



Play & Grow

SENSORY FUN



"PLAY GIVES CHILDREN A CHANCE TO PRACTICE WHAT THEY ARE LEARNING."

FRED ROGERS

Welcome to the "Growing Together" Collection! We have curated this collection of play-based activities and resources designed to help kids develop — all while having fun! While supplies last, we also include a small toy at our monthly events tied to each developmental area. Please supervise your children closely while they are playing with toys to ensure there are no choking hazards.

This resource is also mindful of children with different developmental needs, such as Autism. The activities are designed to be inclusive, offering various ways to engage and support every child's unique journey in emotional development. The age range is 0-5 years who are chronologically older but developmentally at this age.

Each series will focus on a type of child development:

- sensory
- gross motor
- fine motor
- cognitive development
- language development
- social-emotional

If you have any questions, the Autism Society Inland Empire is here to help. We have Resource Specialists who can be reached by email at info@ieautism.org or call us at 951.220.6922.

Thank you to the Department of Developmental Services and First Five San Bernardino for their generous financial support in making this project possible,

We hope it brings joy, growth, and understanding to your family, helping your child thrive.



Our Sensory Systems

Our Sensory systems help children understand and interact with the world around them. Proper sensory development is crucial for overall growth and learning, as it supports other areas of development, such as motor skills, cognitive abilities, and social-emotional growth.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S SENSORY NEEDS.

We all have different sensory needs and experiences. Recognizing and respecting these differences in ourselves and our children is important. Understanding and accommodating our unique sensory profiles can create a more harmonious and supportive environment for our families. Let's embrace our sensory diversity and work together to ensure that everyone feels comfortable and understood.

If your child is sensitive to sound, touch, taste, smell, visuals, or movements, they may have a sensory need. It's not always obvious whether a child has a sensory need. Some of the first signs can also be age-appropriate behavior that will pass later.

Every child with sensory sensitivity is different, and their needs may change over time or within a day. Sensitivities are sometimes linked to Autism or sensory processing disorder, but some children may have sensory needs without any connection to either.

It is important to note the following activities are a small sample of activities to use with children. These activities are also designed to be used with children who are sensory-seeking, not necessarily children who are sensory-avoiding. If a child demonstrates behaviors that avoid the texture of the activity, allow the child to be done,





Sound

Sense of hearing. A child may be sensitive to too much noise or a type of sound like clapping or footsteps. They might be sensitive to sensitivity to loud noises, enjoyment of certain sounds or music, Difficulty filtering background noise or crave constant background noise.

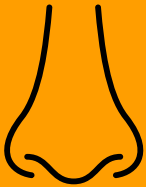


Touch



How our brain receives and interprets messages about contact with their skin. Your child may feel uncomfortable with physical contact or seek it out. This can include contact with people or textures such as tags in clothing, or enjoyment or dislike of specific tactile sensations like sand or water.

Smell



The sense of smell to the environment and our own scents. Some children are sensitive to particular smells, and they may feel overpowered by smell no matter where it comes from or a preference for specific scents.



Taste and Texture

How our brain interprets sensations in our mouth. They may want to put different textures in their mouths. This could be anything—food, hair, or toys. For example, they may only want crunchy foods or dislike foods that look mushy.



Visual

The sense of sight. This can include bright lights or being unable to cope with the dark. Other examples include attraction to moving or spinning objects and sensitivity to flickering lights.

Vestibular (Balance and Movement)

The sense of movement and balance. Examples are enjoyment or dislike of activities like swinging or spinning or difficulty with balance and coordination.



Proprioception (Body Awareness)

How the body interprets the position and placement of body parts. Children may seek activities that provide deep pressure (e.g., jumping, pushing) or have difficulty understanding personal space. They may enjoy certain sensations, like pushing on something or jumping, or avoid movement activities like sliding on a slide or swinging.

Interoception (Internal Body Awareness)



The sense of our internal body. Difficulty recognizing internal body signals (e.g., hunger, thirst, need to use the bathroom) or overly sensitive to internal sensations.

