

# Tactile and Sensory Activities

## **Tactile and Sensory Activities**

Many children see the world with their fingertips. They learn best through “doing” and “feeling” activities. Also, some children have challenges with their sensory skills and may have unusual habits when it comes to touch. These activities for children will help develop your child’s sensory skills, while making them more comfortable with touching different textures.

## **Shaving Cream Painting**

One of the fun activities for children is painting with shaving cream. Spray shaving cream on a cookie sheet and allow your child to spread it out, draw pictures in it, and move his fingers in it. You can add food coloring to make the shaving cream even more fun. Adding grains of rice or other small objects can also help your child feel the different textures. Your child can also use a paintbrush or straw to “paint” in the shaving cream. The best part of this activity is that it is easy to clean up, and you do not have to worry about a mess. However, smaller children should be supervised so that no shaving cream is consumed.

## **Touching and Feeling Different Textures**

There are several fun ways to expose your child to different textures and feelings. You can put together cards of different textures. Simply paste different textures on pieces of cardboard. Different textures can include carpet samples, a feather boa, glitter glued together, as well as other objects glued together.

You can also cut a hole into a small box, such as shoebox and put different textures in there. Allow your child to place his or her hand in the box and feel around. Ask them questions about what they feel, such as the following:

- Can they guess what it is?
- Is it big or small?
- Is it soft or rough?
- Do they like the way it feels in their fingertips?

## **Adding Weight**

Add weight to a backpack or handbag by adding a few books or toys to it. Make sure it is weighted but not too heavy for your child. Have your wear a backpack or bag and complete fun exercises, such as jumping jacks or an obstacle course. If you are near an outdoor playground, have your child go down the slide with the weighted backpack on his back or have him hang from the monkey bars with it on. These type of activities for special needs children help them become more aware of their senses and changes to their being.

The right sensory activities for special needs children depend on your child and his needs. A therapist can help you with ideas for activities for special needs children. The point in these fun exercises is to get your child used to the feeling of different objects, textures, and sensations.

- **Texture book** - Make a texture book using different textures – like wall paper, sand paper, bubble wrap, washing scourers, foam wash cloth etc
- **Smell tour** - Take a 'Smell tour' past places like the fish tanks, the body shop/Lush soap shop, pet shop, etc
- **Disability friendly park equipment** - Many public parks offer special integrated play equipment.
- **Foil play mat** - Use a foil emergency blanket as play matt. Great for sensory stimulation.
- **Dance competition** - Put on music and have a dance competition!
- **Dress yourself** - Using either a large piece of card or lining paper, draw around each other to create life-size figures. Then cut up old clothes to dress your portraits up.
- **Sensory flour games** - Mix cornflour and water together and it makes a great sensory play tool. Also put flour into a plastic bag and seal it with some food coloring. As it gets squished round it will change color.
- **Substitute sand** - Moonsand, for indoor play, made by Spin Master Ltd <sup>TM</sup> is available at most toy stores. It's a soft medium that trickles like normal sand, but moulds like dough. Lots of colors. Great fun!
- **Graffiti wall** - Stick some blank paper on a wall and turn it into a 'graffiti wall'. You can also paint a wall with blackboard paint or put up a big white board for graffiti fun.
- **Sensory tent** - Kit out a play tent with everyday items, such as old CDs, tinsel, fairy lights – for a great sensory space.
- **Sensory indoor tray play**- Use a plastic box, filled with different things, like dried beans, sand, shaving foam, even toothpaste, for sensory play.
- **Matching pair game** - Use a digital camera to photograph and make your own matching pair cards, eg: your dog, your home, family.
- **Aromatherapy** - Put on some relaxing music and have a home-made aromatherapy session. Dilute aromatherapy oils in a special carrier massage oil. Different people like different pressure so experiment a bit according to personal sensory needs.
- **Favorite memories scrapbook** - Use a camcorder or camera phone and make a scrapbook to record special moments when you are out and about, that you can look at together at the end of the day. Use a scrapbook to tell other people about favorite days out.

