

SENSORY WORKOUT: ADDING SENSORY PROCESSING TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Activity Facilitator*





01. **THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**
Physical, emotional, mental, and sensory benefits

02. **WHAT IS SENSORY WORKOUT?**
The goal of the trainings and follow-along activities

03. **MODULES & ADAPTATIONS**
Review modules and provide adaptations

04. **BARRIERS**
Potential barriers to fitness and how to navigate them




AGENDA



BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

PHYSICAL

- Lower blood pressure and blood sugar
 - Build stronger bones
 - Improve digestion and cholesterol levels
 - Increase balance, coordination, and flexibility
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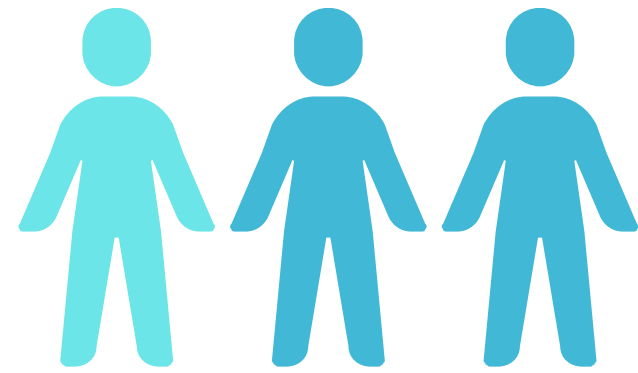
EMOTIONAL & MENTAL

- Improve psychological well-being
- Reduce feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress
- Enhance mood, improve sleep

SENSORY

- Calming or alerting effect on the nervous system
- Increased focus, attention, and body awareness
- Improved balance, posture, and self-regulation

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



1/3 of people with
IDD do not enjoy
the benefits of
exercise

(Jacob et al, 2023)

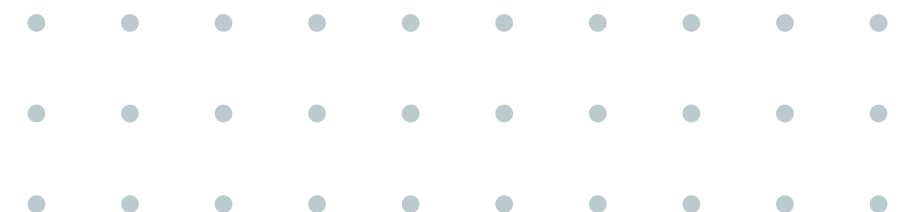
Coexisting conditions

Shorter life expectancy

Social exclusion

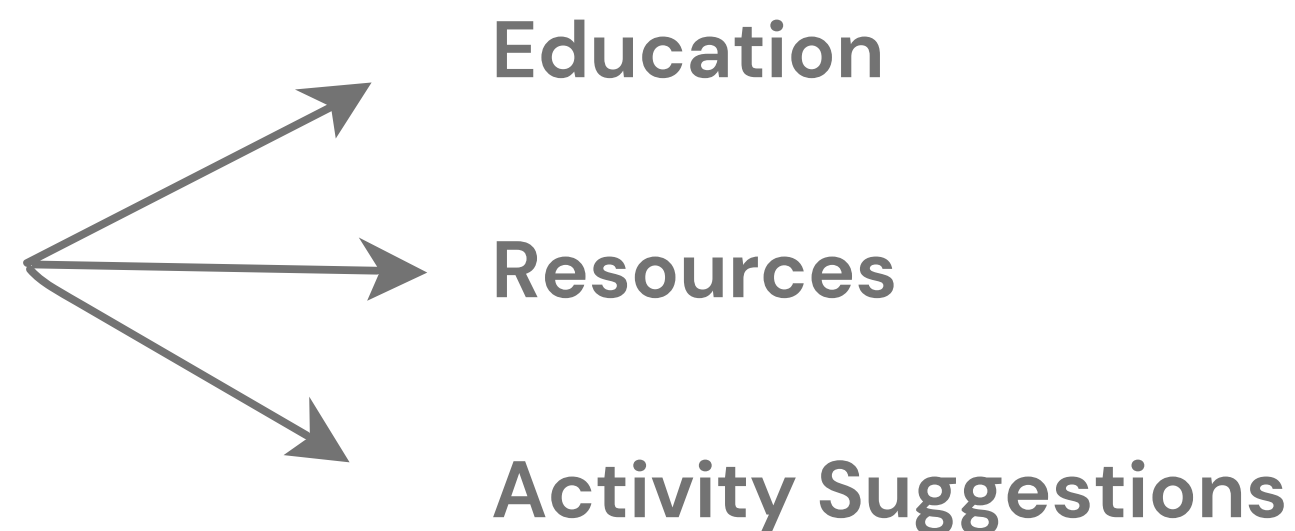
Impaired executive functioning

Poor quality of life



WHAT IS SENSORY WORKOUT?