WHY RECOGNIZING SENSORY NEEDS IS IMPORTANT

1. Improved Communication: Knowing someone's sensory preferences can help us communicate better. For example, if someone doesn't like loud noises, we can speak more softly or choose quieter activities.
2. Less Stress: Meeting sensory needs can reduce stress and anxiety. This is especially important for children who might not be able to explain what bothers them.
3. Stronger Relationships: Recognizing and respecting sensory differences can make our relationships better. It shows that we care and are willing to make adjustments for others.
4. Better Learning: For children, especially preschoolers, having their sensory needs met helps them learn and develop. They feel safer and more focused, which is important for learning.
5. Inclusive Environments: By considering sensory needs, we can create places where everyone feels comfortable and included, no matter their sensory preferences.



HOW TO TELL IF YOUR CHILD HAS A SENSORY SENSITIVITY OR NEED

It's only sometimes obvious whether a child has a sensory need. If your child is sensitive to sound, touch, taste, smell, visuals, or movements, they may have a sensory need. Some of the first signs can also be age-appropriate behavior that will pass later.

Every child with sensory sensitivity is different, and their needs may change over time. Sensitivities are sometimes linked to autism or sensory processing disorder, but some children may have sensory needs without any connection to either.

Sensory sensitivity can manifest in various ways. For "sensory seekers," children might engage in activities that provide intense sensory input, such as jumping, spinning, or touching everything around them. They might enjoy loud noises, bright lights, or strong smells. "Sensory avoiders" might react strongly to certain textures, sounds, or lights. They could cover their ears at loud noises, avoid messy play, or be very particular about clothing textures. These children might become overwhelmed in busy environments and seek quiet, calm spaces.

Some children exhibit a mix of both behaviors. They might seek sensory input in some contexts while avoiding it in others. Understanding these patterns can help caregivers and educators provide the appropriate support and accommodations.

You can ask for an assessment through your medical insurance with an Occupational Therapist if you have any questions.



**IT'S ESTIMATED THAT
APPROXIMATELY 5% TO 16% OF
CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES
EXPERIENCE SENSORY
PROCESSING DISORDER (SPD)**



HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD WITH SENSORY NEED

Recognizing your child's needs is the first step. If they resist what you see as routine tasks, try starting a behavior diary. This can help you pinpoint what the triggers might be. Once you have a clearer idea of what helps or upsets them, there are different ways you can support them

Adjust your home. Is it noisy? Are there any strong smells? Think about creating a calm space for your child. This could be a room in another part of the home. Or a place they can retreat to (a blanket under a table can sometimes work).

Find ways to calm them. If you know your child is likely to find something difficult, think about what may help. This could be earplugs or something they like to smell. They might want a hug or wrap themselves tight in a blanket.

Use sensory support aids. These include chewing or fidget toys, weighted blankets, playdough, or calming boxes. You can also buy clothes without seams or labels.

Communicate. Tell people. Explain to friends and family. Make plans and involve them so that they can also make changes to support your child.

Occupational therapy (OT). Occupational therapy can be incredibly beneficial for children with sensory sensitivities. An occupational therapist can work with your child to develop strategies and exercises tailored to their specific needs. They can help your child improve their ability to process and respond to sensory information, making daily activities more manageable and less stressful.



Check out our list of OTs who have experience with sensory processing:

FUN AND INEXPENSIVE SENSORY ACTIVITIES





PLAYING WITH BUBBLES

IDEAS FOR PLAY:

- **SBUBBLE BLOWING: USE A SIMPLE BUBBLE WAND TO BLOW BUBBLES AND LET TODDLERS CHASE AND POP THEM. THIS HELPS DEVELOP THEIR HAND-EYE COORDINATION AND MOTOR SKILLS.**
- **BUBBLE PAINTING: MIX A BIT OF NON-TOXIC PAINT WITH BUBBLE SOLUTION. HAVE TODDLERS BLOW BUBBLES ONTO A SHEET OF PAPER TO CREATE COLORFUL BUBBLE PRINTS.**
- **BUBBLE TAG: PLAY A GAME OF TAG WHERE THE "IT" PERSON HAS TO BLOW BUBBLES AND TAG OTHERS BY TOUCHING THEM WITH A BUBBLE**
- **CALL OUT BODY PARTS: CHALLENGE YOUR TODDLER TO POP THE BUBBLES USING SPECIFIC BODY PARTS. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU CAN SAY, "POP THE BUBBLES WITH YOUR NOSE!" OR "USE YOUR ELBOW TO POP THE BUBBLES!"**

Bubbles are an excellent sensory toy for children, engaging multiple senses and supporting various areas of development. Blow bubbles and encourage your child to chase and pop them. This is great for developing motor skills and coordination.

