

99 Sensory Activities For Any Child

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“Casey Halper, an Occupational Therapist who works at our school, recently gave a seminar to parents to teach us about sensory balance and activities for a sensory savvy schedule throughout the day. Many kids are now diagnosed with sensory integration issues, but the more I learn about this, the more I find that sensory issues are something that we all face and can all benefit from exploring.

For instance, I now realize that my engine tends to run too low and I need to work harder at energizing myself throughout the day. I have actually become more sensitive to when I am running low and have incorporated some of the activities below to help keep my energy up. I find this whole thing really interesting because I never really thought about actually trying to manipulate my energy level this way, and certainly for kids it can be invaluable as sometimes any kid can be too hyped up or having trouble getting going.

I thought it would be cool to put together a list of sensory activities. While these activities all revolve around sensory stimulation, I think they are just great all-around activities for any kid, and a great list to pull up when you are stuck at home and need ideas for how to pass that last hour in the day or when you need a calming or invigorating activity when your child is stuck in a bad mood. These sensory activities are perfect for any kid from toddlers on up and some are even good for babies.

Sensory activities fall into different categories. Perhaps the most useful one for self-regulation is Proprioceptive Input. That's a fancy word for "heavy work" that engages your joints. These activities make you feel grounded and can be calming for a high-running child or invigorating for a low-running kid.

This first batch of activities create ***Proprioceptive input***:

1. Jump (on a mini-trampoline, from a chair to a sofa, on the bed, etc.)
2. Wheelbarrow walking or races
3. Donkey Kicks
4. ABC Pushups (Push-up plank position, touch chest with hand and say a letter of the alphabet, all the way up to the letter Z. Each letter said, the student changes the hand that touches the chest)
5. Bear walk
6. Crab walk
7. Play leap frog
8. Tummy time push ups (for babies)
9. Toddlers can push their own stroller, the laundry or grocery cart

10. Have your toddler or child carry a backpack full of their own toys and books
11. Hammer ice cubes in a plastic bag (then use them for lemonade!)
12. Pillow Fight
13. Stuffed animal catch
14. Hanging from a chin-up bar
15. Bouncing on hopping ball
16. Tug-of-war
17. Hopscotch
18. Wrestling
19. Tickle fight
20. Drumming
21. Banging on pots and pans
22. Have a parade and march
23. Wiping the counters
24. Sweeping
25. Swiffering
26. Dustbusting
27. Unloading the washing machine and the dryer
28. Taking out the trash
29. Water balloon catch
30. Beanbag catch
31. Push-o-war (put palms against each other and push as hard as you can)
32. Animal footsteps (Child lays down and chooses an animal and using your fingers or hands try to make it feel like that animal walking over back and limbs.

Vestibular Input (swinging and spinning) is intense and long-lasting sensory input. It should be provided in doses and parents should watch and be sensitive to how their children react and help them learn to manage this type of input to keep them even.

33. Swinging: Try different types of swinging to see how it feels (tire, rope, belly, etc)
 34. Spinning
 35. Run in circles
 36. Hang upside down
 37. Swing your child around from their arms or legs
 38. drag them on a sheet or blanket
 39. Rock in a rocking chair
- Tactile Input.

Many kids are overly sensitive to **Tactile input**. Tags, pant buttons, getting wet, or even the feeling of foods in the mouth can drive some kids batty.

Doing these activities can help children get used to tactile stimulation gradually and can be fun for all kids.

40. Make a kid sandwich by pressing down on him between two pillows or couch cushions
41. Make a kid burrito by rolling her tightly in a blanket
42. Roll out the cookie dough by rolling a big ball firmly over the back and limbs
43. Make your own sandbox with a bowl full of dry beans or styrofoam peanuts.
44. Pour salt on a cookie sheet and paint with your fingers.
45. Spread beans out in a baking tray or pan and make a construction site for trucks. Bury small toys in rice and have them do an archeological dig
46. Go on a texture walk
47. Have a texture scavenger hunt at home

In the bath: Some sensory defensive kids hate getting wet, but these activities make bathing more fun for all kids:

48. Add food coloring to the water
49. Ladles, cups, strainers, squirters, funnels
50. Play with shaving cream
51. Soap crayons or bath paints
52. Rub with different textures while in the bath, a smooth or nubby washcloth, a loofah, a nail brush.
53. Put shaving cream on a placemat to squish around
54. Mix cookie dough or cake batter with hands
55. Make play dough
56. Make a touch book of different textures from your home
57. Put single items in paper bags and let kids try to guess what they are
58. play with face paints
59. Repot the plants
60. Use a vibrating toothbrush
61. Sip seltzer
62. Lick lemons

Some kids need ***extra oral-motor activities***, but they tend to be calming for everyone.

63. Crunch ice
64. Use chewelry
65. Make smoothies and suck through a straw
66. practice chewing gum and blowing bubbles
67. Use crazy straws

Breathing is especially important for kids with low muscle tone, but we can all use to exercise our lungs and benefit from the therapeutic effects of breathing deeply.

68. blow whistles
69. Make and blow pinwheels
70. blow feathers off your hand
71. play soccer by blowing a cottonball across the table scoring if you can blow it off the other person's end.
72. Have a cottonball race.
73. Make bubble mountains in a bowl with a straw and soapy water
74. Blow gently on each other's faces (see who can blow the longest)

Visual, Olfactory (Smell), and Auditory Stimulating Activities:

75. Sit quietly and listen to nature. (You can also use nature sounds recordings)
76. Play a listening game. Sit very quietly and try to guess the sounds you hear.
77. Let them play with the stereo dial to experiment with loud and soft sounds.
78. Play by candlelight
79. Turn off the lights and play flashlight tag
80. Shadow puppets
81. Build a fort or tent
82. Hide under a blanket and read by flashlight
83. play catch with a balloon
84. Do mazes or dot to dots
85. Trace your body or hands
86. Wear sunglasses
87. Smells: Explore how your child reacts to different smells. If you find some are soothing or alerting, get lotions, soaps, or candles to help regulate mood.
88. Using a blindfold have them guess different smells. (peanut butter, maple syrup, apples, etc)
89. Try giving a child a strong flavored candy or gum before trying a new food at dinner.
90. Eat sensory savvy snacks
91. Tickle Fingers (trace fingers lightly over the skin)
92. Put on lotion
93. Pet the cat
94. Butterfly kisses (eyelash kisses)
95. Give each other massages
96. Make extreme faces
97. Practice blowing out birthday candles on playdough cakes

98. Put dollops of different colored paints in a baggie and squish around to mix the paints.

99. Create a sensory savvy spot (beanbag chair or pile of pillows with soft lighting, soothing items such as books and stuffed animals, music with headphones and a snack)

Most of these activities are taken from Raising a Sensory Smart Child: The Definitive Handbook for Helping Your Child with Sensory Integration Issues by Lindsey Biel and Nancy Panske. This is the best book I have found on practical advice for parents on sensory issues and I think a really valuable book for ANY parent.



Most kids that I know tend to have at least one situation that makes them, well, pretty much freak. In addition to tons of advice on dealing with sensory issues, Raising a Sensory Smart Child has great tips and advice for how to be sensitive and help children negotiate whatever their particular tough spot is, whether it's bath time, brushing hair, getting dressed, loud noises, as well as sleeping better. This is a book worth having on every bookshelf.”