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## Children and Parents

### Tactile and Sensory Activities



#### Tactile and Sensory Activities for Special Needs Children

Many special needs children see the world with their fingertips. They learn best through "doing" and "feeling" activities. Also, some special needs children have challenges with their sensory skills and may have unusual habits when it comes to touch. These activities for special needs children will help develop your child's sensory skills, while making them more comfortable with touching different textures.

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The right sensory activities for special needs children depend on your child and his needs. A therapist can help you with ideas for activities for special needs children. The point in these fun exercises is to get your child used to the feeling of different objects, textures, and sensations.

Photo by Ernst Vikne

Resource:

The Special Needs Child

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Many children with "Autism" DX really have seizures

## **Sensory Bottles**

A collection of clear plastic bottles and a hot glue gun can help you create a world of swirling, sparkling discovery for your special little guy or gal. Fill the bottle with tap water for quick whorls, or with corn syrup for slower drifts. Let your child help you choose glitter, sequins, sand, food coloring and many other items that encourage your child to observe, recognize and recall information. Small plastic or foam letters, seashells and wooden beads are popular among preschool children. Choose a mix of items that float or sink, add them to your bottle of liquid, hot glue the top on and help your child shake, spin and turn the bottles, observing the different effects of each.

## **Sensory Tables**

Sensory tables create a safe place for otherwise messy activities that involve tactile materials such as sand, water, rice or seeds. Warm water, baby shampoo, a washcloth and a plastic doll can be added to a sensory table for a baby bath that will teach your child to use gentle hands with others and reinforce personal hygiene skills. A few inches of craft sand, some pretty seashells and a pail and shovel create an exciting scavenger hunt that encourages the exercise of fine motor muscles. Rice, a few measuring cups and a mixing bowl can introduce measuring with standard units, and the rice can have a cool, calming effect on the child.

## **Art Trays**

Children can use art trays to contain activities with art supplies such as clay, play dough or paint. Smashing and rolling play dough helps children with special needs develop fine motor skills. It can also have a calming effect on the children and encourages artistic expression. Shaving cream or whipped cream can be molded into shapes or smoothed out for preschoolers to practice etching letters and pictures. A plastic baggy filled with dollops of different colored paint makes for an activity with a satisfying squish, allowing children to explore what happens when they mix colors together as they smush the baggy with their fingers.

## **Paper Activities**

There are countless activities involving paper that can help children with special needs explore and express themselves in different ways. Tearing colored tissue paper and fashioning it into flowers makes for a beautiful bouquet for mom, and allows the children to use small muscles in their hands and discuss the sound the paper makes as it rips. Or, put on your child's favorite song, grab a roll of toilet paper and toss it around the room until it has completely unrolled. Keep dancing as you tear and throw the paper, observing how the air currents catch the paper and affect how it moves. A special "bleeding" tissue paper can be cut or torn and placed on white paper and dribbled with water from eyedroppers, paintbrushes or sponges. The color will move from the tissue paper to the white paper, creating interesting art beneath.

# Fun things to try with disabled children

## Written by a parent of a disabled child

Here are some tips and fun things to do with your child if they have a disability or additional needs. These tips are kindly provided by a parent for parents.



