

Comprehensive Sensory Activities List

BIG MUSCLE WORK ACTIVITIES

Improve body awareness, strength and coordination, promote calm/alert state

Play Activities

Push/Pull

- **"Taxi"** - One child pulls another child in a laundry basket, on a blanket, or inside a knit "tunnel" with a knot in one end. - Tug-o-war with ropes, sheets, bike tire inner tubes, knit fabric tunnel.
- **Push-o-war** with a big pillow; or, standing back to back or face each other with palms touching. One person pushes while the other resists, then reverse roles.
- **Push-ups** or wall pushes especially before writing, etc.
- **Chair push ups**, put heels of hands on either side of the bottom of the chair seat, then push down and lift body slightly off the chair and hold up to 3-6 seconds.
- **"Trampoline ride"** - Several children can pull sheet tight to give favorite stuffed animals a ride, or launch balls at a target.

Jump

- **Pillowcase races**
- **Jump up stairs** with feet together (not alternating) for big "core workout"; keep track of how many stairs child can do without stopping each day.
- **Trampoline**, mini-tramp, or old mattress (add counting, or use as a great activity for school memorizing such as spelling words).
- **Pogo stick** or "bungee jumper" (available online)
- Make **hopscotch** pattern with carpet squares or chalk on the sidewalk.
- **Pile of leaves or snow**
- Off a step or steps, chair, couch or bench to land in a **pile of pillows**, beanbag chairs, sleeping bags
- **Crash pad** for repetitive climbing and jumping or play wrestling, etc. To make one, buy a comforter cover and stuff it with odds and ends of foam pieces, old pillows, blankets or sleeping bags. Or, sew sheet(s) to be like a huge pillow case, and use Velcro to close the open end.
- **Play wrestle** - Keep your hands on child in one spot and push in a sustained way rather than moving hands around quickly. Slow, rhythmical movement is best. No fighting behaviors or tickling. Have a designated, safe area (i.e. sleeping bag over carpet). Both must say "start" to begin, anyone can say "stop" and end the game. If child tends to escalate during this activity, use slow motion action, lots of rolling over together, heavy pressure, intermittent breaks.

Play Activities (continued)

- **“Toboggan”**- Children put feet in a sleeping bag (or sit on top) and sit-bounce their way down the stairs in it. (Can be very powerful calming/organizing input.) Also can belly slide down and army crawl back up the stairs.
- **Piggy back** rides, rolling, somersaults.
- **Sled or roll** down hills and then climb back up the hill.
- **Wheelbarrow walk** - Lift child's feet, let him walk on his hands (the “wheelbarrow”). Set up a short path around objects. Challenge: go up/down stairs.
- **Animal walks** - Crab walk, bear walk, frog, snakes, bunny hops, elephant walk, duck waddle, horse gallops. Add extra challenge: walk across pillows as an animal, go up/down hill.
- **Belly crawl** across carpet. Coordinating both arms and legs in reciprocal push/pull is great coordination and core work activity in this activity.
- **Hang from a bar** - trapeze, rings, monkey bars, etc. Traction sensation can be very calming.
- **Strength exercises** - sit ups, lifting weights, push-ups, etc. Record child's progress.
- Wear weights (half pound) on arms, legs, waist; use intermittently, 20 minutes or less. Or, wear backpack, i.e. filled with sensory items including beanbag lap pad.
- **Hula-hoop**
- **Climb stairs** - Give child clues to find objects on another level of the house and bring each one back to you by going up and down stairs. (Great game when away from home and don't have sensory motor equipment.) Climb ladders, rock climbing walls, tree trunks, etc.
- **Crawl** under a mattress, crash pad (see above) or pile of pillows with a blanket on top to find hidden toys, or stay under there while putting together a puzzle or reading a book.
- **Grasp strength** - Squishing, squeezing, pinching, pulling, twisting putty, squish balls, balloon filled with flour, sand, rice, beans, etc., a piece of tubing or bicycle inner tube.

