

Sensory Play

What is sensory play?

Any activity that stimulates the senses of touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing, movement, or balance.

How do I engage my child in sensory play?

Encourage your child to explore different movements, textures, colors, sounds, tastes, and smells. There are many activities you can complete in the home or outside.

What are the benefits of sensory play?

- Builds nerve connections in the brain's pathways, which leads to the ability to complete more difficult learning tasks.
- Supports language development and teaches sensory characteristics such as hot, cold, wet, sticky, dry, etc.
- Improves fine motor skills, which is the ability to use the muscles in the hands.
- Improves gross motor skills, which are big body movements such as sitting, crawling, walking, running, jumping, etc.
- Encourages children to explore objects in their environment.
- May help children expand their diet by exposing them to different textures, smells, and tastes.
- Can help increase social interactions by completing activities with adults or children their age.
- Develops motor planning skills, which is the ability to think about, plan out, and understand actions.
- Teaches problem solving and cause and effect skills.
- Can help give children the sensory input they need.
- Can be great for calming children.

Home Activities for Sensory Play

Please be sure to supervise children during these activities. Some of the items in these activities may be a choking hazard or may not be edible.

Play with Foods

- Allow your child to explore and play with different foods. Sometimes it is okay to let them make a mess while eating so they can explore different tastes, smells, and textures of foods.
- Your child can explore any foods you have in the home but here are some suggestions:
 - Cooked noodles
 - Rice
 - Yogurt
 - Whipped cream
 - Applesauce
 - Jell-O
 - Pudding
 - Oatmeal
 - Condiments
 - Fruits and veggies
- Food dye is also a great way to make playing with foods more fun by making items different colors.
- Playing with food is also great for helping your child expand their diet and increase independence with self-feeding!



Create Sensory Bins

- A sensory bin can be filled with many different materials for your child to explore.
- Use a large bin or container to place different items in. You can even use a few bins or containers to create various sensory bins.
- Find objects in your home to put in the sensory bin. This can be food or non-food items that are safe to explore such as:
 - Rice or quinoa
 - Beans
 - Dry noodles
 - Sugar or brown sugar
 - Popcorn kernels
 - Jellybeans
 - Corn
 - Coffee grounds
 - Dry cereal
 - Oats
 - Marshmallows
 - Flour
 - Shredded paper
 - Beads or buttons
 - Cotton balls
 - Birdseed
 - Epsom salt
 - Sand
 - Rocks or pebbles
 - Artificial grass
- Start with just one object to put in the sensory bin and then start to mix in some other objects as well. Remember, you can make more than one sensory bin!
- Hide different objects in the sensory bin and have your child dig to find them. This can be small toys, puzzle pieces, erasers, crayons, paper clips, chip clips, packing peanuts, seashells, or pinecones.
- Use kitchen utensils, measuring cups, cookie cutters, and other mixing utensils from the kitchen to use with the sensory bin.
- These activities are great for exploring your different senses and can even work on self-feeding skills by practicing with utensils.



Make Sensory Bags

- Sensory bags are bags filled with different items to engage your child's senses of touch and sight.
- Sensory bags are safe because your child cannot put the items in their mouth. They are also great because they keep items contained and prevent messes in the house.
- Sensory bags are also portable so you can take them on the go!
- Use Ziploc bags to create a sensory bag.
- Choose different fillers to put in the sensory bags such as:
 - Dry pasta
 - Popcorn kernels
 - Rice or sprinkles
 - Cereal or chips
 - Water
 - Hair gel or shampoo
 - Shaving cream
 - Baby oil
 - Beads or buttons
 - Cotton balls
 - Oil and water with food coloring
- After placing items in the Ziploc bag, zip it shut and use duct tape around the edges. Cover all four edges with tape, folding over the edge to help strengthen the bag. To prevent any holes or leaks in the bag, you can use two Ziploc bags and then tape the edges.
- Give your child individual bags to play with or create a grid on hardwood floor by taping the bags to the floor.
- Sensory bags are great for exploring different textures and can be great for promoting tummy time!



Make Sensory Bottles

- Keep your empty water bottles or food containers (ex: Parmesan cheese shaker) – it is best if these are see-through bottles.
- Fill up your bottle with different objects such as:
 - Dry pasta
 - Popcorn kernels
 - Rice or sprinkles
 - Beans
 - Beads or buttons
 - Water
 - Hair gel or shampoo
 - Baby oil
- Glue or tape the bottle closed to ensure your child cannot open it.
- Allow your child to shake the sensory bottle to hear the different noises and watch the objects move around.
- Sensory bottles can be calming for some children and are great to take on the go!



