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### What is sensory play?

Sensory play includes activities that stimulate children's senses such as sight, sound, smell, taste or touch. By providing this type of activity children will learn more about the world around them in a natural way, through their senses. Such activities contribute to brain development by stimulating the neurons in the brain to make connections, and help with development in all areas of learning.

For example, as children explore sensory materials they develop their sense of touch. This lays the foundation for learning other skills, such as identifying objects by touch and using fine and gross motor skills. These motor skills can be refined through moulding, scooping, splashing and shaping objects.

As children become more verbal, they will learn to describe similarities and differences in objects that they see, hear, taste, smell or touch. Social skills can develop through the sharing of materials and seeing how others interpret objects and share ideas and discoveries, therefore building relationships.

Sensory experiences can be calming and therapeutic for young children and help them work through their emotions, anxieties and frustrations. They can release pent up energy and allow children mastery over new skillsets.

All children will benefit from sensory experiences and allowances should be made for accessibility. For instance young babies will enjoy treasure baskets and messy play in trays or baskets on the floor, whereas older children may like to sit or stand at a table to explore activities.

### Why do we need to plan for sensory play experiences?

Planning for sensory experiences is important as it ensures that all areas of the curriculum can be met through purposeful play experiences. Planning ahead will ensure that all of the necessary risk assessments are in place and materials sourced, to allow the activity to be presented well. Planning will also allow practitioners to provide for children's next steps in learning and development depending on the child's likes and dislikes and what the child learns from the activity. The child may find different ways of exploring the activity that the adult has not thought of.

## **Sight**

**The most commonly stimulated sense for young children is sight. From birth, babies are given brightly coloured and patterned toys to look at and play with.**

**Exposing young children to new and interesting experiences will keep them curious about the world around them. Visually stimulating activities will enable children to use the sense of sight to discover colours, shapes, brightness, form and structure. They will discover how things move and develop a visual memory as to how things work.**

## **Sound**

**Many toys for young children feature music and other various sounds. Music is extremely important for children and many learn best when a concept is set to music. Music can encourage motor skills development as children learn to dance and to keep a beat. Singing songs, listening to stories and talking about what they are doing all help children with sound and listening skills. Wind chimes, music boxes, shakers, objects to bang and music to listen and move to will all enhance this area of learning and development.**

## **Smell**

**The sense of smell helps children to identify scents they like or don't like and can be incorporated into planning in many ways. Try adding an array of fragrances into your treasure box, such as coffee, mint, lemon and lavender. Providing these different smells allows the children to differentiate between new scents and build on their learning through their sense of smell.**

### Taste

Through the sense of taste children will get to explore new foods, fruits and vegetables and decide which ones they like and do not like. Finger foods are a good way to encourage independence for toddlers so that they can feed themselves. Cooking activities will encourage children to join in the process of making meals and treats. They are more likely to try new things if they are involved in making and preparing them.

### Touch

The sense of touch can be best explored through textures and messy play. Young babies like to snuggle in with soft blankets and investigate treasure baskets, older babies and toddlers will enjoy messy play activities to explore new textures. Going on a 'touch' walk will encourage children to touch new items for texture such as rough and smooth, wet puddles, tree bark and some plants.

### About Anne



Anne is a highly qualified and experienced early years consultant, and has worked in the industry for over 36 years. She currently operates as a freelance Early Years Consultant, and provides training and quality assurance checks to settings seeking expert advice.

If you are in the process of developing sensory products or an entire sensory area, why not contact Anne for any advice or ideas on how to create the most effective products that really meet a requirement. For more information about Anne and how she could help you, please visit the website below.

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