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RESOURCE NETWORK

Sensory Play for All Ages

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Why sensory play?

From birth through to early childhood, children use their senses to explore and try to make sense of the world around them. They do this by touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, moving and hearing.

We all learn best and retain the most information when our senses are involved.



Favorite Memories

Think of a favorite memory... chances are it is associated with one or more of your senses.

What do you remember seeing? Smelling?
Hearing?



Sensory Play and the Brain

Providing opportunities for children to actively use their senses as they explore their world through ‘sensory play’ is crucial to brain development – it helps to build nerve connections in the brain’s pathways.

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This leads to a child’s ability to complete more complex learning tasks and supports cognitive growth, language development, gross motor skills, social interaction and problem solving skills.





# What is sensory play?

*Sensory play* includes any activity that stimulates your young child's senses: touch, smell, taste, movement, balance, sight and hearing.

~Sensory activities facilitate exploration and naturally encourage children to use scientific processes while they *play*, create, investigate and explore. This allows their brain to create stronger connections to process and respond to sensory information.

Source: <https://www.educationalplaycare.com/blog/sensory-play-important-development/>



# The Five Senses and More

**Taste** – the stimulation that comes when our taste receptors react to chemicals in our mouth.

**Touch** – the stimulation that comes from touch receptors in our skin that react to pressure, heat/cold, or vibration.

**Smell** – the stimulation of chemical receptors in the upper airways (nose).

**Sight** – the stimulation of light receptors in our eyes, which our brains then interpret into visual images.

**Hearing** – the reception of sound, via mechanics in our inner ear.

**Movement** can also be considered a sense: such as body awareness in space (proprioception) and balance.



# Benefits of sensory play:

- Supports cognitive development by building nerve connections in the brain's pathways, leading to the child's ability to complete more complex learning tasks.
- Allows children to develop their knowledge through exploration and discovery, which appeals to children of all learning and thinking styles.
- Encourages problem solving and creativity.
- Supports language development, cognitive growth, fine and gross motor skills, problem solving skills, and social interaction.
- Aids in developing and enhancing memory.
- Helps to calm an anxious or frustrated child.
- Helps children learn sensory attributes (hot, cold, sticky, dry)

Sources:

<https://www.educationalplaycare.com/blog/sensory-play-important-development/>

<https://theivyacademy.org/12-benefits-of-sensory-play-with-activities-you-can-do-at-home/>





# Fun sensory play activities for all ages:





# Sensory Bins, Tables, and Tubs

Sensory tables, bins or tubs are specially selected containers for keeping sensory activities tidy.

Your sensory tub is limited only by the imagination and available materials. Themed sensory bins are perfect for exploring different topics, problem-solving and keeping the house clean. Match each theme with a book and song for extended learning and sensory fun.

Sensory tables and tubs may hold small items and objects that aren't ideal for mouths. Always closely supervise babies and toddlers. Newborns can also engage in sensory activities with your help. You can brush objects against their skin, and shake and rattle containers for sound.

For example: Let's say you are teaching your preschooler about dinosaurs, in addition to reading them a book about dinosaurs, you could also set up a sensory table with a dinosaur theme activity for them to explore. This might include some toy dinosaur characters, but also kinetic sand, pebbles and stones, pieces of wood, pine cones, assorted seeds and plant material like leaves, moss or succulents.

While playing with different sensory items is often self-directed, you can observe and ask open-ended questions to prompt learning, like:

What do you hear?

What does it smell like?

Tell me about...

## Other Sensory Activities that can be modified for all ages:

Sound tubes  
Play dough  
Balance beam  
Calming bottles  
Sandbox  
Swings  
Plant a garden  
Homemade musical instruments  
Jumping Fun  
Mud kitchen  
Art – painting (painting through plastic, finger painting, etc.)  
Frozen toys  
Sorting (pompoms, small toys, etc.)  
Beading  
Water play

More information and ideas on each of these can be found at:  
<https://www.healthline.com/health/childrens-health/sensory-play#activities>



**In closing,** sensory play activities don't have to be complicated to be fun and, often, they only require a few items that you probably already have around the house.

While it can get messy from time to time, helping your child engage with their senses will give them the chance to learn and grow as they interact with the world around them!





# Questions?

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