



Chapter Eight

Creating sensory play: Body awareness

EY

P+

Consider how you would adapt the activities to be suitable for all ages. Think creatively and decide how the sensory experience can still be achieved even if the child is unable to participate.



Body awareness is all about knowing where your body is, how it is moving and how it relates to things around it and other people.

The sensory play activities described in this chapter encourage children to use their bodies and to recognise the feelings of proximity to others and objects. Some children may need a little more help than others as well as reassurance that it is okay to participate.

We have also added some games and activities where the children need to identify where they are in relation to a space or place. Other activities play with pressure or touch against the body such as the image of Rutendo in the ball pool.

Remember the story in Chapter One of Jhasinda, who hated light touch? Stroking her skin was painful for her, but being wrapped tightly in a blanket was comforting. Children will respond in different ways to these activities.

Be aware of children who are hyposensitive to body awareness: some may not understand personal space, standing too close for comfort; some may constantly bump into objects or misjudge distances or have difficulty with fine motor skills.

As we advocate throughout the book, take a person-centred approach to these activities. Think of things from the child's perspective. What do you need to do to ensure that the child can participate? Also remember that touch of any description may be inappropriate due to cultural or religious grounds. Encourage children to participate but don't push them into activities that they are uncomfortable with.



Spatial awareness game
Note that some children may find this game hard

Equipment
a clear space/blindfolds/
tactile objects (optional)



Spatial awareness game



Find an open space or empty room such as a sports hall. Work with the children to get their bearings. Take a look around the area and point out various features.

Ask the children to get into small groups of four children. Identify the group by a name. Now blindfold each child. Turn each child around several times and send them off to walk in different directions.

The aim of the game is for each group of children to find each other. They do this by calling out the name of the group and listening for this above the rest of the children calling out.

The game causes children to bump into one another. When they do, they must say the name of their group to see if they have found another member. If not, they move on. The winners are the first group to re-form.

Extension activities

To make this more fun, give each group an animal name. The groups find each other by making the sound of the animal their group is named after.

Why not try a game with no sound, but the children identify group members through touch, for example, each child in a group carries the same tactile object such as fur fabric or shiny paper. The children need to recognise if it is the same as theirs.

Health & Safety: keep all areas clear of furniture or tripping hazards. Make sure there is plenty of supervision. Children who do not want to participate in the game can become helpers and watchers, supporting others who wander away from the action.

Challenge: What other games can you think of that use blindfolds to support other sensory experiences? Consider taste, hearing, touch and balance.

For younger children, play with a blindfold and encourage the child to find your hand, foot, nose or hair by feel.

All

Wrapping up a parcel

Equipment

various wrapping materials/floor space



Wrapping up a parcel



This simple game involves wrapping a child up as a parcel. Various things can be used as the wrapping such as bubble wrap, tissue paper, wrapping paper, wallpaper, toilet roll, towels and blankets or a rug.

Encourage the children to roll around on the floor and feel the sensation of being wrapped up. Bubble wrap is particularly good and even more fun if the children can burst the bubbles. Beware of suffocation.

Hula hoop games

Hula hoops are very versatile. Weighted hoops can be purchased easily and are not expensive. Some children will prefer this type of hoop to play with.

Hula spin

Two children climb inside the same hula hoop. They spin around as fast as they can, each holding on to the hoop. The children need to be aware of their own body and that of the second child. The children will become dizzy and will need a little time to reorient themselves after the activity.

Hula jumps

Place a number of hoops on the ground. Ask the child to hop, skip or jump into each hoop. While they are in the hoop, ask them to do an action such as to close their eyes and touch their nose, or to do a handstand.

Hula potted sports

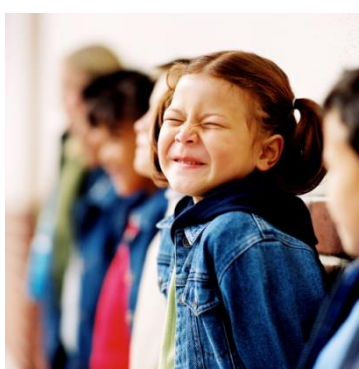
There are many movements that can be done with hula hoops such as climbing through them, rolling them, putting them over heads, spinning them on arms and waists and jumping in and out of them. Work with the children to develop several activities and play team games, with each child copying the movement of the previous child.

Ask the children to stand in a row or circle, each holding hands. This works best with at least six children. The first child has a hula hoop, and without losing hand contact with the next person the hoop must travel down the row or around the circle with everyone going through it. This involves body awareness and balance.

Obstacle races and assault courses

Equipment

various items from around the setting such as ropes, balloons, netting, fabric, balance beams and cardboard boxes



Finding your way



Obstacle races and assault courses are good for body awareness. Children need to recognise where they are in relation to obstacles and also recognise what they need to do to get around, through, under or over them. Ask the children to help you find items around the setting that would be good to add to an obstacle race or visit a local park that has an assault course. Don't forget the value of climbing rocks and trees.