Aptus' Recreation and Occupational Therapists developed these trainings and follow-along activity videos for staff, families, and people supported. The goal is to make physical activity more ***engaging*** and ***beneficial*** for people with developmental disabilities by ***adding sensory to fitness.***





THE THREE LESSER-KNOWN SENSES

VESTIBULAR

→ Movement and balance

PROPRIOCEPTION

→ Body awareness and coordination

INTEROCEPTION

→ Internal sensations and emotional state



DISCLAIMER

The information in these modules are very general and do not replace the advice and guidance of health care providers. Always follow their advice first and foremost.

If you have specific concerns, challenges, or questions, please seek out support from your general practitioner or an appropriate health care provider.

MODULE 1: BREATHING ACTIVITIES

FEATHER BREATHING

Inhale a preferred scent (essential oil, lotion, spice, etc.) and exhale onto the feather while breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth

FINGER BREATHING

Trace your fingers up and down while you inhale and exhale



MODULE 1: BREATHING ACTIVITIES

Breathing is one of the key foundations to starting a *safe exercise practice*.

BENEFITS

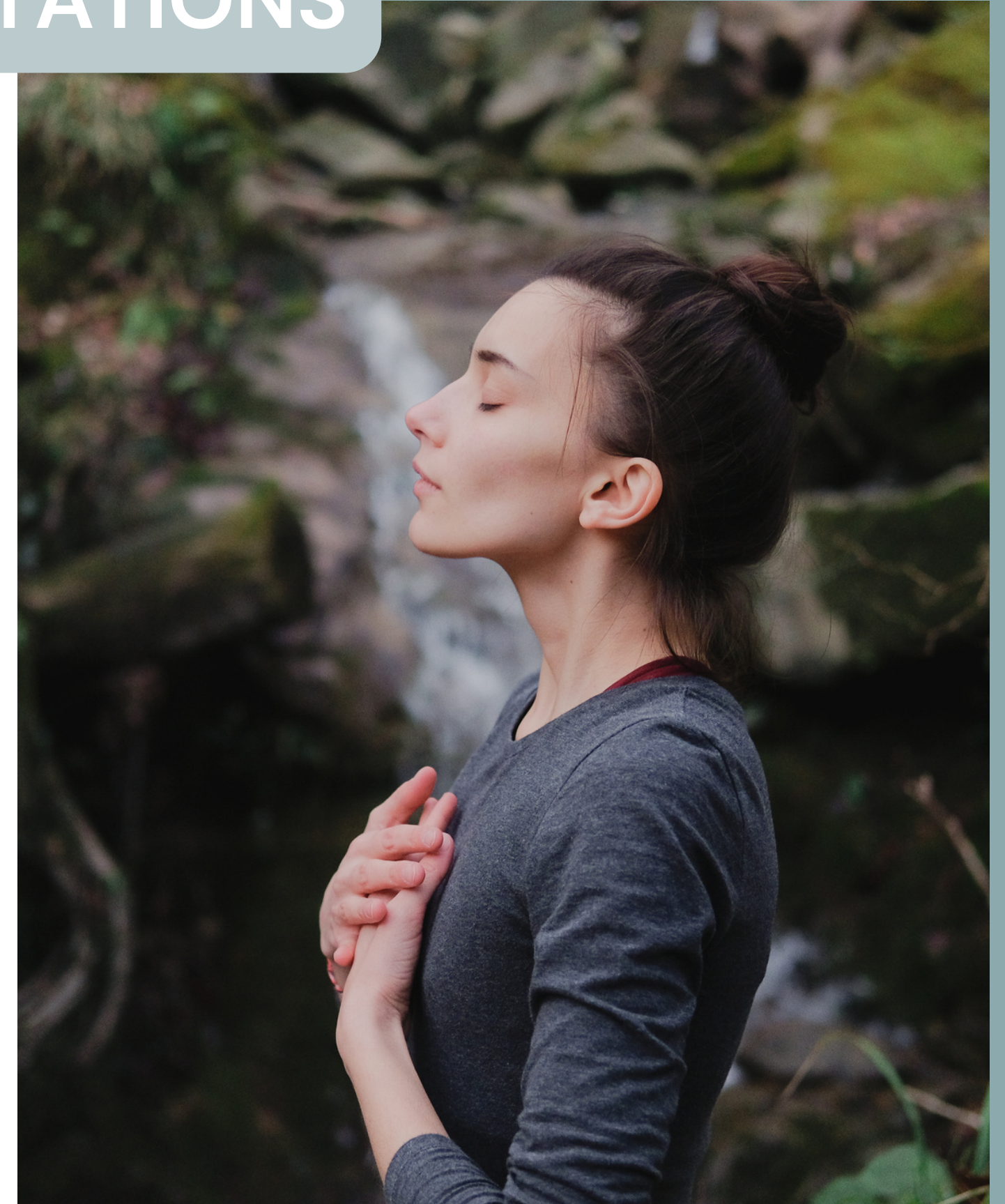
- Makes the concept of breathing more concrete
- Provides visual feedback to the person
- Can help support relaxation and emotional regulation
- Better sleep
- Lowers blood pressure
- Improves digestion

