

Sensory-Rich Activities

This handout lists several activities (categorized by each sense) you can use to create sensory-rich experiences for your child. To optimize their experience, follow these general suggestions:

Encourage a balance of sensory activities every day. Just like adults, kids thrive when they can experience a variety of sensations. Try to make the sensory activity fun.

Go Outside. “Get your child to the playground or park every day, even when the weather isn’t great,” says Biel. Virtually every part of a park offers kids chances to nurture their senses, whether it’s lifting buckets of sand, (proprioceptive), or riding swings (vestibular).

Let them learn with their whole body. In today’s standards-driven classrooms, the pressure may be on for kids to read, write...and sit. Extend your child’s learning with fun sensory activities at home. Is your kid learning letters? Try tracing them in shaving cream or rice, or making them with glue and pasta. For early counting, try drawing a hopscotch board on the sidewalk and counting your way to ten.

Create a sensory savvy spot. This should be an enjoyable place where your child spends time and several senses can be engaged, such as a beanbag or rocking chair or pile of pillows with soft lighting, soothing items such as books and stuffed animals, music with headphones and a snack)

Play time: Help your child make up obstacle courses in the house or yard using crawling, jumping, hopping, skipping, rolling, etc. Listen to soft music. You can also go for a neighborhood walk with a wagon and have your child pull it (make it semi-heavy by loading it with something the child would like to pull around). You can do the same with a baby-doll carriage. Mini or full-size trampolines are excellent for providing sensory input as well. Sensory experiences can be incorporated into virtually every activity.

Vestibular: *Vestibular input (the sense of movement, centered in the inner ear). Any type of movement will stimulate the vestibular receptors, but spinning, swinging, and hanging upside down provide the most intense, longest lasting input. Vestibular Input is intense and parents should monitor how their children react*

1. Animal Walks
 - a. Bear walk
 - b. Crab walk
 - c. Wheelbarrow walk (not an animal, but same principle)
2. Bouncing

- a. Bouncing on hopping ball
- b. Bouncing on lap, trampoline, cushion
3. Cartwheels
4. Climbing, sliding, crawling
5. Dance.
6. Donkey Kicks
7. Drag them on a sheet or blanket
8. Hammer ice cubes in a plastic bag (then use them for lemonade!)
9. Handstands
10. Hang upside down
11. Hanging from a chin-up bar
12. Jump (on a mini-trampoline, from a chair to a sofa, on the bed, etc.)
13. Jumping jacks
14. Pillow Fight
15. Leap frog
16. Riding in stroller/wagon
17. Rock in a rocking chair or on a lap
18. Roll down grass/snow or any hill/incline
19. Rolling on floor
20. Run in circles
21. Scooterboard activities
22. Sit n spin
23. Spinning
24. Stuffed animal catch
25. Swim (doing flip turns and somersaults in the water)
26. Swinging
 - a. Blanket swinging
 - b. Swing your child around from their arms or legs
 - c. Swinging: Try different types of swinging to see how it feels (tire, rope, belly, etc)
27. Therapy ball activities: bouncing, rocking on tummy and back (on top of a mat for safety)
28. Tummy time push-ups (for babies)

Proprioception: *Proprioceptive input (sensations from joints, muscles and connective tissues that lead to body awareness) can be obtained by lifting, pushing, and pulling heavy objects, including one's own weight. A child can also stimulate the proprioceptive sense by engaging in activities that push joints together like pushing something heavy or pull joints apart like hanging from monkey bars.*

1. Tug-of-war
2. Hopscotch
3. Wrestling
4. Tickle fight

5. Drumming
6. Banging on pots and pans
7. Have a parade and march
8. Wiping the counters
9. Sweeping
10. Swiffering
11. Dustbusting
12. Unloading the washing machine and the dryer
13. Taking out the trash
14. Water balloon catch
15. Beanbag catch
16. Push-o-war (put palms against each other and push as hard as you can)
17. Make a kid sandwich by pressing down on him between two pillows or couch cushions
18. Make a kid burrito by rolling her tightly in a blanket
19. Roll out the cookie dough by rolling a big ball firmly over the back and limbs

Tactile: *The tactile sense detects light touch, deep pressure, texture, temperature, vibration, and pain. This includes both the skin covering your body and the skin lining the inside of your mouth. Oral tactile issues can contribute to picky eating and feeding difficulties*

1. Make your own sandbox with a bowl full of dry beans or Styrofoam peanuts.(hide objects in it for child to find)
2. Pour salt on a cookie sheet and paint with your fingers.
3. Spread beans out in a baking tray or pan and make a construction site for trucks.
4. Bury small toys in rice and have them do an archeological dig
5. Go on a texture walk (walk barefoot through a variety of textures: grass, sand, dirt, etc)
6. Have a texture scavenger hunt at home In the bath: Some sensory defensive kids hate getting wet, but these activities make bathing more fun for all kids:
 7. Add food coloring to the water
 8. Ladles, cups, strainers, squirters, funnels
 9. Play with shaving cream or foamy soap (add sand for extra texture)
 10. Soap crayons or bath paints
 11. Finger-paint
 12. Play with glitter glue
 13. Sandbox
 14. Use child-friendly modeling material such as Play-Doh, Model Magic, and Sculpey (the classic Play-Doh Fun Factory provides excellent proprioceptive input as well).
 15. Dress up in fun costumes to get used to the feel of unfamiliar clothing (can have them dress-up to put on a play or make a movie)
 16. Put on face paint or makeup
 17. Rub with different textures while in the bath, a smooth or nubby washcloth, a loofah, a nail brush.