Blowing bubbles can help with:

- **Visual (Sight).** Watching bubbles float and move helps children develop their visual tracking skills, which are important for reading and coordination. The shimmering, colorful appearance of bubbles can captivate children's attention and enhance visual perception.
- **Tactile (Touch).** Catching and popping bubbles provides different tactile sensations, helping children become more comfortable with various textures.
- **Fine Motor Skills:** Popping bubbles with fingers or clapping hands can improve fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination
- **Auditory (Hearing).** Bubbles' soft popping sound can provide auditory stimulation, which can be soothing and intriguing for children.
- **Blowing Bubbles:** Using a bubble wand to blow bubbles helps develop oral motor skills, which are important for speech and feeding.
- **Proprioception (Body Awareness).** Chasing and popping bubbles encourages children to move their bodies differently, improving balance and coordination.
- **Emotional Regulation.** Blowing bubbles and watching them float can be calming and help reduce anxiety.
- **Social Interaction.** Playing with bubbles in a group setting encourages social interaction, turn-taking, and communication



STRETCHY STRINGS

Monkey Noodles or other brands are versatile sensory toys that can be used in many ways and address several sensory areas.

IDEAS FOR PLAY:

- **STRETCHING AND TWISTING: SHOW YOUR CHILD HOW TO STRETCH THE MONKEY NOODLES AS FAR AS THEY CAN GO AND THEN TWIST THEM INTO DIFFERENT SHAPES. THIS HELPS WITH HAND STRENGTH AND COORDINATION.**
- **SENSORY PLAY: LET YOUR CHILD EXPLORE THE TEXTURE AND FEEL OF THE MONKEY NOODLES. THEY CAN SQUEEZE, PULL, AND TWIST THEM, WHICH IS GREAT FOR SENSORY STIMULATION.**
- **SHAPE AND LETTER MAKING: ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO CREATE DIFFERENT SHAPES, LETTERS, OR NUMBERS WITH THE MONKEY NOODLES. THIS CAN BE A FUN WAY TO PRACTICE THEIR CREATIVITY AND FINE MOTOR SKILLS.**

1. Tactile (Touch). Stretching, pulling, and twisting Monkey Noodles provide varied tactile sensations, helping children become more comfortable with different textures.

2. Fine Motor Skills: Manipulating Monkey Noodles can improve fine motor skills and hand strength.

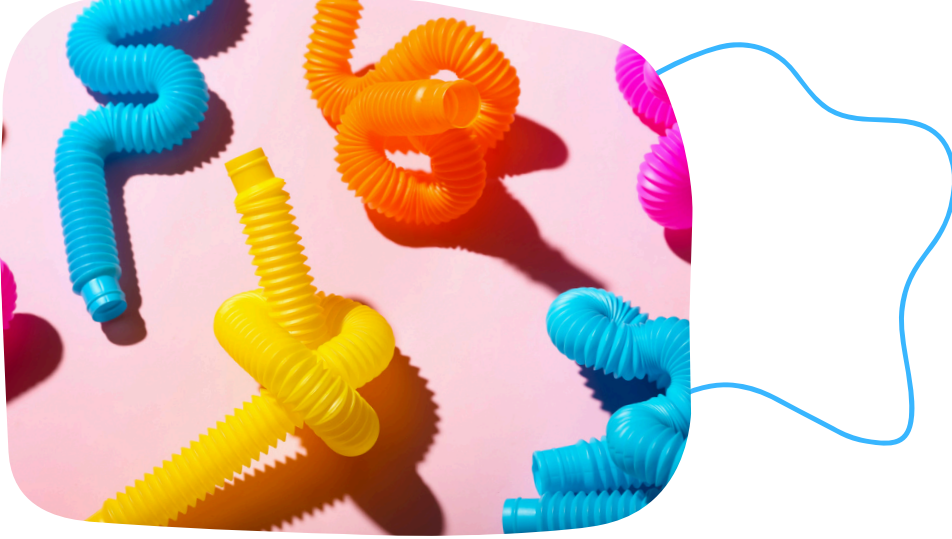
3. Proprioception (Body Awareness). When stretched or squeezed, the resistance provided by Monkey Noodles offers deep pressure input, which can be calming and help with body awareness.

