Sensory Circuit Examples for Oscar

1. Alerting Activities (Wake Up the Body and Brain)

These activities use movement, jumping, and vestibular input to increase alertness.

Farm-Themed Alerting Ideas for Oscar

- **"Tractor Tyre Jumps"**
  Lay out floor spots or hoops as "tractor tyres" and let Oscar jump from tyre to tyre.
- **"Sheep Herding Run"**
  Place small cones or beanbags ("sheep") around the hall. Oscar runs to collect them and puts them in a "pen" box.
  (Fast movement is ideal for alerting)
- **"Bouncing Like a Baby Lamb"**
  He can bounce on a gym ball or mini trampoline — exactly the kind of fast-paced movement recommended to wake up the senses.
- **"Rev the Tractor" Jumping Jacks**
  Do jumping jacks together while making a gentle "brrrm brrrm" tractor sound.

2. Organising Activities (Coordination + Thinking + Motor Planning)

These help Oscar organise his body, plan movements, and focus attention.

Farm-Themed Organising Ideas

- **"Walk the Fence Line" (Balance Beam)**
  A low beam or masking tape line becomes a farm fence. Oscar balances along it while carrying a soft "hay bale" (beanbag).
  (Balancing and coordination tasks support organisation.)
- **"Feed the Animals" Beanbag Throw**
  Throw small beanbags (animal feed) into buckets labelled cow, sheep, pig.
  A perfect organising activity requiring motor planning and accuracy.
- **"Tunnel to the Barn" (Crawling)**
  Crawl through a play tunnel — this type of movement is widely recommended for the organising stage.
- **"Sort the Farm Tools"**
  Carry objects (soft blocks, hoops) and sort them by shape or colour into crates.
  This helps sequencing and coordination.

3. Calming Activities (Deep Pressure + Slow Movement)

These regulate and settle Oscar so he is ready to learn.

Farm-Themed Calming Ideas

- **"Brush the Horse" Pressure Strokes**
  Use a soft sensory brush or cloth on arms and legs (slow, firm strokes).
- **"Hay Bale Push" (Heavy Work)**
  Oscar pushes a padded crash mat or a weighted box across the floor — deep pressure helps calming.
- **"Rocking in the Tractor Cab"**
  Rock gently on a gym ball with support — slow rhythmic movement is calming.
- **"Cuddly Cow Breathing"**
  Hug a soft cow toy to his chest and practise slow breathing:
  "In for 3… out for 4."

A Complete 10–15 Minute Sensory Circuit for Oscar

(Following the standard sequence recommended by UK OT services.)

1. Alerting (3–5 minutes)

- Tractor Tyre Jumps
- Sheep Herding Run

2. Organising (3–5 minutes)

- Walk the Fence Line
- Feed the Animals Throwing Game

3. Calming (3–5 minutes)

- Hay Bale Push
- Cuddly Cow Breathing

1. Classic Social Story Layout (Simple & Predictable)

Title:

“Going to the Sensory Circuit”

Page 1 – What Will Happen

Sometimes I go to the Sensory Circuit at school.
The Sensory Circuit helps my body get ready for learning.

(Include a picture of Oscar or a cartoon of Oscar 1.)

Page 2 – What I Will Do

First, I do some jumping or moving activities.
This helps wake up my body.

(Use a visual of a trampoline, or “Oscar jumps like a lamb.”)

Page 3 – What I Will Do Next

Then, I do activities that help me use my balance and thinking.
I might walk along a line or throw beanbags.

Page 4 – What Helps Me Feel Calm

After that, I do calming activities like pushing or slow breathing.
This helps my body feel comfortable and ready.

Page 5 – How I Might Feel

Sometimes I might feel excited, tired, or unsure.
All these feelings are okay.

Page 6 – My Expected Response

I will try to follow the steps.
Adults can help me if I need them.

Page 7 – Ending / Reassurance

When I finish the Sensory Circuit, I feel ready for my day.
I can do this.

2. Visual Strip Layout (Good for Autistic Learners)

A clear, left-to-right or top-to-bottom strip with boxes:

Title: *"My Morning Steps"*

Step	Picture	Sentence
1	Oscar walking into school	**I arrive at school calmly.**
2	Oscar doing alerting activity	**I do my jumping or running activity.**
3	Oscar balancing/throwing	**I do my organising activity.**
4	Oscar pushing a "hay bale"	**I do my calming activity.**
5	Oscar sitting happily	**Now I am ready to learn.**

This layout works well for Oscar because it uses clear steps and predictable structure.

3. Farm-Themed Social Story Template (Personalised for Oscar)

Title:

"Oscar the Farmer Gets Ready for the Day"

Page 1 – Setting the Scene

Every morning, Oscar the Farmer gets his body ready, just like tractors get ready to work.

Page 2 – Alerting

First, Oscar wakes up his tractor engine.
He jumps, runs, or bounces like a happy lamb.

Page 3 – Organising

Next, Oscar plans his farm jobs.
He walks along the fence, sorts the animal feed, or crawls to the barn.

