

Support strategies for Early Years Gestalt Processors

Focus on the co-regulation first. At this age, a gestalt child is looking for sensory and emotional safety before anything else. Prioritise emotional containment over activity variety. Use repetition, predictability, calm tone, and a “low demand” environment. This means doing less, and doing it more slowly/ calmly.

Echo their interests without redirecting. So if they like doors, zips, spinning things or stacking cups then go with that. Join in with wonder, copy their sounds, and make comments using their scripts or very short, rhythmic phrases that feel like scripts - e.g. “zip zip zip!”, “door open-close!” Avoid questions at this stage and just enjoy the joy and rhythm of it.

Movement in arms, sling or pushchair perhaps, if the outdoors is triggering on foot. Presumably you’ve tried using a buggy or carrier, but if not the vestibular input and closeness may help regulate them.

Can you comment on what’s around you or what you may see outside ... “trees go swish”, “round the corner”, “wheels go bump” etc. The goal is familiarity and safety first, not exploration or play yet.

Bring the outdoors in, like bring textures and nature inside in baskets or trays with leaves, feathers, sticks, stones, pinecones, shells, bark. Allow them to explore freely and comment minimally and musically eg “crunch crunch!”, “soft one”.

Use the same musical / phrase for transitions, snacks, nappy changes, etc. Gestalt processors love intonation and rhythm – it’s safer and more predictable than verbal explanation.

Introduce water play at the sink, scooping rice or lentils, poking playdough, rolling balls or cars – but let them lead the narrative.

Less is more, so don’t set up a tray with five things. One toy/ basket/ sensory material etc. Too much can trigger overwhelm and cause withdrawal.

If you’re not hearing clear scripts yet due to age, early vocal play (repeating syllables, sound patterns, tone copying) is the best groundwork. Reflect back what you hear without correcting it. So if you hear “da-ga-ba!”, say it back. If they hum, hum too. That’s connection in their language.

Even if they don’t appear to understand a visual timetable yet, using consistent visuals for things like mealtime, nappy, and rest time may help slowly build trust in routine. This will compliment the musical prompt for transition.

Sit on the floor (or a picnic blanket on the floor to start with, that you could take outside for familiarity), and do what they do – or just be ‘there’. You’re building safety, not teaching skills at this stage.