4. Visual Tracking: Watching the noodles stretch and bounce back can improve visual tracking skills.

5. Auditory (Hearing) The subtle sounds made when stretching or snapping Monkey Noodles can provide auditory input, though this is a secondary benefit.

6. Emotional Regulation. Playing with Monkey Noodles can be a soothing activity that helps children manage stress and anxiety





Playing with pop tubes can be fun and is excellent for sensory play.

Here are some of the key sensory benefits they offer:

- **Tactile (Touch) Texture Exploration:** Pop Tubes' ridged texture provides varied tactile sensations, helping children become more comfortable with different textures.
- **Fine Motor Skills:** Manipulating Pop Tubes by pulling, twisting, and connecting them can improve fine motor skills and hand strength.
- **Auditory (Hearing) Sound Exploration:** The popping sound made when expanding and contracting the tubes provides auditory stimulation, which can be both soothing and intriguing for children
- **Proprioception (Body Awareness) Deep Pressure:** The resistance offered by Pop Tubes when stretched provides deep pressure input, which can be calming and help with body awareness.
- **Visual (Sight) Color Recognition:** Pop Tubes come in bright, vibrant colors, which can help children learn and recognize different colors.
- **Visual Tracking:** Watching the tubes expand and contract can improve visual tracking skills.
- **Gross Motor Skills Coordination:** Moving the tubes in different directions or swinging them can engage larger muscle groups and improve coordination
- **Emotional Regulation Stress Relief:** The rhythmic movements and auditory feedback can help reduce anxiety and promote self-regulation
- **Social Interaction Cooperative Play:** Pop Tubes can be used in group settings, encouraging communication and cooperation as children take turns and share

POP TUBES

IDEAS FOR PLAY:

STRETCH AND SHRINK: SHOW YOUR CHILD HOW TO STRETCH THE POP TUBE OUT AND THEN PUSH IT BACK TOGETHER. THE POPPING SOUND AND THE RESISTANCE CAN BE VERY SATISFYING.

SHAPE MAKING: BEND AND TWIST THE POP TUBES INTO DIFFERENT SHAPES. YOU CAN MAKE CIRCLES, SQUARES, OR EVEN LETTERS AND NUMBERS. THIS CAN HELP WITH FINE MOTOR SKILLS AND CREATIVITY.

SOUND PLAY: USE THE POP TUBES TO MAKE DIFFERENT SOUNDS. STRETCHING AND COMPRESSING THEM CAN CREATE INTERESTING NOISES. YOU CAN ALSO TALK OR SING THROUGH THEM LIKE A MEGAPHONE.

COLOR SORTING: IF YOU HAVE POP TUBES IN DIFFERENT COLORS, YOU CAN SORT THEM BY COLOR. THIS IS A SIMPLE WAY TO PRACTICE COLOR RECOGNITION.

PLAY DOH

Play-Doh is another inexpensive toy that addresses several sensory areas, making it a popular choice for sensory play and therapy. Here are some of the key sensory areas it can help with:

1. Touch and Texture Exploration: Handling Play-Doh allows children to experience different textures, which can help them become more comfortable with various tactile sensations.

2. Fine Motor Skills: Manipulating Play-Doh by rolling, squishing, and molding helps improve fine motor skills and hand strength.

3. Proprioception (Body Awareness): Deep Pressure: Activities like pushing and rolling Play-Doh provide deep pressure input, which can be calming and help with body awareness.

4. Visual (Sight): Color Recognition: Play-Doh comes in various colors, which can help children learn and recognize different colors.

Visual Motor Skills: Using tools to cut or shape Play-Doh can improve hand-eye coordination and visual motor skills.

5. Smell: Scented Play-Doh: Some Play-Doh varieties are scented, providing olfactory stimulation and helping children become more accustomed to different smells.