Hanging balloon bags

This idea is slightly different. Fill a number of balloons with a little water, blow them up and hang them from the rafters or an outside pergola (the water adds a little weight). The children negotiate their way through the balloon maze, trying not to touch them. If the child touches a balloon, they need to retrace their steps and start from the beginning again.

Try pinning balloons to a wall or large noticeboard. Play a game with several children where the left hand has to touch a yellow balloon, the right hand a green balloon, etc. The children have to think about where their body is and, if playing with several children, need to consider where their body is in relation to others.

Amber happens to have dyspraxia and autism. She has difficulty in understanding spatial awareness and will not recognise when she is too close to others. However, she does not like people being too close to her.

Her parents taught her that it was not socially acceptable to stand too close to another person and that she would have a better response from others if she stood an arm's length away to have a conversation.

They practised the spacing by playing the 'arm game', standing next to each other but creating the space by measuring an arm's length. Amber got used to standing an arm's length away from others and found life was much easier when people did not back away from her all the time when she stood next to them.



Chapter Nine

The sensory story challenge

Consider the short story below and think back through the ideas in this book. Pick out elements in the story and think about how you can use them to create sensory experiences for children and young people using everyday resources. Don't limit yourself to this story; take a look at other books, new and old favourites. How can you make opportunities for children to participate in new and exciting ways?

The friend's adventure

"Hey, Jack," whispered Evan, "I can see a ghost." "Where?" responded Jack, pointing his torch into the blackness.

The two boys were camping in the garden. They had made their own tent from a large sheet hung over a rope, which was tied between two trees. The ground was lumpy and bumpy but they had created a fantastic soft den using lots of duvets, sleeping bags, pillows and cushions.

It was dark, the evening air was damp and the grass outside the tent was wet to touch. Earlier in the evening, they had had a fire and the embers were still glowing red.

"Over there. Look!" whispered Evan, pointing up into a tree. "Through the branches. See! It's moving." Jack looked up to where Evan was pointing. Sure enough, he did see something white and misty. It seemed to be floating on a branch.

"I'm going to investigate," said Evan, stepping out of the tent. "Aargh, it's wet out here," he said as his bare feet touched the wet grass. Jack handed Evan the torch; he did not want to go outside. An owl hooted as Jack crept back inside the tent. "Did you hear that?" said Evan. "I think it was the ghost."

Both boys stood still listening to the evening sounds. Every time they heard a sound Evan shone the torch to see what it was. The torch light reflected on the wet grass.

They both froze; a long howl came from a tree branch. The boys were scared. Could it be the ghost? Evan shone the torch in the direction of the tree, slowly lighting up the trunk. They could see the dark bark, the shadow of green leaves and, as the torchlight moved upwards, they saw a long, swaying white ribbon.

Was it the ghost? Slowly, Evan moved the torch; the beam travelled further up the branch following the ribbon. The boys saw it wasn't a ribbon at all; it was a tail. They had found their ghost. It was Snowball the cat sitting on a branch howling at the moon!

Creating sensory activities from the story



The following are only suggestions for sensory activities relating to the story. The challenge is up to you to encourage the children's imagination and creativity in order to support sensory experiences.

- Make dens from sheets, rope or cardboard boxes
- Fill the den with different surfaces to represent 'lumps and bumps'
- Add lots of soft furnishings and bedding to create a cosy nest
- Turn the lights off in a room and block out light from the windows
- Play with torches and coloured filters to light up parts of the room
- Build a pretend fire with twigs. Place some battery-powered tea lights between the sticks and cover with a lightweight red fabric to represent the embers
- Create a wet touch activity to represent wet grass. Allow the children to experience this sensation barefooted
- Listen to various night-time sounds. Recreate those sounds using everyday items
- Create an activity using torchlight and reflection. Shine a torch on your own face while looking in a mirror
- Play a game of ghosts where the children become ghosts using sheets and blankets
- Gather together a range of natural items to feel and smell, such as bark, leaves, grass and flowers
- Slide pieces of ribbon (wet and dry) across bare skin
- Play a game of being a cat: the sounds they make; the movements they make. Enhance this by asking the children to feel fur fabric
- Create cat masks and play hide-and-seek in the dark. The cat hides and the children find it

These are just some ideas. Consider what else you could do to create sensory experiences for the children.

Quick ideas sensory play activity sheets

In the next chapter we offer some quick ideas sensory play activity sheets. Copy these and give them to families to undertake at home. Each sheet contains simple ideas using everyday items found around the house. We have found that many parents are interested in playing with their children but lack the ideas to do so. Try making your own ideas sheets and simple sensory bags using everyday items.

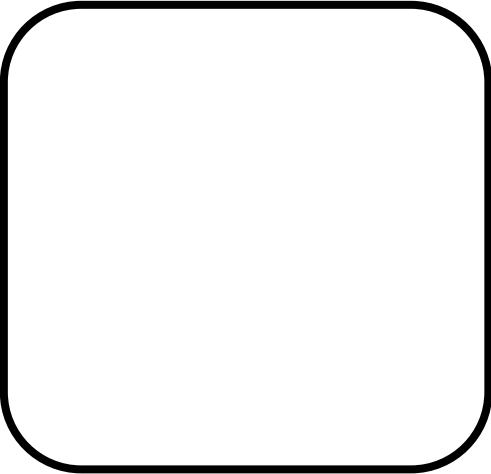
We have not specifically focused on any one sense in the activity sheets; many ideas provide experiences for more than one sense. We have used the same visual key used in this book to show what senses are used for each activity.