(Urban Balance, 2021)



BREATHING ADAPTATIONS

- Embed into routine (after eating, before bed)
- Start small and when calm (easier to practice when nervous system is regulated)
- Can pair with a variety of preferred scents to make this concept more concrete (essential oils, candles, spices, coffee beans, etc.)
- Practice in nature using flowers, grass, trees
- Smell kits – make it fun!
- Can be performed in a variety of settings, seated or standing



POSTURE ACTIVITIES



TISSUE DANCE

Try to keep a tissue on top of your head while you dance to music.

BALANCE BALL TOSS

One person sits on an exercise ball while the other person gently tosses the ball for them to catch.

ORBIT BALL

Sitting on the floor or in a chair with a partner and passing a ball back and forth by moving it across the front of their bodies.



STRETCHING ACTIVITIES

WING & PRAYER

Press your palms together in front of you. Push them up and down. Extend your arms out and open like wings.



SWAYING PALM TREE

Raise your arms up straight over your head and move side to side like a swaying palm tree.

MARCHING

Bring one leg up at a time towards your chest to a 90 degree angle until you are “marching.”

CAT COW

Breathe in and look up to the ceiling while lowering your belly. Breathe out and lift your belly up towards the ceiling and drop your head and round your back.

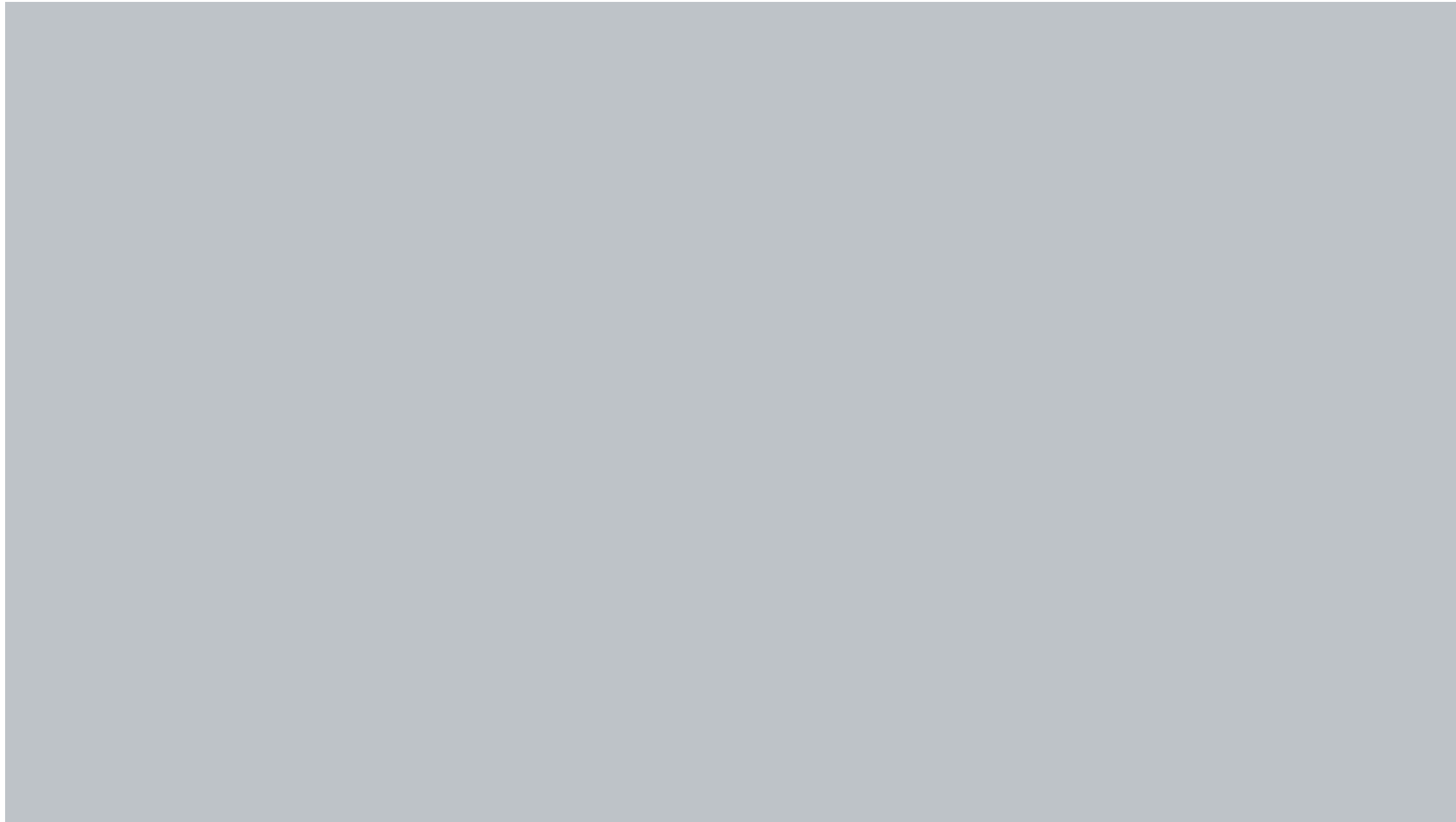
POSTURE & STRETCHING ACTIVITIES



BENEFITS

- Makes the concept of alignment more concrete
- Provides natural feedback to the person on their posture
- Can help make the concept more fun to explore
- Provides a gentle warm-up before other activities and reduces the risk of injury
- Connects breath and posture

POSTURE & STRETCHING ADAPTATIONS



- **Smaller ball**
- **Weighted ball**
- **Seated stretches**
(triceps, hips, side, neck, etc.)

(Athanasios, 2021)

MODULE 2: DANCING

These activities were designed to encourage *physical activity* while providing a *fun sensory experience* and to help support a *regulated nervous system*.