Painting Activities

- Use cardboard, paper/newspaper, or anything you want to paint on.
- Use paint brushes, old toothbrushes, sponges, sticks, popsicle sticks, Q-tips, cotton balls, or fingers to paint.
- If you don't have paint, try using shaving cream, cool whip, pudding, yogurt, water, or make your own homemade paint. Remember, you can use food coloring to make different colors with these materials.
- To make homemade paint, blend ½ cup of flour with ½ cup of salt. Then add ½ cup of water. Mix until smooth. Add food coloring for different colors.



Explore Nature

- Encourage your child to play outside.
- Play in the grass, dirt, or mud, collect leaves and flowers in the yard, and pick up and explore different objects such as rocks or pinecones.
- Make your own water table outside by bringing buckets of water out and giving your child measuring cups or kitchen utensils to play with.
- Create your own games or activities. For example, go on a scavenger hunt to find different items. You can collect different colored flowers and use them to make hair on faces that are drawn on paper or cardboard.



Sandbox Activities

- If you don't have a sandbox at home, you can make your own!
- Use empty containers or bins.
- Fill your container or bin with sand. If you don't have sand, try using sugar, brown sugar, or Epsom salt. You can even add food coloring to Epsom salt to make colored sand. Just add the salt to a Ziploc bag, add drops of food coloring into the bag, squish it around to mix it, and let it dry.
- Use kitchen utensils, cups, and bowls to allow your child to play in their sandbox. You can even add different toys or items in the home to hide in the sand.



Play with Playdough

- Playdough can be a great sensory activity. If you don't have any at home, try using these ingredients to make your own batch!
 - 1 cup of flour
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of salt
 - 1 teaspoon of cream of tartar
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon of vegetable oil
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of boiling water
 - Food coloring (15-20 drops for darker colors)
- Directions:
 - Whisk the flour, salt, and cream of tartar.
 - Make a small hole in the center and add the vegetable oil, boiling water, and food coloring.
 - Stir until the dough forms.
 - If the playdough feels runny or sticky, allow it to sit for a few minutes. If it still feels runny or sticky add a little more flour.
 - When dough is cool, use your hands to soften and form it.
 - Try adding different essential oils, scents, or spices (lavender, cinnamon, soap, etc.) to explore different smells with the playdough.
- Store the playdough in a Ziploc bag and place the bag in a sealed container.
- Allow your child to explore the playdough with their hands, kitchen utensils, cookie cutters, or any other objects in your home. You can even hide small items in the playdough and have them find them.



Play with Slime

- Use these ingredients to make your own slime:
 - 1 cup of liquid glue
 - 1 teaspoon of baking soda
 - 2 to 3 tablespoons of contact or all-purpose solution
 - Food coloring (optional)
 - Glitter (optional)
- Directions:
 - Mix the glue and food coloring in a bowl
 - Add the baking soda and mix it together
 - Add the contact solution to the mixture
 - Mix until the slime pulls away from the sides of the bowl
- Store your slime in a Ziploc bag or container.
- Allow your child to explore the slime with their hands, kitchen utensils, cookie cutters, or any other objects in your home. You can even hide small items in the slime and have them find them.



Craft Activities with Glue

- Exposing children to glue (stick or bottle) is a great sensory activity and there are endless crafts you can create using materials in your home.
- Use materials such as Q-tips, cotton balls, popsicle sticks, paint brushes, or old toothbrushes to spread liquid glue.
- Explore with glue:
 - Use paper, newspaper, or cardboard to make the craft on.
 - Let your child glue different objects on such as dry cereal, pasta noodles, scrap paper, beans, cotton balls, buttons, pouch tops, bottle caps, or anything else you may have around the house.



- Recycled crafts:

- Use materials such as egg cartons, toilet paper rolls, junk mail, empty boxes or food wrappers, pouch lids, or bottle caps and allow your child to make their own creations.



- Match and glue activities:

- Use paper or cardboard and draw dots, circles, or other shapes.
- Give your toddler cotton balls, pom poms, pouch tops, buttons, dry cereal, or other objects to glue onto the paper or cardboard.
- For a challenge, have your child match colors or shapes!



