

The Benefits of Sensory Play

By Nicola Kelly

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From birth children are learning about the world around them through touching, tasting, smelling and hearing. Through experiencing and experimenting with sensory play children will have a greater understanding of the world around them.

Sensory activities facilitate your child's natural curiosity and instinct to explore. As well as developing both gross and fine motor skills, it also encourages emotional and social development, understanding of basic maths and science concepts and expands their language base.

Sounds like a lot to cover during a session at the water tray? It is easy to take for granted what your child can achieve from a simple sensory activity, but if that activity engages them, with the right support they can learn so much without realising it! Just adding a few different pieces of equipment or asking the right open ended questions can have your child thinking of new ideas to test their theories! For example, adding ice cubes or washing up liquid to water play or different sized containers to sand play.

At home I have a 19 month old little boy, who, like me has an aversion to getting messy but unlike me he has no qualms about having a messy house!! To encourage us both out of our comfort areas I decided to start providing sensory play at home.

I started with a little preparation. On a visit to the local garden centre I picked up a large gravel tray, great for containing most of the mess! At home I hunted through the airing cupboard for an old towel to mop up any spillages and then started collecting different containers and utensils as I found them.



Playing it safe I started with water play, mixing some warm water with washing up liquid to make bubbles which my little boy loved! Placing the towel under the tray, we got out his kitchen set and I added different sized spoons and some additional pots, to add some depth, I also used my washing up bowl.

We both sat down and started pouring and mixing, getting absolutely soaked and not caring a dot! Afterwards we just changed clothes and mopped up any spillages with the towel. Success!!

Since then we have tried using ice cubes, shaving foam, dried pasta and, in an attempt to get him to eat them, raisins and apple!

If you are inspired and want try some sensory play at home, or are looking for new ideas of what to offer why not try these with your child...

Pasta play Use different shapes, cooked or uncooked.

Paper Play Shredded- If you are using your shredder to dispose of bank statements or the like, why not let the children play with the results?

Wet- Adding pages of magazines (if you're lucky you'll have read them first!) to a shallow bowl of water and let them explore how the paper changes.

Cloud dough Easier than making play dough, this just has two ingredients baby oil and flour! Just mix one cup of oil to 8 cups of flour to make basic dough. You can also add items from your cooking cupboard to enrich your child's experience like, vanilla essence, food colouring, cocoa powder or spices like cinnamon or turmeric.



Cornflour
play

Pour some corn flour into a bowl and mix it with water until it becomes thick, so you can still pour it but it feels solid under pressure. Pour the cornflour onto the table and allow the children to explore the texture of the mixture.

Shaving
foam

A great one to practice mark making on a flat surface like a large baking tray.



Pasta play was a hit, he loved scooping up and pouring the different sized pasta into different containers using my measuring spoons!



He wasn't so sure on the shaving foam so I added a couple of his favourite toys to encourage him. I left the tray out so he could keep coming back to investigate.