Household Chores or Daily Routines

- **Carrying moderately heavy objects** - groceries, boxes, laundry, buckets of sand or water
- **Push – Pull**
 - Heavy cart, wheelbarrow, vacuum cleaner, laundry basket
 - Helping to move or rearrange the furniture
- **Cleaning** inside, washing walls, windows, floors, etc.
- **Yard and outdoor housework**: raking, shoveling snow, etc.
- **Propped on elbows** with child on his stomach, to encourage weight-bearing on arms while playing board games or watching television
- **Bucket dumping in tub** - Give the child a fairly large plastic bucket or bin to fill up in the bathtub, then dump (make sure the curtain is pulled). Kids love this!

MOVEMENT THROUGH SPACE/BALANCE ACTIVITIES

Improve body awareness, balance and coordination, promote calm/alert state

- **Swing** - Use regular swings or hang an inner tube from a tree. Change direction of movement, position of child.
- **Sit 'n Spin** works well for younger children, especially if afraid of swings.
- **Playground equipment** (slides, jungle gyms, climbing).
- **Movement games:** Simon Says, Follow the Leader, Twister.
- **Blanket ride** on smooth/wood floors
- **Blanket swing** - Two adults each take end of blanket and swing child laying inside, eventually dropping child onto a bed for a soft landing.
- **Swimming**, water play - inner tubes, rafts, etc. help balance.
- **Slip-N-Slide**
- **"Dancin' on Dad"**- for lighter children, child walks or "dances" on top of parent laying down between two cushions. Parent can add additional movement challenge.
- **Bike riding, rollerblading, ice skating**
- **Hop balls** (inflated ball with handle) Set up a relay course with flat objects/boards for kids to jump over.
- **Ball activities catch/throw, kickball, volleyball with balloon or beach ball**
- **Obstacle courses** - planning movement, coordination, strength, spatial concepts
 - Big boxes are great for climbing into and out of, or open the ends to use as tunnels.
 - Stack up pillows with a blanket overtop to make a "hill" to climb over.
 - Use a small table as a bridge to go under.
 - Crawl around, through, or over a chair.
 - Hula hoops or tires – crawl through and step into and out of.
- **"Hot Lava" or "Rushing River"** is a form of obstacle course where child tries to get around the room without stepping on the floor. Carpet squares or washcloths are safe "islands" in "hot lava" (carpeted floor) or stepping stones in the river. Can use a long, narrow folded sheet or a 2 x 4 for bridge (balance beam); step stool, bench, etc.

TOUCH/PRESSURE ACTIVITIES

Improve touch sensation/discrimination, decrease touch defensiveness, promote calm/alert state

Whole Body Deep Pressure Activities

- **"Burrito"** - Roll child up in blanket, sleeping bag, textured rug. Pretend to add extra "ingredients" while providing extra squish pressure. Lift end to unroll, adjust speed as needed.
- **"Peanut butter sandwich"** - Child crawls between box springs and mattress. Can add squish.
- **"Hotdog in a bun"** - Child lays face down between two pillows – above and below trunk. Use moderate pressure on top pillow, applied rhythmically. Model breathing out with downward pressure, breathing in while lifting pressure. Watch response carefully.
- **"Mummy wrap"** - Wrap trunk or body parts in ace bandage.
- Make **large pillows** for child to snuggle into, roll and climb over or fall onto. Reserve a corner of room for a pillow pile; can add flannel sleeping bags. Hide objects under pillows or blanket and have child crawl under to find objects. Adult adds pressure to resist the child's movement to crawl out, but allows the child to be successful. Pile pillows on your child and give added pressure if they request it.
- **Make tents** out of blankets, add pillows and bed spreads
- **Weighted pillow case** (fill with beans, tie knot). Place on lap or on trunk (if lying down).
- Roll a **large therapy ball** or beach ball over your child's back with moderately firm pressure.
- **"Swimming"** - Child does belly crawl across a carpeted floor as if swimming, and then parent "dries" child off with firm towel rub after gets across the "lake." Then child flips over onto back and pushes across lake with feet to do "backstroke".
- **Crawling** through cloth tubing gives both touch and deep pressure sensations to the body. (can buy cloth tubing at a fabric store, or can sew regular knit fabric together on long side seam)
- **Draw** on child's back, arms, hands slowly and firmly and have the child guess what it is. If ticklish, use broader part of your hand, not fingertips.