- **Texture book** - Make a texture book using different textures – like wall paper, sand paper, bubble wrap, washing scourers, foam wash cloth etc
- **Smell tour** - Take a 'Smell tour' past places like the fishmongers, fish and chip shop, the body shop/Lush soap shop, pet shop, etc
- **Borrow equipment** - If you need equipment during the holidays, ask your school/college or day centre if you can borrow equipment from them, rather than hiring it.
- **Disability friendly park equipment** - Many public parks offer special integrated play equipment. There is a wheelchair-friendly roundabout, Called the Mobility Whirl, in over 100 parks. To find out more, call: 01248 600372.
- **Foil play mat** - Use a foil emergency blanket as play matt. Great for sensory stimulation.
- **Dance competition** - Put on music and have a dance competition!
- **Dress yourself** - Using either a large piece of card or lining paper, draw around each other to create life-size figures. Then cut up old clothes to dress your portraits up.
- **Toy libraries** - Toy libraries provide toys and play opportunities for children with special needs and also information and support for parents, carers and their siblings. To find your toy library, contact the National Association of Toy and Leisure Library's Helpline Services: tel: 020 7255 4616 or email: [helpline@playmatters.co.uk](mailto:helpline@playmatters.co.uk)
- **Ideas book** - Roma Lear has written a range of books full of ideas of activities for people with special needs, look out for her on Amazon.
- **Sensory flour games** - Mix cornflour and water together and it makes a great sensory play tool. Also put flour into a plastic bag and seal it with some food colouring. As it gets round it will change colour.
- **Substitute sand** - Moonsand, for indoor play, made by Spin Master Ltd <sup>TM</sup> is available at most toy stores, including the Early Learning Centre. It's a soft medium that trickles like sand, but moulds like dough. Lots of colours. Great fun!
- **Graffiti wall** - Stick some blank paper on a wall and turn it into a 'graffiti wall'. You can also paint a wall with blackboard paint or put up a big white board for graffiti fun.
- **Home skittles** - Use guttering to make a chute to play skittles.
- **Sensory tent** - Kit out a play tent with everyday items, such as old CDs, tinsel, fairy lights – for a great sensory space.

- **Sensory indoor tray play**- Use a plastic box, filled with different things, like dried beans, sand, shaving foam, even toothpaste, for sensory play.
- **Matching pairs game** - Use a digital camera to photograph and make your own matching pair cards, eg: your dog, your home, family.
- **Concessions** - Always ask about discounts for disabled people and their carers. Some major venues have generous discounts. Always ring the theatre and ask, or call in person possible, as concessions are not available online.
- **Aromatherapy** - Put on some relaxing music and have a home-made aromatherapy session. Dilute aromatherapy oils in a special carrier massage oil. Different people like different so experiment a bit according to personal sensory needs.
- **Favourite memories scrapbook** - Use a camcorder or camera phone and make a scrapbook to record special moments when you are out and about, that you can look at towards the end of the day. Use a scrapbook to tell other people about favourite days out.
- **Smelly socks game** - Use old socks or buy some from a charity shop. Scent some cotton wool balls with different smells like tea, coffee, lemon, apple or tomato ketchup etc. When cotton balls are dry, put them in the socks, tie them up with a ribbon, and play a game of 'Guess the smell'.

This article was kindly provided by [Netbuddy](#).



## How we can help you

If you would like support and advice, you can talk to one of our Family Support Workers by calling our confidential helpline on [0808 800 2222](tel:0808 800 2222). You can also share experiences and advice with other parents on our [Forums](#). Family Lives is here for you and you can contact us about any family issue, big or small.

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# Sensory Bags

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Sensory bags are great for kids to develop their prewriting skills. Plus they are mess-free and therefore a mom's favorite play tool!

## Supplies

- Sandwich bag
- Styrofoam balls
- Hand sanitizer

## Directions

1. Stuff a handful of Styrofoam balls into a sandwich bag. Don't overstuff as it will be difficult for your child to play the activity.
2. Squeeze in a teaspoon of hand sanitizer so that the balls are stuck to each other and it's even more fun to play! Here are a few things you can have your toddler do with the sensory bag –
3. Place a paper over the bag and have the kids color it with wax crayons. They will notice interesting patterns emerging from the paper!
4. Place a conical, but not sharp, object underneath the sensory bag and have your child practice her pincher grasp.
5. Just give them the bag to squeeze and squish.
6. You can freeze the bag in the fridge for the kids to feel what 'really cold' feels like.

