

## Sensory activities ideas for SEN children

### What is sensory play?

Sensory play is any activity that stimulates the senses. There are five main senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, and two other less-known senses, vestibular (sense of balance) and proprioceptive (sense of where each body part is in relation to the rest of the body). The more kids use their senses, the more they develop them and the ability to learn using them.

### Why is sensory play so important?

- **Helps kids learn.** The more senses a child uses when learning something new, the better equipped that child is to remember and recall information later.
- **Builds language.** When kids describe a sensory play activity and how it feels as they experience it, they gain an understanding of words and that helps them develop a rich, descriptive vocabulary.
- **Promotes social interaction.** Children of all abilities can participate in sensory play. Peers who are typically developing may be apprehensive to approach a child who looks or acts different than they do. Sensory play activities can naturally entice kids to come close and investigate. Getting kids in close proximity to one another is the first step to interaction.
- **Develops motor skills.** Whether kids are making waves in a water table or drawing circles in shaving cream, they are strengthening the muscles in their body that are needed for daily living activities like zipping a jacket or brushing their teeth.

When you contemplate a sensory play activity for a child in your life with special needs, take into consideration not only what they'll learn, but also how they'll experience it —and then promote the areas that make the most sense for each child.

- **Kids who are blind or visually impaired** may not gain a tremendous amount of value from fourteen different shades of green crayon on simple, white copy paper. They may benefit more from enjoying a colouring activity on different textured paper – like bumpy, corrugated, and scratchy (e.g. sand paper).
- **Kids who are deaf or hard of hearing** may miss the verses in a song, however, they can feel the beat of the drum and the vibration of whistles and kazoos. Music can be part of sensory play for kids who are deaf or hard of hearing if you can help them feel the music.
- **Kids who have physical limitations** may not have the control to easily follow intricate paint by number patterns, but may find success with stamps and washable stamp pads, where elaborate masterpieces are created with simple movements.
- **Kids who have sensory processing issues** are a little trickier. Some are highly sensitive to sensory stimulation while others have low sensitivity. For kids who crave more stimulation, add scented extracts or small beads into homemade playdough. Or finger paint instead of using a brush so their fingers feel the coolness and movement

directly. For kids who are overly sensitive, finger painting may still be an option – but have the kids wear rubber gloves or put different coloured paints in a sealable plastic bag so they can experience how the colors mix and move without ever having to get paint on their hands.

With sensory play, as with all play, safety is important. Keep these tips in mind when you are preparing your sensory play activities...

- **Supervise.** Whether it's directly or within earshot, children should always know there is an adult nearby to help, if needed.
- **Be aware of overstimulation.** For some children, flashing lights are a sensory delight to watch; for others, those same lights may instigate seizures. Be aware of your child's needs and limitations.
- **Make sure they are developmentally appropriate.** Keep age, abilities, and skill in mind when choosing an activity. If children are still exploring with their mouths, make sure the activities you introduce have pieces large enough to not present a choking hazard and are non-toxic.

By providing opportunities to explore in different ways, you are helping children identify what they like and dislike. How they learn best. What calms them and what excites them. Use the senses to guide you in understanding your kids and helping them learn.

- 1- <https://www.firstdiscoverers.co.uk/sensory-activities-children-autism/>
- 2- <https://www.pentagonplay.co.uk/news-and-info/benefits-of-sensory-play-for-children-with-special-educational-needs>
- 3- <http://www.earlyyearsresources.co.uk/blog/2018/02/sensory-play-activities-and-ideas/>
- 4- <https://www.learning4kids.net/list-of-sensory-play-ideas/>