

Sensory Play

Sensory play is any activity that stimulates a child's senses – touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste, as well as movement and balance. It might look like simple (and sometimes messy!) fun, but it is actually an important way children learn about their world and develop important life skills.

Why sensory play matters

- **Builds Brain Connections:** When children explore texture, sounds, and materials, their brain makes new connections that support thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.
- **Supports Language Development:** Describing what they feel (“It’s soft!” “It’s squishy!”) helps children build vocabulary and communication skills – verbal or using alternative communication methods
- **Encourages Curiosity and Imagination:** Sensory experiences invite children to explore and create in their own way – there is no “right” or “wrong” outcome.
- **Supports Emotional Regulation:** Sensory activities can be calming or stimulating depending on what a child needs. They help children manage emotions, focus attention, and feel secure in new environments.
- **Strengthens Fine and Gross Motor Skills:** Scooping, pouring, squeezing, and manipulating materials all help develop the muscles needed for everyday tasks like writing, dressing, and feeding.



- **Promotes Social Skills:** At playgroup, sensory play encourages turn-taking, sharing, and cooperation as children play side-by-side and communicate about what they are doing.

Sensory Play Ideas

Lots of children love exploring sensory play! It's all about giving little ones the chance to touch, smell, see, hear and move as they discover new textures and materials. Below are just a few sensory play ideas you can try at your playgroup! Get creative and feel free to use some of your own ideas.

Playdough Fun

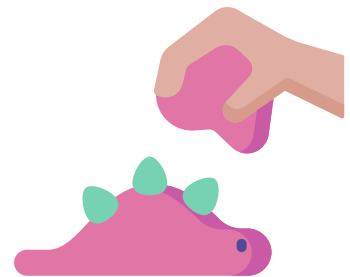
Playdough is a simple, hands-on sensory activity that encourages children to squeeze, roll, shape and create together. It supports fine motor development, creativity and early learning, while also promoting social interaction, shared play and language as children sit alongside one another and talk about what they are making.

You'll need:

- 2 cups boiling water
- 1 cup table salt
- Food colouring
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 cups plain flour
- 4 tsp cream of tartar
- Rolling pins, cutters, etc.

What to do:

- In jug, stir boiling water and salt
- Add food colouring and oil
- In bowl, mix flour & cream of tartar
- Mix wet ingredients with dry in bowl
- Wait for mixture to cool slightly and knead
- Play! Roll, cut out shapes, squish



Rainbow Spaghetti

Rainbow spaghetti is a bright, sensory-rich activity that encourages children to explore colour, texture and messy play together. It supports sensory exploration, fine motor development and creativity through open-ended play, while also promoting social interaction and language as children play alongside one another and talk about what they are seeing and feeling.



You'll need: cooked and cooled spaghetti, food colouring, a small amount of cooking oil to prevent sticking, and ziplock bags or bowls for mixing the colours.

What to do: Divide the cooked spaghetti into bags or bowls, add different food colours with a little oil or water, and mix to coat. Rinse well with cold water, then invite children to explore the spaghetti freely through touching, mixing and play.

Pigs in Mud

Pigs in Mud is a fun, hands-on sensory play activity that invites children to explore messy "mud" while playing with toy pigs or other farm animals. It supports sensory exploration, fine motor development, creativity and imaginative play, while also encouraging social interaction, turn-taking and language as children play alongside one another and share in the experience.

You'll need:

- Toy pigs or farm animals
- A shallow tray or tub
- "Mud" ingredients - cornflour, water and cocoa powder, or chocolate cake mix and water
- Optional - you may want to use aprons or art smocks for this one!

What to do: Mix the ingredients to create a soft, squishy mud, then add the animals to the tray.



We all have our own sensory likes and dislikes, and that's ok. Not every activity will suit every child (or adult!) Encourage all children to join in but don't worry if they don't want to get fully involved or involved at all. You can offer simple alternatives so they can take part in a way that feels comfortable. For example, if a child is curious about the "Pigs in Mud" activity but doesn't want to get their hands messy, they could use a toy truck or spoon to explore the mud instead.