



**Sensory Play:
What, Why & How**

What is sensory play?

Sensory play includes any activity that stimulates your young child's senses: touch, smell, taste, movement, balance, sight and hearing. Sensory activities facilitate exploration and naturally encourage children to use scientific processes while they play, create, investigate and explore.

Sensory play has so many benefits for children of all ages and we see children develop immense concentration from the scooping, mixing, sorting, smashing, and pouring that is offered with this play.



We often talk about the five senses. These are:

- **Taste** – the stimulation that comes when our taste receptors react to chemicals in our mouth.
- **Touch** – the stimulation that comes from touch receptors in our skin that react to pressure, heat/cold, or vibration.
- **Smell** – the stimulation of chemical receptors in the upper airways (nose).
- **Sight** – the stimulation of light receptors in our eyes, which our brains then interpret into visual images.
- **Hearing** – the reception of sound, via mechanics in our inner ear.

ACTION: Let's brainstorm a sensory activity that would engage each of the 5 senses!

What are the benefits of sensory play?

Research shows that sensory play builds nerve connections in the brain's pathways, which lead to the child's ability to complete more complex learning tasks. In addition, sensory play supports:

- Language development, cognitive growth, fine and gross motor skills, problem solving skills, and social interaction.
- Developing and enhancing memory
- Calming an anxious or frustrated child
- Children learning sensory attributes (hot, cold, sticky, dry)

When a child is adding and stirring ingredients it fosters creativity and enables children to experiment with science and math concepts. Children begin to understand and investigate with ideas such as more/less, same/different, many/few, empty/full, before/after, greater than/less than. Children also learn physics principles such as the effects of force (increasing water flow through increased force); effects of gravity (water runs downhill) etc.

Here are some materials that we recommend having on hand:

- Flour, salt, cream of tartar (ingredients for play dough)
- Rice and/or beans/lentils
- Shaving foam (fragrance free)
- Food coloring
- Non-toxic bubbles (like children's bubble bath)
- Spaghetti noodles and other dried pasta
- Empty plastic containers (yogurt, etc), jars, small vases, tupperware containers, etc (anything you can find to scoop, pour and fill)



Here are some 'nice to have' materials that you can order and re-use but aren't critical for sensory play success:

- [Kinetic sand](#)
- Water beads (and we like [this one](#) because the container can be re-used for sensory play afterwards!)
- Baby oil
- Small funnels, scoops & spoons, tongs. We love this [wooden set](#) but also enjoy these [plastic ones](#).
- Small world play objects such as animals, shapes, etc
- Mortar & pestle
- Essential oils (lavender is great)
- Scale/bucket balance (we love [this one](#) from Lakeshore Learning)
- Discount School Supply has compiled a great list of [sensorial materials for purchase](#)

Tips & Tricks for execution

- Introduction is key

- sharing what the materials are, how we will use them and repeating that the materials stay where they belong i.e. “When I open this lid, will you help me keep the rice in the bin? Rice stays in the bin”.

Reminder: Fewer words better, simple, clear. They are excited to have you open the lid so don't speak several sentences about how to use it and what not to do, they aren't listening!

- Containing the activity.

- Prepare your space! Sensory tables are great and we have had parent volunteers make us several over the years so if that is in your skillset, great!
- Large storage tubs or bins can be just as good!
- Kitchen mixing bowls and/or buckets can work too!

- The clean up.

- Pick an old queen sheet or big towel to be the sensory mat, to aid in easy clean up. Including your child in the clean up is important and having a small dustpan and brush or spray bottles, rags, etc can help them feel excited about the clean up process.

The Art of Observation

Observation is an integral and ongoing part of a Montessori teacher's work and a valuable skill to embrace as a parent. Observing without judgment is one of the most vital teaching tools we have to "follow the child," recognize her needs, and assist her in finding her strengths and capabilities.

Observation is a critical component of lesson planning and classroom management. When the teacher observes that a student has mastered a concept or skill, she can introduce new lessons. When you work or play with your child at home, holding some questions in your mind can be a great way to develop your awareness and skill in observation. Here are some questions you might consider when doing sensory play activities:

- Do they like using their hands or utensils?
- Do they like mixing or pouring?
- Do they seem to respond to texture in a positive or negative way?

