

# Snoezelen at Stockton

**Imagine the possibilities** when a student with autism, Down syndrome, developmental delay, cognitive delay, learning disabilities, or behavioral concerns enters the Snoezelen room with his/her therapist or teacher as part of their weekly routine at Stockton School. Immersed in a controlled multi-sensory environment promoting communication, exploration, social interaction and self-esteem, the student is empowered to succeed.

**Imagine the possibilities** when a nonverbal student with autism says his first words, a hyperactive student is able to calm down to increase attention, or a passive student with Down syndrome is able to explore and interact with her environment. Snoezelen empowers students with disabilities.

**Imagine the possibilities** when a mainstream student is invited to share the magical multi-sensory environment along with a student with special needs in the Snoezelen room. A special bond emerges and both students benefit.

## What is Snoezelen?

Snoezelen is a controlled multi-sensory environment designed to calm, relax, stimulate, intrigue and empower students with disabilities. The Snoezelen environment is safe and non-threatening.

Snoezelen aims to create an atmosphere of trust and relaxation through pleasurable sensory experiences. When you enter the Snoezelen room, everything you see, hear, smell or touch is designed to stimulate an active response, encouraging a feeling of being in control of your own environment and being able to explore at your own pace.

Students are able to control each item through adapted switches. The therapist/teacher follows the student's lead for each interaction and guides communication, social interaction, motor skills and cognitive skills.

Snoezelen is a unique, controlled multi-sensory room filled with six-foot tall brightly colored bubble tubes, colored fiber optic curtains, projected pattern designs slowly moving around the room, colorful interactive panels on the walls, soft music, special lighting, and soft padding on the floor and walls. The room radiates a sense of tranquility.

Snoezelen is a wonderful environment to enjoy and share...a place that replenishes the spirit!

# The History of Snoezelen

The concept of Snoezelen was defined in the late 1970's by Dutch therapists Jan Hulsege and Ad Verheul while working at the DeHartenberg Institute in Holland, a center for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The word "Snoezelen" is a contraction of the Dutch verbs snuffelen (to seek out or explore) and doezelen (to relax).

Snoezelen was initially developed with the aim of offering recreational activities for individuals with severe sensory and intellectual disabilities. The idea was to present different stimuli using media such as light and sound effects, aromas or tactile boards, in order to activate sensory perception in a safe and comfortable environment.

Ad Verheul concluded that in order to create a situation from which clients can derive maximum benefit, it is necessary to structure a physical setting that has healing properties. However, such an environment cannot, of itself, harness the healing potential in the situation. This is mediated by the presence of what he has called an "enabling" therapist, that is, one who is able to release the self-directed energies of the client in a positive way (Shapiro and Bacher, 2002).

## The Benefits of Snoezelen

- Improved focus and engagement
- Increased self-regulation
- Reduction in self-injurious behaviors
- Increased social interaction
- Enhanced communication between student and therapist/teacher
- Increased exploration of environment
- Increased skill acquisition
- Greater motivation to participate in activities
- Improved hand-eye coordination
- Overall impact is extended to daily life

In 1997, therapists at the Beit Issie Shapiro Educational Center in Israel conducted research on the benefits of Snoezelen. They found that in the Snoezelen room, children were much calmer and exhibited fewer maladaptive behaviors. The children displayed more curiosity and interest in what was happening around them. Physiologically, there was a reduction in the heart rate of children who were usually hyperactive, and an increase in the heart rate of children inclined to be passive (Shapiro and Bacher, 2002).

## **The Snoezelen Philosophy**

- Student is encouraged to initiate activities
- Opportunity for the student to make choices
- A safe, comfortable atmosphere
- Therapist controls amount and intensity of stimuli
- An improved relationship between student and therapist/teacher
- Freedom from pressure to perform and achieve
- An enhanced quality of life
- A beneficial aid to teaching
- A creative approach to therapeutic gain
- An air of enjoyment and well-being

To see a video of the Snoezelen room at Stockton School, you can go to YouTube.com and in the search box, type in Snoezelen at Stockton. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8doQvPjBiQg>)