6. Emotional Regulation: Stress Relief: Squeezing and manipulating Play-Doh can be a soothing activity that helps children manage stress and anxiety

IDEAS FOR PLAY:

- **BASIC SCULPTING:** ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO USE THEIR IMAGINATION TO CREATE DIFFERENT SHAPES AND FIGURES. THEY CAN MAKE ANIMALS, PEOPLE, OR EVEN THEIR FAVORITE CHARACTERS.
- **COOKIE CUTTERS AND MOLDS:** USE COOKIE CUTTERS OR PLAY-DOH MOLDS TO CREATE VARIOUS SHAPES. THIS CAN HELP WITH FINE MOTOR SKILLS AND HAND-EYE COORDINATION.
- **ROLLING AND FLATTENING:** PROVIDE ROLLING PINS OR OTHER TOOLS TO ROLL OUT THE PLAY-DOH AND FLATTEN IT. THIS CAN BE A GREAT WAY TO PRACTICE USING DIFFERENT TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES.
- **COLOR MIXING:** EXPERIMENT WITH MIXING DIFFERENT COLORS OF PLAY-DOH TO SEE WHAT NEW COLORS THEY CAN CREATE. THIS CAN BE A FUN WAY TO LEARN ABOUT COLOR THEORY.
- **PLAY-DOH KITCHEN:** SET UP A PRETEND KITCHEN AND USE PLAY-DOH TO MAKE PRETEND FOOD ITEMS LIKE PIZZAS, COOKIES, OR SANDWICHES. THIS CAN BE A GREAT WAY TO ELAY.
- **SENSORY PLAY:** SIMPLY SQUISHING, SQUEEZING, AND ROLLING THE PLAY-DOH CAN BE A GREAT SENSORY ACTIVITY. IT HELPS WITH TACTILE EXPLORATION AND CAN BE VERY CALMING.



SQUISHY TOYS

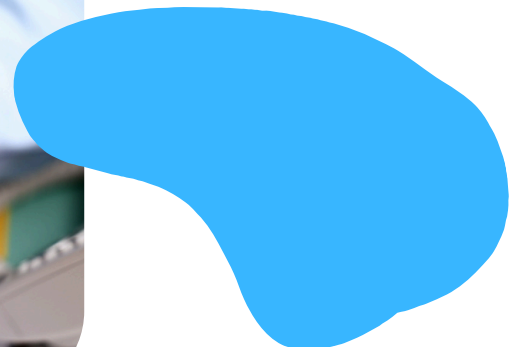


Squishy toys can be incredibly calming for children. They offer a safe and effective way for kids to release stress and anxiety. This is especially beneficial for children with sensory processing disorders, as the tactile feedback from squeezing these toys can help them feel more grounded and secure.

Children may prefer different types of squishy toys (for example, foam toys, which are harder, versus something that feels water inside) and textures. Some are bumpy on the outside, while others are smooth.

Here are other ways squishy toys can help:

- **Stress Relief:** Squishy toys can be very calming. They help children release stress and anxiety, making them particularly beneficial for children with sensory processing disorders.
- **Focus and Attention:** These toys can help children concentrate better. The repetitive motion of squeezing can be soothing and help maintain focus during tasks.
- **Sensory Development:** Squishy toys engage multiple senses, especially touch. They help children explore different textures and sensations, which is crucial for sensory development.



OTHER RESOURCES ON SENSORY PROCESSING

Websites

[The STAR Institute for Sensory Processing](https://sensoryhealth.org/) provides many resources for parents and professionals, including research publications, home activity suggestions, and downloadable flyers. They also offer a treatment directory to help families find healthcare providers experienced in working with SPD. <https://sensoryhealth.org/>

[The Child Mind Institute](https://childmind.org/article/sensory-processing-issues-explained/) has a section dedicated to sensory processing issues, offering articles and resources to help parents understand and support their children with SPD. <https://childmind.org/article/sensory-processing-issues-explained/>

Books

Growing an Insync Child by Carol Stock Kranowitz and Joye Newman. Provides parents, teachers, and professionals with tools and activities to give every child a head start and a leg up. The program focuses on early motor development to enhance a child's physical, emotional, academic, and overall success.

Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder by Lucy Jane Miller. Internationally renowned expert Dr. Miller shares her more than forty years of experience and research findings on SPD. Now in its fourteenth printing, with over 50,000 copies sold in all formats, it is an authoritative and practical guide to understanding and treating this little-understood condition.



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YOUR LOGO