18. Put shaving cream on a placemat to squish around
20. Mix cookie dough or cake batter with hands
21. Make play dough
22. Make a touch book of different textures from your home
23. Put single items in paper bags and let kids try to guess what they are
24. play with face paints
25. Repot the plants
26. Garden
27. Tickle Fingers (trace fingers lightly over the skin)
28. Pet the cat
29. Butterfly kisses (eyelash kisses)
30. Give each other massages
31. Put dollops of different colored paints in a baggie and squish around to mix the paints.
32. Sculpt
33. Sew, weave, crochet, or knit
34. Use sandpaper on woodworking or art projects

ORAL: *Taste input is perceived by our tongue but how we interpret or experience it is strongly influenced by our sense of smell.*

1. Use a vibrating toothbrush
2. Sip seltzer or carbonated drinks to experience bubbles
3. Lick lemons
4. Crunch ice
5. Eat popsicles, frozen fruit, and other frozen foods
6. Experience mixed temperature foods (hot fudge sundae, hot taco with cold toppings, etc.)
7. Use chewelry
8. Make smoothies and suck through a straw
9. Practice chewing gum and blowing bubbles
10. Use crazy straws Breathing is especially important for kids with low muscle tone, but we can all use to exercise our lungs and benefit from the therapeutic effects of breathing deeply.
11. Blow whistles
12. Make and blow pinwheels
13. Blow feathers off your hand
14. Play soccer by blowing a cottonball across the table scoring if you can blow it off the other person's end.
15. Have a cottonball race.
16. Make bubble mountains in a bowl with a straw and soapy water
17. Blow gently on each other's faces (see who can blow the longest)
18. Try giving a child a strong flavored candy or gum before trying a new food at dinner.
19. Practice blowing out birthday candles on playdough cakes
20. Make extreme faces

21. Allow your child to experience the sensation of “pop rocks”
22. Eat sensory savvy snacks, such as:
 - Carrot Sticks
 - Celery Sticks
 - Cucumbers
 - Grapes
 - Apples
 - Pears
 - Dried Fruit (cherries, apricots, mangos)
 - Orange Wedges
 - Whole wheat pretzels
 - Rice Cakes
 - Raisins
 - Granola Bars
 - Graham Crackers
 - Fruit Leather
 - Low Fat Yogurt with straw
 - Apple Sauce with straw
 - Chunks of cheese
 - Cheese Sticks
 - Whole grain cereal
 - Whole Grain Cracker (triscuits)
 - Cereal Bar
 - Popcorn
 - Chewy whole grain mini bagels
 - 7 grain chips
 - Baked pita chips
 - Bagel chips

Auditory: *Auditory input refers to both what we hear and how we listen, and is physiologically connected with the vestibular sense.*

1. Sit quietly and listen to nature or nature sound recordings (rain, ocean, thunder, birds singing)
2. Play a listening game. Sit very quietly and try to guess the sounds you hear.
3. Let them play with the stereo dial to experiment with loud and soft sounds.
4. Listen to a wide variety of music (calming, upbeat, different instruments, etc)
5. Draw attention to sounds all around us (fridge humming, aquarium, dishwasher, etc)
6. Encourage musicianship: Provide your child with a musical instrument and encourage him to play and even take lessons.
7. Allow child to predict and control sounds (turn on the vacuum cleaner, pop the balloons after a birthday party, anticipating the noise).
- 8.

Visual: *Visual input is received through the eyes and integrated and processed into meaningful images by the brain*

1. Play by candlelight
2. Turn off the lights and play flashlight tag
3. Shadow puppets
4. Build a fort or tent
5. Hide under a blanket and read by flashlight
6. play catch with a balloon
7. Do mazes or dot to dots

8. Trace your body or hands
9. Wear sunglasses

Smells: Olfactory input (sense of smell) comes through the nose and goes straight to the most primitive, emotional part of the brain. Certain odors can stimulate, calm, or send him into sensory overload.

1. Explore how your child reacts to different smells. If you find some are soothing or alerting, get lotions, soaps, or candles to help regulate mood.
2. Using a blindfold have them guess different smells. (peanut butter, maple syrup, apples, etc)
3. Put on aromatic lotion