Household Chores or Daily Routines

- Help parent **wash dishes**. Use different textures to wash - i.e. plastic scrubber, sponges, cloth.
- **Bath time**, good for total body awareness
 - Bubble bath or shaving cream play
 - Scrub with a brush, terry cloth, soft sponge, loofa sponge, etc. Child scrubs or parent scrubs, but firmly – no light touch!
 - Rub in powders and lotions after bathing.
 - Rub dry firmly with towel – sometimes scratchy towels work better than soft.
- **Help with cooking** (i.e. make meatloaf and other foods with hand) or baking if it involves using hands to mix or spread.

- **Gardening** - work with soil or sand, dig and carry objects
- **Swimming** - Bury part/most of child's body in the sand, run into the water and wash off.
- Play in a **ball pit** i.e. at fast food restaurant.
- Provide **touch throughout the day** through deep pressure "bear hugs," massage, shoulder/backrubs, etc.
- **Barefoot** as often as possible (if child has no difficulty with toe walking/low arches) especially on grass/sand.
- **Bedtime**
 - Add heavy blanket to bed, consider weighted blanket at night.
 - Tuck child in tight. Tucking sheet into mattress so child is snug all night may improve sleep.
 - Let child sleep on different material - i.e. fake fur, etc.
 - Provide large and small stuffed animals to cuddle.
 - Give back rub, some children enjoy hanging head over side of bed as parent strokes slowly over spine.

Hand Activities

- **Outdoors** - Water, sand, snow, mud, clay play. Playing in sand box and finding hidden objects with eyes open or closed. Indoors: put textures in a dish pan or storage bin.
- **Hand & body paint** - Mix tempera paint with liquid starch, add a little liquid detergent to prevent staining (purple & black stain the most). Great in the tub, use hands and feet to paint. Face paints wash off easier if you apply lotion to the skin first.
- **Finger paint with food** - puddings, whip cream, ketchup, mustard, flour and water paste, or whatever!
- **Dry textures** - beans, rice, dried corn, bird seed, Easter grass, packing materials, etc. in dish pan or bin. Use water play type utensils, hide objects for child to find. i.e. fill/dump containers or dump trucks; use a cut-open bleach bottle for a funnel; pour beans over arms, head, feet, etc.
- **Other textures for play:** glurch, Nickelodeon Gak or Floam, silly putty, Playdoh, corn starch - water mix. Hide small objects in substances and have the child try and find them.
- **Clay Tray** - Spread non-hardening molding clay on an old tray or plate and flatten down to 1/8 inch. Use an old pencil or wooden dowel pointed on one end with pencil sharpener to draw pictures, trace paths or dotted lines. Rub clay smooth again to erase.
- **Draw on carpet squares** with chalk, erase with hands/feet; stomp or pound.
- **"Feely Sack"** - Fill a bag or pillowcase with household items, such as comb, feather, rock, toothbrush, spoon, etc. with different textures. Have the child see if they can tell you what the object is by just touching it.
- **Fidgets** - Fast food meal toys, squeeze balls, rubber band strings, pipe cleaners, beads on a lace or string, string of paper clips, etc.

Decrease Child's Aversion to Touch

- When a touch seems to irritate the child, teach him to **"rub it out"** with his hands.
- Try an **electric toothbrush** as an alternative to manual toothbrushing. Check with your dentist for recommendation for the appropriate electric toothbrush.
- When seated with peers, **allow extra space** so that child does not get repeatedly bumped or touched. Adults should touch with permission, and do so in a firm way.
- Provide frequent **hugs** and firm, full body **massages**, especially before difficult activities like dressing.
- Combine with whole body pressure activities and big muscle activities – see lists above.

