

Enhancing Sensory Environments and Activities to Promote Motor Development and New Learning for Toddlers and Preschoolers





Toddler/Preschool



Fine Motor Tasks

- For some kids, fine motor and visual tasks that are familiar, quiet, and repetitive can also have a calming and organizing effect.
 - This kind of activity can be a good start to a child's day. The tools needed can be many of the basic household items you have in your kitchen cabinets or may be parts of games or craft activities. Save your different sized plastic containers and lids for the kids to stack or nest together. Cut openings of various sizes in the top of a large yogurt container or coffee can and let them push items through the slot or hole. You can vary the size, shape and even the sound it will make as it falls into the container.
 - Other examples might include stringing beads (on string, pipe cleaner or a straw), placing pom-poms in a container using tongs, sorting items into an egg container, holding an empty spice container in one hand and placing Cheerios into the top, removing caps to different sized containers by twisting, pulling or pushing.



Toddler/Preschool



Quiet Space and Tactile Input

- Provide a quiet space to limit auditory, visual or other inputs and allow the child to calm and regroup:
 - a corner with a bean bag chair and some pillows, a small tent or canopy made from a sheet. This can be a space where some children are more focused on books or puzzles.
- Tactile/Touch Input: Provide a calming sensory break during the day with a tactile bin.
 - Fill a shoebox-sized plastic container with sand, dry rice, or dry beans and let kids run their hands through it. Younger children who are still at risk for mouthing items, can use squares of felt or other materials, along with scarves, large feathers, etc. Items from nature are always a hit (pinecones, leaves, stones). A cookie sheet lined with sand, flour or sugar can be a fun way to draw shapes or letters with a fingertip or end of a pencil/pen.
 - Applying deep pressure to the body with hugs or weighted stuffed animal, or squishes with a pillow or beanbag chair provides full-body calming sensory input for kids who might be overstimulated. Some kids may rest more easily with heavy blankets such as a quilt.





Toddler/Preschool



Proprioceptive/Heavy Work

- A lot of kids benefit from proprioceptive input in the form of heavy work. Heavy work means moving the body against heavy resistance. This provides stimulation to the muscles and joints that can be calming and organizing.
- Heavy work activities include: squishing/squeezing play dough or a stress ball, pushing/pulling friends in a wagon, pushing/moving chairs or heavy laundry baskets, climbing, holding a heavy door open, and carrying books.



Toddler/Preschool



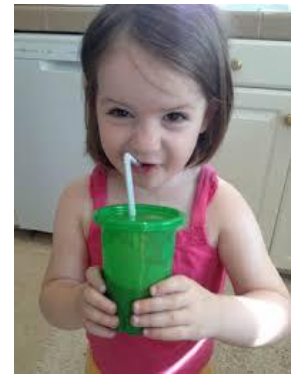
Vestibular/Balance Tasks

- Many children find repetitive and rhythmic vestibular input, including rocking, swaying, or gentle swinging to be extremely calming. This kind of sensory input can be a great and easy way to help a child reset when they are overstimulated, overwhelmed, or dealing with tantrums. Adding a rocking chair or two around the room and having an exercise ball handy are simple ways to provide calming movement when kids need it.
- Try one of these Row, Row, Row Your Boat activities or some gentle back and forth movement on a scooter or on a therapy ball.



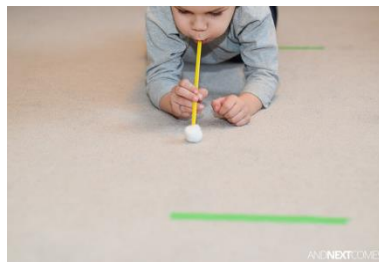


Toddler/Preschool



Oral Input

- For many children, chewing can provide calming oral sensory and proprioceptive input. Try oral sensory snacks which are chewy or crunchy (bagels, cheese sticks, veggie straws, pretzel sticks) as appropriate.
 - Many kids benefit from using chewy tubes or chewy pendants (Chewlery) to provide resistance and further calming input.
 - Other great calming oral sensory activities include sucking against resistance (e.g. sucking a thick smoothie through a straw) and blowing (e.g. blowing a feather or pompom across a table).



Toddler/Preschool



Auditory Input

- One of the quickest ways to help kids who are overstimulated and overwhelmed is to quiet things down.
 - Using a quiet voice to address kids and get their attention rather than raising your voice over the noise is a great start.
 - Other auditory strategies include playing white noise while children are playing/working (e.g. rain sounds, ocean sounds, or even using a fan) to help block out distracting background noise.
 - Quiet, calming music is another great option. Some children may enjoy wearing headphones, but make sure to monitor the volume.
 - Noise reducing headphones are also great for kids who become overstimulated by sound in loud situations.

Additional Resources: Website and PDF Links

- Cooking with Kids and Hand Skills

<https://www.theotttoolbox.com/cooking-with-kids-and-hand-skills/>

- Active Play Indoors- Even in Tight Spaces!

<https://www.todaysparent.com/ways-to-keep-kids-active-indoors/>

- Indoor Sensory and Fine Motor Toddler Activities

<https://handsonaswegrow.com/indoor-activities-toddlers/>

- Hand Strengthening Activities

<https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/hand-strength-35-fun-activities-for-kids/>

- Creating a Busy Box When Waiting is Difficult

http://www.eccpct.com/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/Busy_Box_11_30_16_2_.pdf

- Animal Walks to Engage Core Muscles and Strengthen Muscles for Fine Motor Learning

<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/12-animals-walks-for-kids-to-get-moving>

- Yoga for Kids

YouTube has many free yoga videos for kids which follow a theme or story. Cosmic Kids Yoga, like this one with Jamie on the farm:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKmRB2Z3g2s>