

Sensory Play

In previous columns, suggestions for play in general and for outdoor play have been provided. Today's column focuses on sensory play. Sensory play can be fun, relaxing and can provide children with opportunities to enhance their learning through the five senses. These opportunities are remarkably simple and easy to provide. Even though sensory play typically focuses on the sense of touch, there are four other senses to explore. The sense of smell can be developed by taking a walk after a summer rain shower; plus there is the glorious opportunity for a child to pick up a worm. This same walk can enhance a child's listening skills through hearing the many varied sounds of birds. While on the walk children can look for traffic signs, animals in window, and numbers and letters on license plates. During holiday times children can experience the many different decorations displayed. If you are not able to go outside, there are still many different ways you can provide sensory activities in the home.

It is surprising how easy it is to provide sensory activities in the home by using readily available household objects or dollar store treasures. Fun foam letters can be buried in a tub of rice for children to find and manipulate; younger children will learn to recognize their letters while older children can make their names and other words. A child's sense of touch can be enhanced by filling the kitchen sink with water and providing the children with plastic spoons, containers and funnels. Finger painting with chocolate pudding is a fun sensory activity and adding corn meal or coffee grounds will provide a child with a new texture experience. A plastic bottle with a secure lid filled with water and tiny objects, such as buttons, crayon pieces, beads and bolts (for older children) is easy to create; you can then ask your child to describe and count the contents.

This provides an activity that will help to develop their visual sense. The sense of taste can be developed by setting out items, blindfolding the child and ask them if the item is sweet, sour, salty etc. The child can be asked if they can identify the food. A child's sense of hearing may be enhanced by placing an alarm clock in one room of the house, set it to ring and ask the child which direction the ringing is coming from. You may ask the child to follow the sound until they reach the alarm clock. If available you may also use a sea shell and ask the child what sound they hear. Offering smelling sensory activities may seem difficult at first but there are several different activities that will be inexpensive and quick to set up. By setting out items like garlic, vinegar, perfume, bananas, strawberries or lemons, you will be providing an activity that will allow your child to sort items into pleasant and unpleasant categories.

By offering these many and varied sensory activities you will be providing your children with valuable educational experiences. These educational experiences focus on an entire range of pre-kindergarten skills such as; counting, classification, pre-writing and pre-reading. Furthermore, these sensory activities are fun for the whole family and may create cherished memories for many years to come.

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