

# Sensory Processing and The Alert Program®

## What is Sensory Processing?

Sensory Processing is the process of our bodies taking in information through our senses, organising in our central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) and responding to this in a way that we can interact appropriately with the world around us.



The Alert Program®, by Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger, is a framework that is used to assist us in learning how to understand the way our bodies work and use an “engine theory”

## Engine Theory

Our bodies are like engines of a car, sometimes they run high, sometimes they run low and sometimes they run just right. If your engine is running on high speed you might be overexcited, out of control and not want to sit still. If your engine is running on low speed you might feel tired and zone out, not wanting to learn. If your engine is just right it is easier to learn, play and get along with others.

In order for children to focus their attention, manage their emotions and control their behavior, their engines need to be at their just right speed, more of the time. Everyone's just right is different!

## Engine Changers

Activities that we engage in change our engine speeds throughout the day. These “engine changers” come from a range of sensations including movement, touch, looking, listening and smell and taste. For example, chewing gum to calm oneself when stressed or to alert when tired, or a deep bear hug to calm down when angry, or jumping on the trampoline to give a boost of energy before starting their homework.

## Self-Regulation

Being able to manage the pace of your engine and knowing how to change it is called self-regulation. Self-regulation is a skill that can be developed over time and is something that is important for all people to use. Some children will require more assistance than others to understand and practice the concept. This can be done by:

- Talking about the pace at which his body is running (e.g. “How is your engine running?”) so a common language can be used between home and school.
- Talk about how the engines can change with different input to the body. The engine changer chart reflects what is helpful in changing their engine and can be used with them to further aid their self-regulation. Parents giving examples of what they do to change their own engines can be an excellent model.
- Incidental opportunities throughout the day (e.g. walk breaks, heavy load activities, using air filled cushions or fit balls for desk work, wheat bags on lap).
- Engaging in preventative sensory activities to minimize difficulties with emotional regulation. This can be carried out before school and at the end of the school day.

Your child may indicate a preference for certain engine changers to help them feel just right, such as sitting on a wobble cushion, going for a run before they do homework, listening to music as they read. It is helpful for children to learn self-regulation when family and teachers support them in finding what makes them feel just right. The classroom has access to several items for students to use, however if your child wishes to use something in particular from home, talk to the teacher about how this may be incorporated into the class. [For further information see our YouTube channel for a parent friendly “Intro to the Alert Program®”](#) or individualized support please contact [admin@lil-peeps.com.au](mailto:admin@lil-peeps.com.au)

