

Sensory Integration Activities and Materials

By Kathleen M. Ray. Reprinted from *CEE*, March 2012.

Sensory Integration Tubs

Use small plastic tubs with lids to hold a variety of items that can stimulate all the senses. You can find most of these items in your local discount store; they usually will be small:

- Baby lotion
- Baby powder
- Stretch bands or toys
- Squeeze toys and balls
- Light-up toys or flashlights
- Windup toys
- Small snacks with different textures (e.g., raisins, Cheerios, M&M's, dried fruits)
- Textured swatches (e.g., satin, sandpaper, silk, terry cloth, fur, plastic, leather, flannel, and cotton)
- Play dough or clay
- A vibrating toothbrush

Auditory Activities

- **Sounds hide and seek.** For this sound game, you can use any kind of instrument that makes noise. Give an instrument to the child who is to hide. Have the child hide with the instrument and make noise until he or she is found. Instruments might include whistles, harmonicas, bicycle horns, tambourines, or pots and spoons.
- **Loud and soft, fast and slow.** Using a variety of sound-making objects, demonstrate opposite sound qualities such as loud and soft, and then allow the children to do the same. Use headphones or earplugs if there is excessive noise around the area. Noisemakers can be made from paper-towel rolls. Cover the ends with construction paper after filling the rolls with popcorn, seeds, small rocks, or salt.

Taste Activities

- **Peanut-butter cookies.** These tasty cookies can be made and enjoyed in five minutes.

- 1 T. peanut butter
- 1 T. nonfat milk
- 1 graham cracker
- Zip-lock sandwich bag

Give each child a cracker in a cake pan. Have the children use their fingers to crumble the cracker into fine pieces. Place the crumbs into a sandwich bag. Add the peanut butter and nonfat milk. Seal the bag, making sure all the air is out. Have the children knead the bag until the ingredients are mixed. Open the bag, take out the dough, roll it into small balls, and eat it. You can also roll the cookies in sprinkles or coconut if you like. Makes one bag—have enough ingredients on hand for all the children. (Use peanut-butter substitute for an allergy-free snack.)

- **What is it? How does it taste?** Gather a variety of small sweet, salty, bitter, and sour food samples. Blindfold the children and have them taste and describe each item. This activity could also be done without a blindfold, with the children's eyes closed or open.

Tactile and Fine-Motor Activities

- **What's in my purse?** For this activity you will need an old purse and pairs of common objects such as crayons, keys, buttons, and baby socks. Put one of each of the objects in the purse. Give the children an item and see if they can find the matching item inside the purse without looking

Sensory Integration Activities and Materials

• **Manipulatives**

- Puzzles with or without knobs
- Counters such as plastic chips, coins, dried macaroni or beans, or plastic animals or people
- Pegs and Peg-Boards
- Hand or finger puppets
- Painting supplies (for finger, sponge, or brush painting)
- Stamping or printing supplies (stamps or vegetables such as potatoes)
- Gluing supplies
- Play dough or clay (this can be homemade to stimulate the sense of smell)
- Hammer, nails, and wood
- Crayons, pencils, or markers
- Sand, dried beans, corn, noodles, or cotton balls to dig through

Vestibular and Proprioceptive Activities

- **Animal games.** Think up various types of animals with your children, and then move like the animal.
 - Snake—slither on floor
 - Rabbit or kangaroo—jump up and down
 - Elephant—clasp hands together and swing them back and forth
 - Cheetah—run in place as fast as you can
 - Frog—hop like a frog
 - Bird—flap arms as if flying
 - Penguin—keep both arms at your side and waddleYou can also play the bug game by becoming a worm, a butterfly, a bee, a spider, or a grasshopper.
- **Playground Equipment**
 - Swings
 - Slides
 - Merry-go-round
 - Ball games
 - Rings
 - Jungle gyms
 - Trampolines
 - Seesaw

Oral Motor Activities

- **Bubble wrapping paper.** This is a fun, easy way to make homemade wrapping paper. Make a bubble solution and add food coloring. Have the children blow bubbles onto blank sheets of paper and let them dry. If bubbles get on a child's clothes they may stain, so have the children wear a smock or an old shirt. If you use straws instead of bubble wands, poke a few small holes an inch from the top of the straw so children can't suck the bubble solution up.
- **Blowing races.** Line up different colors of cotton balls or Ping-Pong balls along a designated line. Have children blow the balls to a designated finish line.

Olfactory Activities

- **Olfactory “smelly trees.”** Draw a simple rectangle for a tree trunk and an oval for the leaves on some construction paper. Place a few tablespoons of ground coffee into a shallow bowl. Allow the children to paint the tree trunk with glue and decorate it with coffee grounds. Pour the excess back into the bowl. Tear open an herbal tea bag and place the contents in another shallow bowl. Have the children paint glue on the oval and then sprinkle the tea on for the leaves.
- **What is it? How does it smell?** Gather a variety of foods or other items with notable smells. The children can be blindfolded, they can close their eyes, or they can keep them open. Present the “smelly” items one at a time for each child to identify.

Visual Activities

- Sorting shapes
- Finding hidden shapes or pictures in a busy background
- Matching games
- Picking out what is wrong or different in pictures