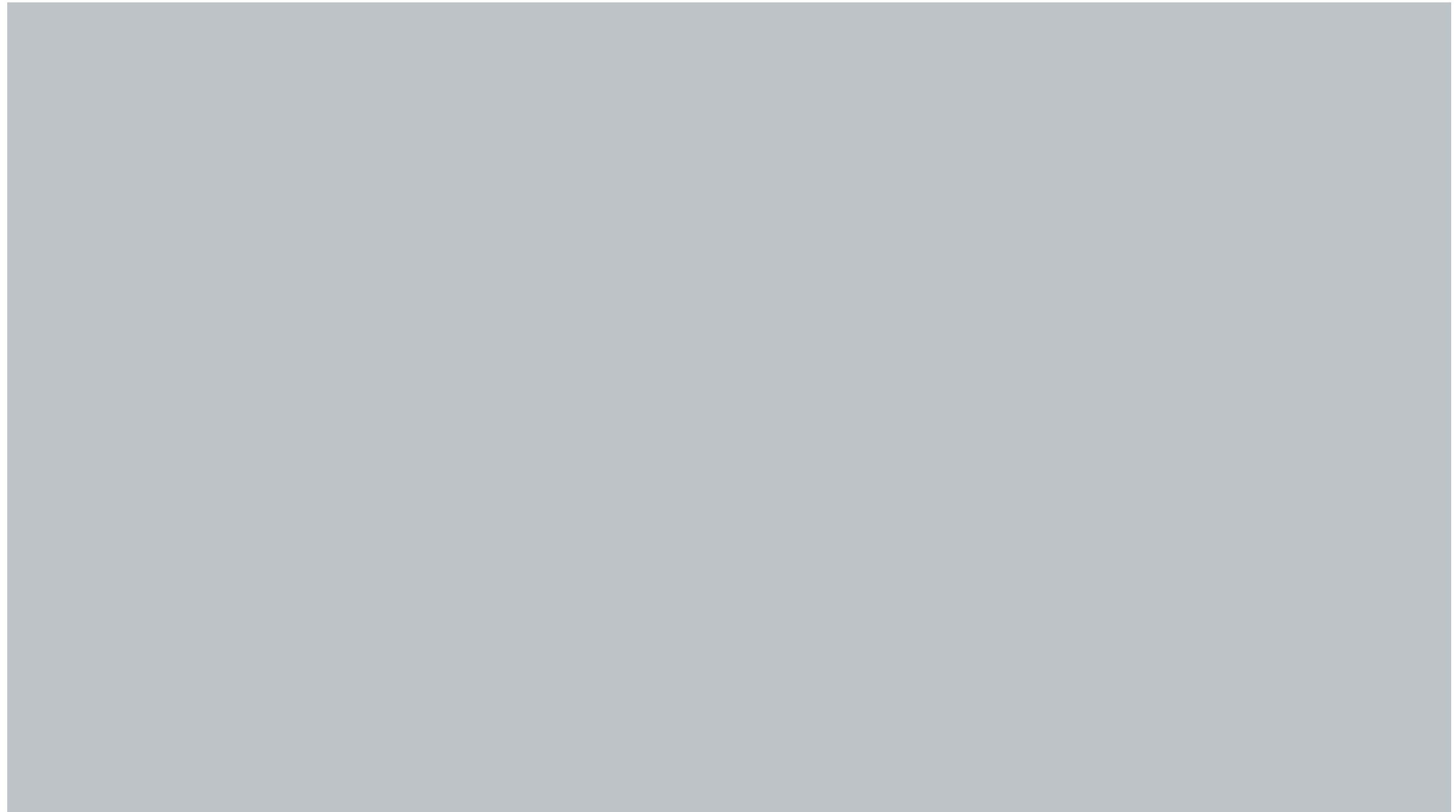
BENEFITS

- Improve motor skills and coordination
- Fun and social
- Great sensory experience (visual, auditory, vestibular, proprioceptive senses)



DANCING ADAPTATIONS

- Explore different genres of music (playlists that are person-centered)
- Move along to YouTube dance videos
- Seated Macarena, Freeze Dance