TUMMY TIME SENSORY BAGS



 CanDo Kiddo

EDIBLE SAND

SAFE FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS



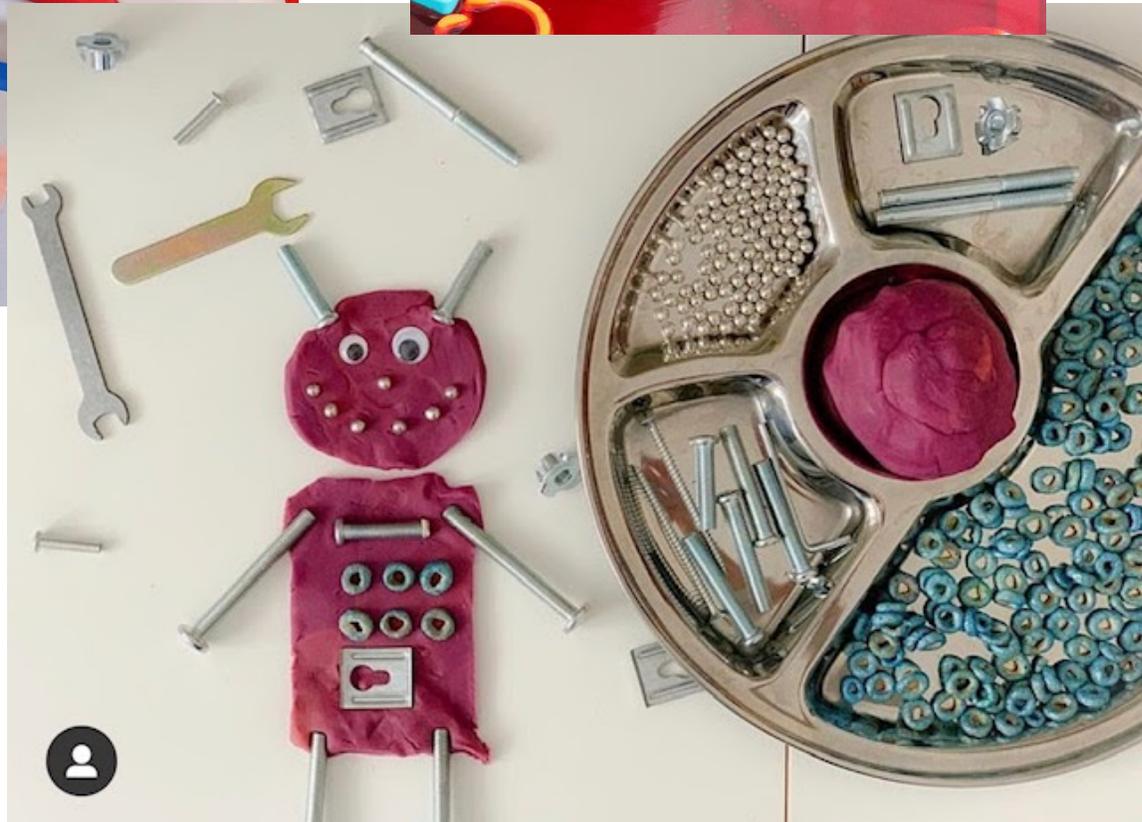
GREEN PEA Sensory Bag

-Happy Toddler Playtime-



Save







JACK-O-LANTERN Sensory Bin

a scoop and pour activity



HIDE THE ANIMALS

AN EASY TODDLER ACTIVITY



ICE PLAY

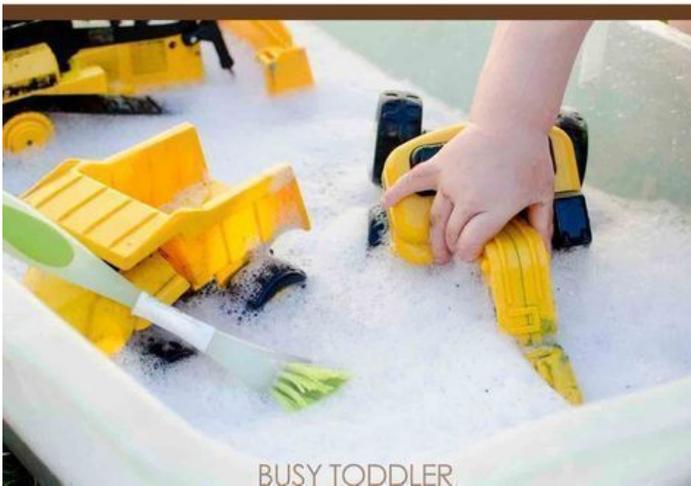
frozen sensory play ideas

NurtureStore





MUDDY TRUCKS & CAR WASH



BUSY TODDLER

GET YOUR BOXES! PAINTED BOX CAKE IS AWESOME!



BUSY TODDLER



SENSORY WRITING TRAY



MESSY LITTLE MONSTER.COM



PERI BOTTLE COLOR MIXING

YUP, PERI BOTTLE.



TUBES & RICE

A FUN SENSORY BIN



Sensory Science Smell Bottles



THE CHAOS & THE CLUTTER

Our Go-To Recipes

Moldable Play Sand Recipe (kinetic sand)

This moldable play sand recipe has just three ingredients and the children really enjoy this sensorial material.

Materials

- 5 cups of play sand
- 3 cups of all purpose flour
- 1 cup of vegetable oil

Instructions

- Combine all of the ingredients in a large plastic bin (preferably with a lid).
- Mix together until all of the lumps disappear.
- If it doesn't feel moldable, add more oil, 1/4 cup at a time.
- When you are done playing with it, store until next time. It won't dry out!
- **You can order a bag of Quikrete Brown Play Sand (50lb - Item# 58173) from Ace Hardware for \$6.99

Simple Slime Recipe

Materials

- 4 ounces of elmer's glue
- 1 ½ cup water divided
- 1 teaspoon Borax (found in the cleaning aisle of the grocery store)
- Food Coloring (optional)

Instructions

- In one bowl combine glue and ½ cup of the water. Stir to combine. Add food coloring if desired.
- In another bowl combine 1 teaspoon Borax with 1 cup (warm) water to dissolve Borax.
- Slowly pour glue and water mixture into Borax water, whisking to combine.
- Pour any excess water off, then knead or stir to finish combining.
- For best results, let slime sit for 10-15 minutes to thicken. Store in a sealed container.

- **Cloud Dough (Snow Dough) Recipe**

- **Materials**

- 5 cups cornstarch
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup vegetable oil (you might need more)
- 2 tbsp biodegradable glitter (optional)

- **Instructions**

- Mix it all together. You want to be able to squeeze the snow dough and have it stay in a ball while still “powdery”.