- Nature crafts:

- Pick flowers or leaves outside and turn it into a craft.
- Allow your child to glue them wherever they want to on a piece of paper or cardboard.
- Cut out a hole in the middle of a paper plate and make a wreath for whatever season you want.
- Draw letters or pictures on a piece of paper or cardboard and glue the leaves or flowers over top.



- Count and glue activities:

- Use cardboard or paper and draw lines for your child so they can glue items in a line.
- Use items to glue such as cotton balls, seeds, cereal, noodles, buttons, pouch tops, or bottle caps.
- Encourage your child to practice counting while lining up objects. You can even write numbers on the lines.



Bathtub Play

- Bath time is part of your child's routine, so try adding some sensory activities to make it more fun for them!
- Add cups or containers so your child can explore the water by scooping and dumping the water. You can also try adding items such as a strainer, sponges, or spray bottle for more fun.
- Add different toys or objects you have in the house for your child to play with. For example, try cutting up swimming pool noodles or pieces of foam for your child to play in the water with.
- Add foods into the bathtub. Cooked spaghetti noodles can be great to play in the water with. Remember, you can use food coloring for this!
- Use soap to make a bubble bath. Encourage your child to play in the bubbles by blowing or touching them. You can even try different soap scents or add essential oils to explore different smells as well.
- Play with shaving cream in the bathtub. Allow your child to use shaving cream to draw on the bathtub walls. You can even add a few drops of food coloring to make different colors.
- Drop ice cubes in the tub for your child to play with. You can even make colored ice cubes by adding a couple drops of food coloring into the water and then freezing it. Watch the ice cubes melt and give off their color in the water.



Blanket Swing

- Have two people hold onto a blanket to make a swing.
- Swing your child back and forth.
- This activity may give your child the sensory input they need to calm down and focus.



Blanket Drag

- Have your child lay on a blanket on the floor.
- Drag them around the house.
- This activity may give your child the sensory input they need to calm down and focus.



Blanket Roll

- Roll your child in a blanket like a burrito.
- Allow them to roll around on the floor.
- Provide extra pressure by adding pillows or couch cushions on top of them.
- This activity may give your child the sensory input they need to calm down and focus.



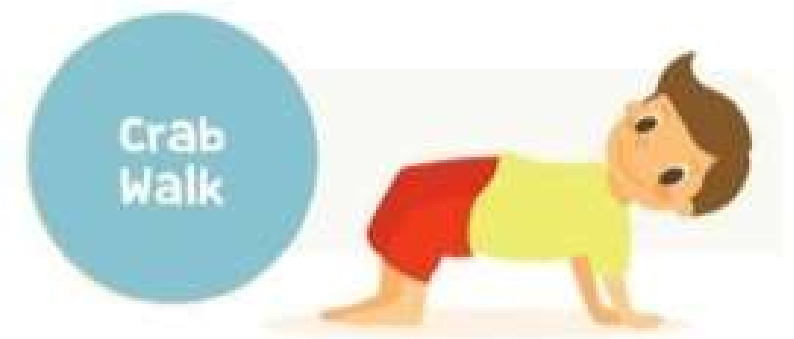
Crash Mat

- Use couch cushions, pillows, blankets, bean bags, or anything soft and squishy to create a crash mat for your child.
- Allow your child to run around and crash to get some energy out.
- This activity can help your child safely get the sensory input they are looking for.



Animal Walks

- Walk around the house like different animals.
- These animal walks can help give your child sensory input they need.



Row Your Boat

- Sit on the floor facing your child and hold hands.
- Push and pull so your upper bodies rock forward and backward with each motion. Try singing the song, row your boat!
- This activity can help give your child the sensory input they are seeking.



Massage

- Use your hands, a rolling pin, a towel rolled into a ball, or a soft and squishy ball like an exercise ball, kickball, or a small ball.
- Have your child lay on the floor and apply pressure to their body moving up and down.
- A fun way to engage your child in this activity is to call it making a pizza! As you're giving your child the massage, pretend you are turning them into a pizza by rolling out the dough, spreading the sauce on, and adding pizza toppings of their choice.
- This activity can help give your child the sensory input they need.



Heavy Work Activities

- Heavy work is an activity that pushes or pulls against the body.
- Heavy work activities can help your child get the sensory input they need.
- Place items in a laundry basket (books, clothes, blankets, pillows, or anything to add some weight into it) and have your child push it around the house.
- Play with canned goods – stack them or move them around the house.
- Have your child be your helper and carry or hold items for you.