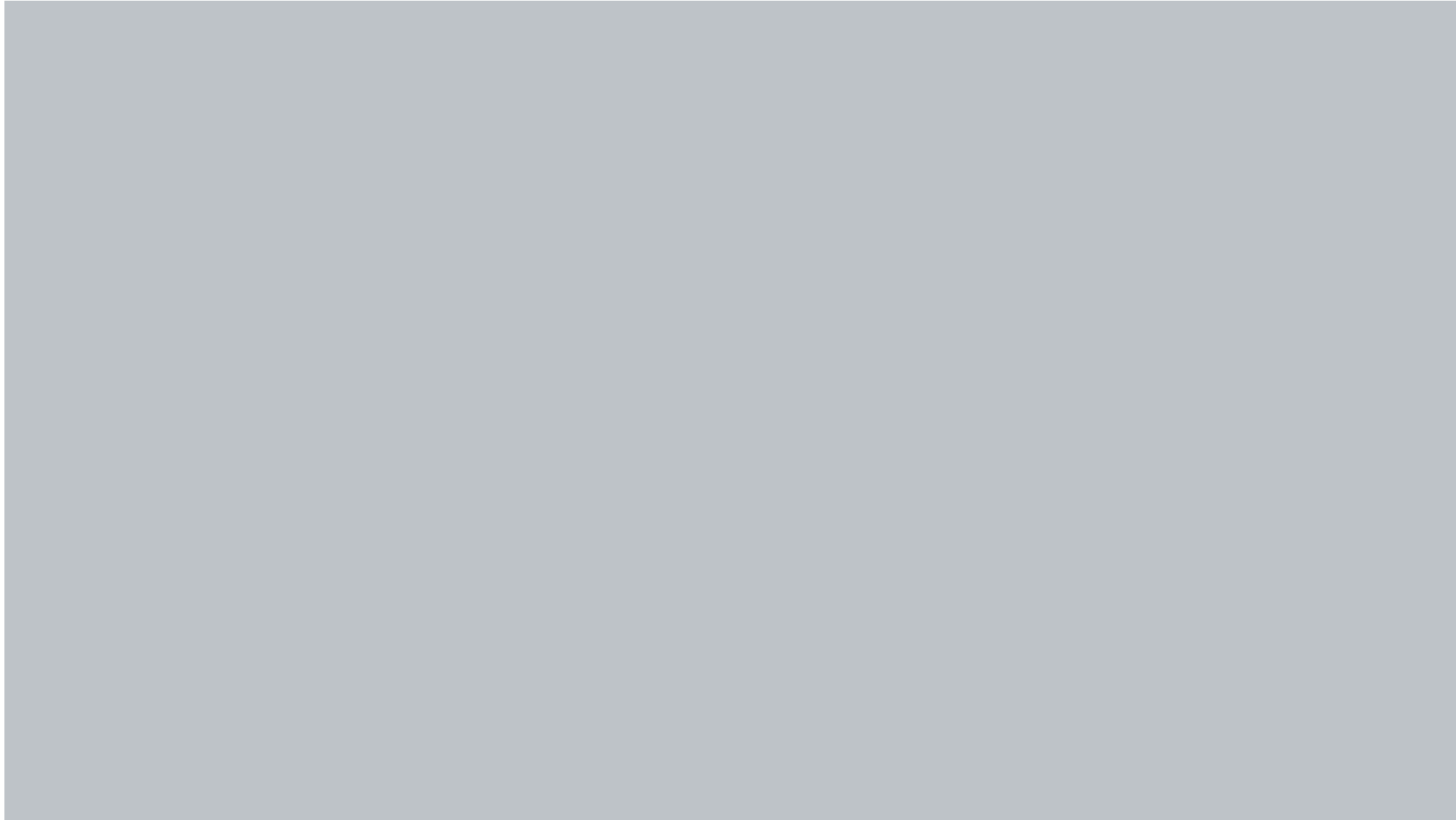
MODULE 3: ANIMAL WALKS



Animal walks are a great way to move our bodies in a *new way* and get *all major muscle groups* working at the same time.

- Bear Walk
- Crab Crawl
- Frog Hop
- Kangaroo Jump
- Inch Worm
- New additions: Elephant Stomp, Penguin Walk, Flamingo Hop

ANIMAL WALK ADAPTATIONS



- **Resistance band exercises** (chest press, arm curl, shoulder squeeze, leg press, etc.)
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

BARRIERS TO FITNESS



- **Financial barriers and lack of transportation**
(Melville et al, 2015)
- **Lack of programming, resources, and training**
(Moran et al, 2014)
- **Physical barriers**
- **Psychological barriers**
- **Lack of social support**
(Schijndel-Speet et al, 2014)

HOW TO NAVIGATE THESE BARRIERS

Cost, Transportation, and Programming:

- Strengthening community and organizational resources
- Implementing physical activity in or near the home (e.g.: nature walks)
- Creating a routine

(Melville et al, 2015)

Physical Barriers:

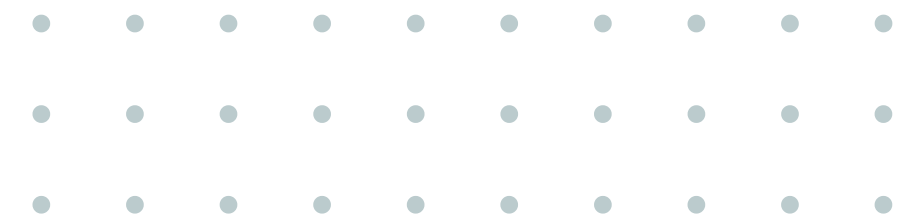
- Incorporating accessible forms of exercise
- Slowly familiarizing and introducing novel activities

(SIRC, 2023)

Social Support and Psychological Barriers:

- Increasing social support from staff, relatives, and other peers
- Providing motivation through positive feedback and encouragement
- Person-centered focus

(Schijndel-Speet et al, 2014)



GENERAL TIPS

- Incorporate into everyday routine (same time if possible), make it predictable and something to look forward to
- Ask what supported people enjoy (person-centered)
- Present new ideas (exposure to different activities they may have never encountered before)
- Bottom line – make it fun! (dancing, walking, getting outside in nature)





<https://www.youtube.com/@sensoryworkout>

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Sensory Workout and request your
certificate:

<https://aptustc.com/sensory-workout>



THANK YOU

You are welcome to email me with any
additional questions or comments at
sensoryworkout@aptustc.com