ORAL ACTIVITIES

Use when child is chewing on shirt/hands/objects, or to decrease aversion to toothbrushing or foods, or to increase awareness prior to eating.

- **Tug-of-war** mouth games i.e. gently pull on rubber tubing, or washcloth clenched in child's teeth.
- **Chewy items**
 - Taffy, gum, gummy bears, fruit roll-ups, licorice, beef jerky, dried fruit, stale or dense bagels.
 - Almost any fruit can be frozen for increased resistive chew and touch stimulation.
 - Non-nutritive chewies such as rubber tubing on the end of a pencil at school, Nuk brush, straws, sports bottles, "chew-tube" or "chewelry" available online.
- **Crunch** - Granny Smith apples, raw veggies, pickles, large/thick pretzels, Corn-nuts, banana chips, rice cakes, ginger snaps
- **Resistive suck**
 - Hard candy or sucker, ice cube
 - Sucking water or juice through a sports bottles or long curly straw, or suck thick fruit shake through a regular straw
- **Strong tastes**
 - Gum, candy (Warheads, Atomic Fireballs, cinnamon gum, sour balls, etc.)
 - Strong flavored/spicy foods (lemon/limes slices, dill pickles, salsa, spicy sauces, etc.)
- **Respiratory**
 - Blowing on a variety of whistles/kazoos or quiet toys with moving parts
 - Blow cotton ball across the floor, with/without a straw
 - Blow bubbles into tub or jar of soapy water with a straw, (may color it with food coloring), or into glurch mixture (look for recipes online)

MUSIC/RHYTHM ACTIVITIES for two-sided coordination; rhythm skills also improve general brain integration and attention span.

Make it the "just right challenge" for kids to keep the beat, give minimal assistance as needed.

- **Marching** and clapping, patting games to music

MUSIC/RHYTHM ACTIVITIES (continued)

- **Music and Movement CD's**
 - Greg and Steve CD's such as Kids in Motion, Kids in Action
 - Jumping jacks, grapevine step, skipping or galloping to music
- **Household "instruments"** - Plastic buckets/pots for drums, wooden spoons for drum sticks, baby food jars with beans for shakers, put on music and encourage or model keeping the beat
- **Music in background** - classical such as Mozart is often best
- **Jump rope** - Simple back and forth jump rope rhymes, regular overhead jump roping - forward and backward.

COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

Large shoulder, elbow movement supports general coordination and visual-motor activities.

- **Scribbling** on paper, newspaper, paper bags, etc.
- **Drawing** on driveway with chalk
- **Finger painting** on large roll paper
- **Washing** car or windows
- **Bean bags** at targets - squeeze and throw (Can fill old sock with beans and knot the end.)

Eye Hand Coordination

- **Early cutting activities** – cut a Play-doh "snake" into chunks, cut short sections off of long folded strips of paper to make pieces for simple mosaic-type projects, cut straws to make jewelry "beads" to thread with string
- **Play-doh** - Child can help you make it from online recipes. Use rolling pin, silverware, dishes, kindergarten scissors, garlic press, cookie cutters; stamp it with jewelry or small toys.
- **Coloring books**, dot-to-dot books. Coloring within stencils. Tracing. Practice letter making in dry Jell-O/cornmeal, in sand, with clay, etc.
- Use pincher **clothespins** to build objects or projects.
- **Stringing beads** or macaroni, can start with pipe cleaners then progress to shoe laces.
- **Folding** - napkins, laundry, paper airplanes, origami. Weaving paper strips.
- **Fine motor toys**
 - Pick-up sticks, Jenga, dominoes
 - Marbles
 - Tinker toys, Lego's, Bionacles, Lincoln logs. Make an item, have child copy it.
- **Clothing fasteners**
 - Practice buttoning, zippering (on oversized items)
 - Practice tying shoes (two different colored, extra long laces on a practice shoe.)
- **Help in the kitchen** – measure, stir, flip, etc.
- Children 5 years old and older: educational **computer activities/games** (i.e.1 hour/day.) Lumosity is great for research based brain games