"If your body is like a car engine, sometimes it runs high, sometimes it runs on low, and sometimes it runs just right."

"HOW DOES YOUR ENGINES RUN?" ®
The Alert Program for Self-Regulation
“How Does Your Engine Run”®
The Alert Program for Self-Regulation

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Overview:

- The Alert Program (AP) assists students in understanding the basic theory of sensory integration related to arousal or alert states.
- The focus is to help children learn to monitor, maintain and change their level of alertness so that it is appropriate to a situation or task.
These are the eight key concepts you should understand before beginning the program:

- Occupational Therapy
- Sensory Integration
- Arousal Theory
- “Engine Levels”
- Protective Responses
- Inhibition and “Heavy Work”
- Sensory-Motor Preferences
- “Detective work”
Arousal States or “Engine Levels”

- The “arousal” can be considered as the state of the nervous system describing how alert one feels.
- It can also be considered to attend, concentrate and perform tasks in a manner suitable to the situational demands, one’s nervous system must be in an optimal state of arousal for that particular task. *(Mercer and Snejil, 1997)*
- **Self-regulation** is the ability to attain, maintain and change the arousal appropriately for a task or situation.
Arousal States or “Engine Levels”

Examples of Engine Levels

Normal Day (Anne)

High

“Just Right”

Low

10:00 am  Noon  3:00  5:30  10:00 pm

High (Paul)

Low (Carl)

AM  PM

Figure 1-5.
Protective Responses

- “Sensory defensiveness is the over-activation of our protective senses.” (Willbager and Willbager, 1991)
- The protective responses are automatic and without cognitive thought.
Inhibition and the “Heavy Work”

- The “top-down” concept uses verbal reminders of what it is expected.
- The “bottom-up concept” (used in the AP), uses heavy work” input along with other sensory-motor strategies to help the brain to regulate in an optimal functional manner.
Sensory Preferences

- Determining sensory-motor preferences helps to assess what strategies may be most useful in achieving and maintaining an appropriate arousal state for various tasks and situations (See Sensory-Motor Checklist for Adults)
“Detective Work”

- Watch for subtle cues of child that indicate what type of sensory-motor strategies are being used for self-regulation, attention and function.
- When looking at behavior, decide if it needs to be changed. Is it working?
- Why would one consider changing the behavior? Safety reasons or because of the need of adults reasons?
Stage One: Identifying Engine Speeds

1. The child learns the engine words
2. The adult labels their own engine levels
3. The child develops awareness of the feel of their own engine speeds, using adult’s labels as guides.
4. The child learn to identify and label levels for themselves.
Stages of the Alert Program (Cont.)

- **Stage Two: Experimenting with Methods of Changing Speeds**
  1. The adult introduces sensory motor methods to change engine levels.
  2. The adult identifies sensory-motor preferences and sensory hypersensitivities.
  3. The child begins experimentation with choosing strategies.
Stage Three: Regulating Engine Speeds

1. The child chooses sensory-motor strategies independently.
2. The child uses strategies independently, outside of therapy sessions.
3. The child learns to change engine levels when options are limited.
4. The child continues receiving support.
But, what’s all this talk about engines?

- “Your body is like a car engine, sometimes it runs on low, sometimes it runs on high, and sometimes it runs just right”.
Stage One: Identifying “Engine Speeds”

1. The child learns the engine words.
2. Adult labels their own engine levels.
   - The child keeps learning engine words.
   - Adult’s modeling
3. The child develops awareness of the feel of their own engine speeds, using adult’s labels as guides.
   - Use of obstacle course activities. It is used at school/therapist settings but can be adapted at home as well.
   - Maximize opportunities in daily routines to promote awareness.
   - Stay in the present. Making references of things that happened at school can be abstract and confusing for the child.
Stage One: Identifying Engine Speeds (Cont.)

4. Student learns to identify and label levels for themselves. (Cont.)
   
   - Level of Alertness on High-Low Chart
Stage One: Identifying Engine Speeds (Cont.)

4. Student learns to identify and label levels for themselves. (Cont.)
   - Engages in gross motor movement to obtain optimal arousal state.
4. Student learn to identify and label levels for themselves. (Cont.)
   - Chart Level of Alertness following the movement.
Stage One: Identifying Engine Speeds (Cont.)

4. Student learns to identify and label levels for themselves. (Cont.)
   - Chart Level of Engines throughout the day
References:

“HOW DOES YOUR ENGINE RUN?”
A Leader’s Guide to
The Alert Program for Self-Regulation
Mary Sue Williams, OTR/L
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Therapy Works, Inc.

An Introduction to
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Take Five!
Staying Alert at Home and School
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