

# Sensory Regulation Box

## A THERAPEUTIC TOOL

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*A small, tangible system for meeting the nervous system where it is, through texture, scent, sound, and gentle return.*



## **Sensory Regulation Box Research**

*The Sensory Regulation Box intervention is grounded in trauma-informed, somatic, and neurobiological research that emphasizes the role of the body and sensory systems in emotional regulation. This approach draws from sensorimotor psychotherapy (Ogden et al., 2006), which highlights how traumatic and overwhelming experiences are stored in the body and processed through movement, sensation, and physiological response. It is also informed by polyvagal theory (Porges, 2011), which underscores how cues of safety, including soothing sensory input, can help regulate the autonomic nervous system and support shifts out of states of hyperarousal or shutdown.*

*Sensory-based strategies are widely incorporated in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Linehan, 2015), particularly within distress tolerance and self-soothing skills that engage the five senses to anchor individuals in the present moment. Research in trauma and neuroscience further supports the use of bottom-up regulation strategies, which prioritize sensory and embodied interventions over purely cognitive approaches (van der Kolk, 2014). These methods can be especially effective for individuals who experience overwhelm, dissociation, or difficulty accessing language during distress.*

*The Sensory Regulation Box operationalizes these principles by offering a curated collection of tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory, and grounding objects that provide immediate, accessible pathways for nervous system regulation. By engaging the senses directly, this intervention supports emotional stabilization, increases interoceptive awareness, and fosters a sense of agency in managing internal states. Over time, the use of sensory tools can help clients build a personalized “language of regulation,” strengthening their ability to recognize, respond to, and care for their nervous system across a range of emotional experiences.*

### References

- Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2020). *Trauma and expressive arts therapy*. Guilford Press.
- Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy*. W. W. Norton.
- Porges, S. W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation*. Norton.
- van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

# Sensory Box Worksheet

## / BUILD YOUR PERSONAL REGULATION KIT

Sometimes words are not enough. Sometimes the body needs something immediate, something to touch, to hold, to smell, to anchor into. A Sensory Regulation Box is a collection of small tools that help your nervous system settle, orient, and return. Use the space below to design your own Sensory Regulation Box.

### 01. Touch (Tactile Support)

What textures help your body feel calmer or more grounded?

**Examples:** soft fabric, smooth stone, fidget tool, putty, weighted object

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### 02. Sight (Visual Grounding)

What helps your eyes soften or focus?

**Examples:** calming image, photo, color card, nature scene, candle

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### 03. Sound (Auditory Support)

What sounds help regulate your nervous system?

**Examples:** music, white noise, calming playlist, nature sounds

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### 04. Smell (Olfactory Anchors)

What scents bring comfort or familiarity?

**Examples:** lavender, essential oils, favorite lotion, coffee, spice

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### 05. Movement (Body-Based Regulation)

What small movements help your body release or settle?

**Examples:** stretching, tapping, shaking, breathwork, hand pressure

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### 06. Comfort Objects

What objects help you feel safe, connected, or supported?

**Examples:** meaningful object, token, small photo, symbolic item

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*/ REFLECTION:*

*Which sense feels most important for you right now?*

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*When you imagine using this box, what changes in your body?*

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*Which item feels like it might help during a difficult moment?*

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