

The Braincalm™ Intensive Program Brain Organising & Brain Calming Program

Developed by Brenda Cassidy OT & Sensory Educator

Introduction

The Braincalm™ Intensive Program is an easy to run and effective program where children in mainstream & special classes with sensory issues, ASD (Autism), ADHD, anxiety & behavioural issues complete 20 minutes a day of a variety of therapy based but fun activities.

The specially designed activities which **are completed in a specific order and for a specific length** of time help children become calm, organise their brains and return to the classroom or to homework calm, focused, alert & ready to learn.

Brenda Cassidy OT & Sensory Educator is offering this program as an easy but effective tool for pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools to 'settle' the classroom and improve learning for both 'sensory' children and the other 'dysregulated' children in the classroom whose schoolwork may sometimes be disrupted. Parents, special needs staff, resource/learning support teachers and anyone on staff in preschools, primary or post primary schools can run this simple but effective program as long as they have completed the training.

In the present day in Ireland and the UK Brenda is observing that around 1/5 of children in primary schools have 'Something Going On'- or SGO as she calls it. In a mainstream classroom of 25 pupils, 5 or 6 will possibly have traits of autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia, sensory issues or some other type of issue that will impact on their ability to learn. She meets desperate parents who cannot afford private therapy and or are on long therapy waiting lists. She meets school staff every day who tell her that these issues are not taught in their college curriculum. The Braincalm™ Intensive Program, though NOT a replacement for therapy, gives parents and school staff a program to help the child while they are waiting for therapy or also as a add on to the therapy they receive outside of school. (If a child is having OT or other therapies- the parent or school should speak to the therapist before beginning this program.)

Schools across the country and the world work with many children with disruptive behaviour that are sometimes attributed to issues with sensory processing problems:

- Shouting out or constant talking/attention seeking excessively
- Bumping and knocking into things and other children
- Constantly moving, fidgeting or chewing pencils
- Finding it hard to sit on their chair for long periods of time

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- Constantly covers their eyes or squints in bright light & covers ears with certain sounds/loud noise
- Prone to anxiety or meltdowns
- Behaviour issues in class or yard
- Under aroused' or constantly 'sloth-like'/sluggish (poor engagement and appear to not be listening)
- Poor concentration
- Poor handwriting
- Frustration/sadness/low self esteem
- Poor ability to socialise with peers.

These types of children are what we refer to as 'dysregulated'. They have become hypersensitive or under responsive to ordinary, everyday sensory stimuli. So, their 'acting out' is just a way to release their energy or help themselves calm down. Mindfulness programs MAY sometimes work but often these children need more help to either 'up' their arousal level or 'bring it down' so they can concentrate and attend in school and at home. Along with sensory issues, children with other issues and conditions may present as being 'out of synch' (such as those with generalised anxiety).

Unfortunately, these children often become known as the unruly or naughty child. Many 'under aroused' children are labelled as being 'lazy and lacking attention'. However, we must **always remember that a dysregulated child is NOT an undisciplined child!**

The aim of Brenda's program **The Braincalm™ Intensive Program** is to improve the above issues so that children have a structured, safe and focused place to calm and organise themselves so they can learn better. It is NOT a replacement for occupational therapy but complimentary to it.

The Braincalm™ Intensive Program is an easy but very effective daily program where children aged 4 up to adulthood are brought together in groups of 2 or 3 and facilitated through specific, therapeutically designed and validated activities that can be easily run by parents, preschool staff, SNA's, resource teachers or other staff. Sometimes if a child is very dysregulated we may need to take the child on a one to one basis. The program may also be used in a 'short format' as a sensory break or can be taught to parents for use at home to help settle a child before homework or bed.

The Braincalm™ Intensive Program consists of 3 activity stations:

1. A - Alerting the Brain

2. B - Brain Organising

3. C - Calming the Brain

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The Braincalm™ Intensive Program uses very little equipment (it is equipment most likely available in schools already) and can be run in a room or school hall.

This program has been shown to positively impact 80-85% of these children and helps them become open for learning. Reports from all over Ireland have shown that children have improved in their handwriting & language skills, happiness, sociability, confidence, attention in school, better behaviour, less fidgeting/squirming, less 'sloth like' behaviour, calmer and better attendance to school.

The Braincalm™ Intensive Program was developed by Brenda using longstanding therapeutic activities but she has built in techniques & methodology she has researched & observed as being successful during her 1 year pilot study in Ireland during 2016/2017.

Brenda uses her own personal experience as a Mum of 2 sensory children (her daughter has dyspraxia & hypersensitive sensory processing disorder & her son has 'sensory seeking' issues) and her extensive experience working with schools and parents to help many people all over the world.

Brenda would like to acknowledge paediatric OT Jane Horwood and Jean Ayers OT for their extensive and ground breaking work in the area of sensory integration. Their decades of work have helped those of us who are helping school staff and parents moving forward into the future.

Brenda would also like to acknowledge the wonderful principal, staff and pupils of St. James's Primary School, Dublin who worked with Brenda for over 2 years to develop and pilot this and other programs. In particular, Brenda would like to thank Melissa Hogan, Resource Teacher & Coordinator of the fantastic 'Early Focus Project' in the school, without whom the 'Braincalm™ Intensive Program' would not have come to fruition. A warm word of thanks is also extended to the many schools, class teachers, principals, SEN teachers & Special Needs Assistants and parents all over Ireland who have been so giving of their time and feedback during the early days of the 'Braincalm™ Intensive Program' development. Your help and support mean that many children's lives will change for good.

We hope you enjoy running the program in your preschool, school or home.



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