Page 4 – Calming

Then, Oscar slows his engine down.
He pushes a hay bale or hugs his cow toy and breathes slowly.

Page 5 – Reassurance

Oscar's body feels ready.
He is calm, steady, and ready for the day's work.

4. Social Story Layout Using Colour-Coding (Very effective for Oscar)

Use **Green (Go)**, **Amber (Think)**, **Blue (Calm)** to match sensory circuit stages:

Page 1 – Green Page (Alerting)

- Big green border
- Picture of Oscar bouncing
- Text: **"This wakes my body up."**

Page 2 – Amber Page (Organising)

- Amber border
- Picture of balancing or throwing
- Text: **"This helps my body think and plan."**

Page 3 – Blue Page (Calming)

- Blue border
- Picture of breathing or pushing
- Text: **"This helps my body feel calm and safe."**

Page 4 – White Page (Reassurance)

- Soft colours
- Picture of Oscar settled
- Text: **"Now I am ready to learn."**

First-Person "I" Statement Social Story (Highly recommended)

Title: "I Can Do My Sensory Circuit"

I go to the Sensory Circuit to help my body feel good.
First, I wake up my body.
Then, I organise my body.
Next, I calm my body.
When my body feels calm, learning is easier.
Grown-ups can help me.
I can do this.

Short. Predictable. Reassuring.

The Science Behind Sensory Circuits

The science behind Sensory Circuits sits at the intersection of:

- **Sensory Integration theory**
- **Neuroscience of arousal and self-regulation**
- **Motor learning and executive function**
- **Evidence-based sensory interventions**

While research continues to expand, the components of Sensory Circuits have demonstrable benefits for attention, regulation, and learning, making them a widely used tool in occupational therapy and education.

Sensory Circuits are structured sequences of physical and sensory activities designed to help children reach an **optimal level of arousal** for learning. They are widely used in schools and therapy settings and are rooted in **Sensory Integration (SI) theory**, first developed by **A. Jean Ayres**, which explains how the brain organises and interprets sensory information to produce purposeful behaviour.

1. Foundations in Sensory Integration Theory

Sensory Integration proposes that sensory input—movement, touch, proprioception, and balance—feeds the brain in ways that support attention, organisation, motor planning, and emotional regulation. When sensory systems are under- or over-responsive, children may struggle to engage or focus. Sensory Circuits aim to regulate these systems through planned, structured input.

Research also shows that sensory processing challenges occur when the brain has difficulty organising sensory messages, leading to hypersensitivity (over-responsive) or hyposensitivity (under-responsive). Sensory-based activities can help modulate these responses.

2. Why Sensory Circuits Work: Brain and Body Mechanisms

A. Arousal Regulation

The key scientific underpinning is the idea that a child must be in the "just right" state of alertness to learn. Sensory circuits are explicitly designed to adjust arousal—either increasing or decreasing it—to support attention, engagement, and readiness for learning.

B. The Role of Different Sensory Systems

Each section of the circuit targets different sensory systems:

1. Alerting (Vestibular + Proprioceptive Activation)

- Activities like jumping, skipping, spinning, or bouncing provide **vestibular stimulation**, supplying the brain with information about movement and head position.
- This boosts alertness, primes attention networks, and prepares the nervous system for learning domain.

2. Organising (Motor Planning + Multisensory Integration)

- Activities requiring balance, sequencing, timing, and bilateral coordination activate **executive functions**, support motor planning (praxis), and integrate multiple sensory cues.
- These tasks strengthen the brain's ability to filter sensory input and organise responses. [stbrigidsns.ie], [wyevalley.nhs.uk]

3. Calming (Deep Pressure + Proprioceptive Input)

- Activities such as wall pushes, heavy work, crawling, and weighted input activate the **proprioceptive system**, known for its regulating and calming effects.
- Deep pressure has strong evidence for reducing stress and supporting self-regulation.

These stages are neurologically sequenced to **move from activation → organisation → regulation**, ending in a calm, ready-to-learn state. Ending on calming activities is essential to avoid overstimulation.

3. Evidence Base & What Research Shows

✓ Evidence Supporting Components of Sensory Circuits

A systematic review of sensory-based interventions (2015–2024) found:

- **Deep pressure input** has strong evidence for improving regulation.
- Activities targeting **multiple sensory systems** are more effective than single-system interventions.
- Sensory strategies can improve functional outcomes when used appropriately.

✓ What Research Tells Us About Sensory Circuits Specifically

Direct large-scale research on "Sensory Circuits" as a named programme is limited, but:

- They are grounded in evidence-based sensory integration principles.
- Practice-based evidence from occupational therapists is abundant and supports improvements in attention, self-regulation, and readiness for learning.

✓ Connections to Neuroscience

Research on sensory-equipped environments shows:

- Controlled sensory stimulation helps regulate arousal.
- Calming stimuli can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing cortisol and improving mood and focus.

4. Benefits Observed in Practice

Based on clinical and school-based implementation:

- Improved focus and attention
- Better organisation of behaviour
- Enhanced motor skills
- Increased engagement, particularly among quieter or less responsive children
- Better readiness for classroom learning