

# Multi-sensory Matters: Activity Ideas to Support Child Development

By Sarah Russell

**Children are born to learn about their surroundings provided their sensory systems are adequately stimulated and utilized. Sarah Russell lists various activities that can help support a child's development.**

All children are born with a central nervous system wired for multisensory based inputs. For example, in the initial days, babies are attentive to their mother's voice, they quickly learn to differentiate the smell of breast milk/bottle milk from other smells and feel comforted through swaddling or rocking.

Understanding the role of the sensory system in early infancy gives rise to the knowledge that if children are provided with learning opportunities in the early years based on utilizing their sensory systems, it enhances and adds value to their development. The meaning of sensory activities involves stimulating the senses, such as touch, vision, hearing, sight, taste, movement and muscle input.

It's fun and engaging to incorporate a variety of rich sensory modalities into your child's play, thus developing an integrated sensory system. When children are able to reliably and smoothly receive, integrate and process sensory materials, these efforts play an essential role in the development of fine, gross and visual motor, social thinking and higher level learning skills (e.g. reading, maths, spelling).

## Activity ideas you can try at home:

### Babies and Toddlers

- Provide music and sensory books to your child to scrunch, touch, open flaps, etc.
- Provide cause and effect toys (e.g. pop-up toys, musical instruments).
- Try this easy to make 'rattle' at home: Fill a water bottle with water and glitter or simply ditch the water and add pasta, rice, dried beans. This makes a fun and cheap toy for your child to shake around which is rich in differ-

ent kinds of sounds and visual sensory inputs.

- Have your child sit and play with different textures on their legs, feet and hands (e.g. grass, sandpit, water, etc.). Hint: a sandpit/ water tray table is a great space saver for families living in a condominium.



PhotoSource: Pixabay

- In the bath provide your child with bath crayons (toddlers) to scribble with, cups and teapots to fill and pour with, squeezy toys (more suitable for toddlers) etc.
- Have your child engaged in some finger feeding. It is another way to develop your child's touch (tactile) sensory system along with supporting aspects of his/her fine motor skills (e.g. dexterity skills, hand-eye coordination).

*To name a few benefits, these activities help develop your child's ability to use both hands together (bilateral coordination), hand-eye coordination and develop their muscle strength.*

### Preschoolers:

- Dress-up box with a variety of different textures. It is also a great way to work on self-care skills such as buttoning and zipping.
- Early writing development/ drawing: using chalk on the pavement or easel, crayons, fine painting, drawing in a tray of flour/ shaving foam, bath crayons etc.
- Playdough-kits are a fun way to keep children entertained and engaged, although you can: have them hide and find little treasures buried into the playdough, make 'pretend' food items/ sculpt animals, make letters/ numbers etc.
- Spend time outdoors such as at the playground, swimming pool, sandpit etc.
- Make pictures/ collages using objects found around the house/park e.g. leaves, grass, dirt, tam bark, flowers, etc. Use homemade glue where they can use their fingers (or use a paintbrush), sticky tape dispenser, stapler, hole puncher etc.
- If your child is particularly fidgety you might find he/she can engage better while standing at a desk to play and/or when movement is embedded into their learning (e.g. jumping on a trampoline while counting or doing their ABC's). You can also tie some theraband to the chair legs and have them kick on this while they do their work/ play.
- Let your child get dirty by playing in the mud, running through a sprinkler/ playing with the hose-pipe, face paint, draw and paint, shaving foam. These are all rich in tactile information which help children develop a plethora of skills such as developing their body awareness, which is an important precursor for fine and gross motor development.