



# Home Program for Sensory Activities

Students need to experience a variety of different sensory activities to help them learn about their bodies and the world they live in.

Sensory activities should be included into all lessons and daily activities to give the children the opportunity to engage with their environment, for enjoyment and leisure activities.



## ACTIVITIES TO TRY



- Finger painting and hand painting.
- Washing hands with a variety of different textured flannels and sponges. Use strong smelling soaps. Dry them with a rough towel. When washing/drying hands use firm strokes, particularly around the joints.
- Have a box of different materials/objects (e.g. loofahs, furry objects, brush with firm bristles, sheepskin wool) and allow the child to explore them with their hands initially and then rub the material over different areas of their body. Talk to the child about what the material feels like and which part of the body is being rubbed.
- Baking gives a lot of opportunity for sensory activities (smells, sights, sounds). Give the child lots of opportunities to explore the flour/sugar/dough mixture with their hands and their mouths as they cook (don't worry about hygiene, it is more important that the child is fully included in the while cooking experience than to produce edible food in the end. Make different textured food and include strong smelling spices or essences (e.g. almond essence) and colourings. If you don't worry about being able to eat the food afterwards then these can be great exploratory sessions for the child and a good opportunity to work on switching skills (e.g. plug the food mixer into the switch box).
- Fill boxes with rice, sugar, beans and dry pasta and allow the child to explore the materials with their hands or hide contrasting objects in the materials to find (e.g. puzzle pieces).
- Also try with other materials such as jelly, spaghetti and cooked pasta, blancmange, instant whip, oatmeal (wet/dry), squirty cream in a can (squirting it onto the table and getting the child to make different patterns in it or squirting it onto different body parts).
- Finger foods - allow the child to eat a range of different textures with their hands.
- Always ensure that all items that are put in the mouth are safe to swallow.



## SOUND



- Record the child's vocal noises so that they can play them back and hear themselves.

• Allow the child to listen and experience a wide range of different music styles. Observe their responses to the different styles of music.

- Use different pieces of music to signify changes in routine. Having different pieces of music playing prior to something significant happening may help them gain some anticipation and understanding about what is going to happen next. Always play the same piece of music for different events, repetition aids learning and provides security.
- Provide opportunities to explore musical objects and instruments. This encourages learning about "Cause and Effect" and about their control over the world around them.
- Use switches to turn music on/off. Find a piece of music that motivates the child and use this within their routine as described above.

## SMELL



- Baking sessions.
- Use smells in the same way as music to signify different changes in routines (e.g. different incense sticks).
- Put strong scents into the sensory boxes. For example mix peppermint essence with the cooked pasta or add coffee to a bowl of cold water to explore).

## MOVEMENT



A change in body position is a source of sensory input. Moving a child who has limited moving opportunities should always be done in a slow controlled manner to give the child time to adjust to the sensations of movement.

## Remember to:

- ✓ Observe the child's reaction to sensory input. Stop the activity if it appears to be causing anxiety or a negative reaction.
- ✓ Spend time on one sensory stimulus at a time and give the child time to experience the input.
- ✓ Always use a firm touch rather than a light touch. Avoid the face, stomach and genital area.
- ✓ Contact the occupational therapist if any more information is needed or if there are any concerns.

## VISION



- Set up a visual corner: use strong netting in a corner of a room and attach items using pegs to the netting for the child to look at. Try and motivate them to reach out to touch and explore the objects. You can use different themes to select objects (e.g. colour or cultural themes). Bright contrasting colours are effective in colour stimulation. You can place a fan near the corner so that the child can turn it on to make the hanging objects move in the wind.
- Use visually stimulating objects to explore or switch on operated visual toys.
- Use the simple visual switch programmes on the computer. (e.g. "Switch it" where the child has to press the switch once and the picture changes).
- Add visual emphasis when talking to the child by using visual aids such as PECS cards, Makaton and photographs. You can use these to create a visual schedule.