Chapter Ten Photocopy resources

All the resources in this section are free to photocopy and use. Enlarge each resource on a photocopier as appropriate.

1. Activity diary template (page 16)

	Name and date:
	How did the activity make you feel?
	 ☐☐☐
Draw a picture or paste on a photo of your activity  ©www.theplaydoctors.co.uk	Notes to share:

2. All about me communication passports template 1 (page 20)

These are very simple templates, but they are useful when the child is going to a new setting or is meeting people for the first time. Complete the details, print, cut out and laminate. Keep in your wallet and use as appropriate

Front

My name is
How I communicate
I am sensitive to

Back

I get upset when
I calm down when

3. All about me communication passport template 2 (page 20)

ALL ABOUT ME!

My name

Things I like doing

Special things about me!

This is me!

Things I don't like

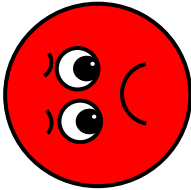
I am sensitive to

Things that calm me down when I am upset

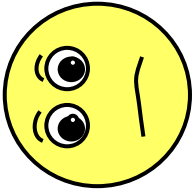


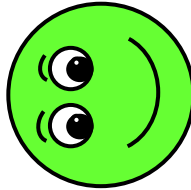
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4. Noise-O-Meter and emotions template (page 55)









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94

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Five minute sensory play activity cards

Kitchen music



Sensory Play Sheet 1

Take a look in your cupboards and find items for children to make music. Ideas include:

- Banging wooden spoons on saucepans
- Shaking containers filled with rice or pasta
- Use a teaspoon to gently tap drinking glasses filled with different levels of water
- Running the end of a spoon over the outside of a colander or grater



What else can you use?

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Painting with diamonds



Sensory Play Sheet 2

Purchase a packet of Epsom salts or sea salt (granular not powdered). Mix a teaspoon of salt with some water-based paint and add a little extra water. Stir well. Paint on to a thick paper using a large brush.

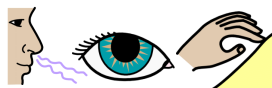
The salt crystals will be picked up in the paint, and when the picture is dry it will shine like diamonds! Try creating diamond butterflies by dabbing colour on to one side of the paper and folding it over to create a matching print. Use shiny stickers to create the body and head.



What else can you paint?

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Create a miniature garden



Sensory Play Sheet 3

Find a plastic tray or container. Fill it with sand or rice to create a surface to 'plant' various items. Take a look around the kitchen or outside. What is available to plant or decorate the garden with? What about using:

- A plastic bottle top to create a miniature pond (fill with water). Add bits of carrot to create fish
- A piece of cauliflower or broccoli to create trees
- Breakfast cereal (various) to create pathways or flowers
- Herbs to create green grass



What else can you use?

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Sensory taste tubs



Sensory Play Sheet 4

Find about ten plastic tubs or containers. Take a look around and find different safe textured foods to put into the tubs. Consider powder, liquid, loose foods and sticky stuff. Allow the children to feel, smell and taste the tubs. What about using:

- Sugar, powdered milk, powdered custard, coffee granules, flour
- Sultanas, small breakfast cereal, frozen peas or sweetcorn
- Pieces of jelly, jam, peanut butter (beware of allergies), honey or syrup
- Milk, fruit juice, water, fizzy drinks



What else can you use?

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Shaving foam fun



Sensory Play Sheet 5

A simple but brilliant activity to do in the bath – it washes straight off!

Place a large plastic dustbin liner in the bottom of the bath. Support children to squirt two or three cans of shaving foam into the bag. Fold over the top and tape closed. Allow the children to create a series of small holes in the bag using the sharp end of a pencil or scissors (supervised). Get them to climb into the bath and manipulate the bag creating small shaving foam worms. Play until the shaving foam is all out of the bag. Slide up and down the bath and have fun. Add some drops of food colouring into the foam to create colours. Use the foam to draw on to the sides of the bath and any tiles.



What about doing this outside on a plastic sheet?

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Sensory baths Ideas



Sensory Play Sheet 6

Simply fill twenty or so balloons with warm water as you are filling the bath. Add lots of bubbles to the bath so that the bottom of the bath cannot be seen. Drop the balloons into the water and allow the children to get in and feel the squashy balloons beneath the water. Add a pile of coloured ice cubes to the bath water. They will float and eventually melt. Try mixing natural food colouring with sea salt and let it dry. Put it into the bath to colour the water and add a grainy texture. Try adding a packet of powder drink mix to colour and scent the water, or perhaps play with raw jelly cubes until they dissolve.



What else can you think of to make bath time fun?

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Sensory play does not have to cost the earth. It just takes a little imagination and a sense of freedom to create unique sensory experiences that the child will always remember. Have fun!