; designed front desk staff survey for kit already in use; researched elements of sensory-friendly healthcare environments

Phase 2 - Content Development
Developed caregiver flyer; identified sensory tools and kit budgets; identified participating sites; sourced social stories; developed kit instructions and staff member training materials

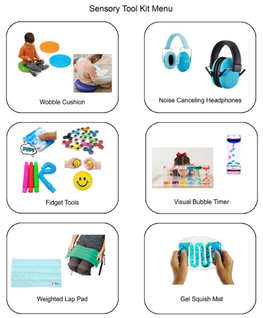
Phase 3 - Site Preparation
Trained identified liaisons; assembled and delivered kits containing caregiver flyer, kit menu, two social stories, instruction sheet, pilot tally sheet and 10 sensory tool options

Phase 4 - Pilot Implementation
Piloted sensory kits across 11 sites in South King County for four weeks from March 11th-April 5th; staff members identified struggling children in waiting rooms, offered the menu of available tools, and distributed flyer on sensory regulation and tool selected by caregiver/child to use in the waiting room prior to their appointment; gathered feedback on pilot through tally sheet of items used, weekly check-in emails to site liaisons, and post-pilot survey of staff members

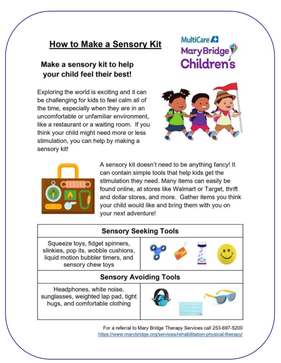
Kit Components

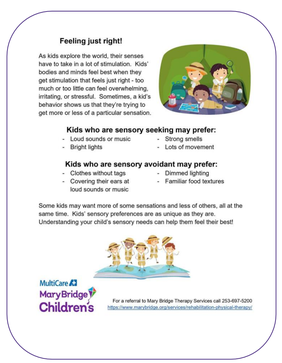
Sensory Tool Kit and Items

Sensory Tool Kit Menu and Tally Sheet



Caregiver Flyer





Findings

Post-pilot survey results from 7 front desk staff:

- The waiting room environment was better (72%)
- Kids seemed better able to cope with the waiting room (71%)
- Kids seemed more calm (57%)
- Kids seemed more comfortable (43%)

Other feedback: More staff training needed; transitions can be challenging; site layout and volume of check-ins is key factor for kit use; staff and families were very appreciative

"A patient kept screaming and falling on the floor so I lent him a bubble timer, and he immediately calmed down and just held on to it with amazement."
- Front Desk Staff

Recommendations

Sensory kit expansion: Increase front desk staff training; prioritize take-home items; consider facility layout, rhythm, and staffing; allow site customization

Other sensory-friendly strategies: Start system-wide staff training; add family educational content to website; modify environment and clinical care processes to support sensory differences

References

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