SENSORY PLAY AT HOME

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What is a Sensory System?

Breakdown of each sensory system:

1. Vision: how your child takes in and interprets the things they see!
2. Hearing: how your child takes in and responds to the things they hear!
3. Smell: how your child perceives and responds to things they smell
4. Oral: how your child takes in and interprets the things they put in their mouth
5. Touch: how your child takes in and explores things through physical touch!
6. Vestibular: Provides your child with information about their body's movement and balance
7. Proprioception: Provides your child with information about awareness of their body in space

- It is important to recognize that the sensory systems do not operate in isolation from each other and a child may have sensitivities or preferences pertaining to more than one sensory system. Preferences and sensitivities are developed based on experiences over time.
- It is also crucial to note that each child will respond differently to sensory play as each person has different sensory preferences and reactions. This means what one child finds calming, may be alerting for someone else.
What is it?
Your child’s ability to process what they see in the space around them including lights, colors, shapes, etc. It also includes how well a child can see the things in front of, around them, close to them, and far away.

How it impacts you:
It is important to consider a child’s visual system as a potential source of either feelings of safety or distress. Children can be overwhelmed by spaces heavily cluttered or decorated, especially those with bright colors or lights. This can make it increasingly difficult for your child to sort through the information they gather using their eyes and cause frustration.
Alerting:
01. Natural/dim lighting, take fewer toys out at one time
02. Make your own sensory bottle using a water bottle, water, vegetable/baby oil, and fun objects placed inside to float! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76MTGCGFt5E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76MTGCGFt5E)
03. Allow your child to wear a baseball hat that will assist them in decreasing the amount of space they are seeing at one time, allowing them to take in and process the environment in smaller amounts

Calming:
01. Bright fluorescent lights/different colored lights
02. Driving toy cars along a race course/maze. You can draw your own maze on paper at home!
03. I-spy/search and locate books where your child can search for hidden items in very busy images

How can I support my child with what I have at home?
What is it?
The way your child takes in and processes the sounds around them, the volume at which they perceive them, and the way the sound makes them feel (alarmed vs calm)

How it impacts you:
Your child may be overwhelmed by sounds around them that you perceive as background noise. On the other hand, some children may require increased volumes of sound in order to recognize them. If we can support a child’s hearing as a sensory system, we can help prevent unnecessary upsets.
How can I support my child with what I have at home?  

**Calming:**

01. Music that has 60 beats per minute. Examples and further explanation can be found via this link: [https://insidetheorchestra.org/2019/04/17/comforting-music-for-kids/#:%7E:text=Listening%20to%20music%20that%20has,brainwaves%20we%20have%20when%20relaxed.](https://insidetheorchestra.org/2019/04/17/comforting-music-for-kids/#:%7E:text=Listening%20to%20music%20that%20has,brainwaves%20we%20have%20when%20relaxed.)

02. Allow your child (when socially appropriate) to wear a hat that covers part of their ears (i.e. winter hat or headbands in the spring/summer)

03. Be mindful of the placement of certain household items such as fans, air conditioners, blenders, vacuums, and acknowledge that these sounds may be upsetting. Increasing the distance between your child and these items will help support them.

**Alerting:**

01. Listening to music that has more beats per minute such as EDM/Techno based music

02. At home music shaker using household items! You can swap out the mixture of rice for beads as well! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOcyl4y3t98](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOcyl4y3t98)

03. Use an empty coffee grounds container to allow your little one to play the drums! Practice drumming FAST! and s l o w
What is it?
Your child’s interpretation of the scents around them. This can be important to consider especially if you are unable to identify a visual source that may be impacting your child. Associations are made with smells based on experience over time.

How it impacts you:
If your child is easily impacted by certain smells you may find that this disrupts their day and causes a change in behavior. If your child is not impacted or does not pick up on smells that they “should”, they may benefit from more alerting scents. Calming scents can be used in a number of ways: supporting your child getting to sleep at night, allowing them to feel relaxed and safe while playing, etc.
How can I support my child with what I have at home?

### Calming:
01. Remove overbearing scents from your child’s environment if possible
02. Lavender essential oils or air freshener
03. Chamomile essential oils

### Alerting:
01. Citrus smells such as orange. You can even boil orange peels in a pot of hot water mixed with other desired scents such as cinnamon as a natural way to fill the home with this scent: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybFuGPNpxtA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybFuGPNpxtA)
02. Lemon essential oil/candle/air freshener/stove-top boil
03. Spearmint essential oil

*when possible, ensure candles are made of natural ingredients as some individuals are sensitive to candles burning around them and may develop a runny nose or other reaction*
**ORAL**

**What is it?**
The sensations your child experiences when eating or putting items in his or her mouth. This can include the consistency of the food (liquid/puree/solid), texture of the food (crunchy/chewy/hard/soft), the flavor of the food (bland, spicy, sweet, sour), and the temperature of the item (warm/hot/cold)

**How it impacts you:**
Your child may have specific preferences or needs when it comes to what they will put in their mouth or eat
How can I support my child with what I have at home?

**Alerting:**
01. Familiar/preferred/comfort foods
02. Bananas/cantaloupe/honeydew/peaches
03. Pudding/warm oatmeal/applesauce

01. Ice cold water, popsicles, frozen yogurt snacks, frozen gogurt
02. Strong flavors: citrus/oranges/lemon/lime, grapefruit garlic, pickles,
   a. Example: lemonade, you can add sparkling water for extra alerting effect
03. Crunchy snacks such as veggie sticks, rice cakes, apple slices, etc.

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What is it?
The way your child feels about the things they feel throughout the day! Kids are constantly exploring different textures without knowing it. We can help support these little ones as they explore their surroundings with their hands AND feet! Don’t forget about the benefits of being barefoot!

How it impacts you:
Some children love to get their hands messy and others, not so much! Either way, offering opportunities for your child to use his or her hands to explore different items and textures may either help them adjust to the new textures, or satisfy their desire to get messy!
How can I support my child with what I have at home?

Below is a list of activities that can be altered for the child who would rather NOT get messy & for the child who LOVES to get messy!

01. Ice Cubes: use with bare hands or fun kitchen utensils if child is not quite loving this feeling.
02. Jello Toy Rescue: place toys in jello mix before refrigerating overnight. Rescue the toys in the morning! Can be done using kitchen utensils, while wearing gloves, or with bare hands!
03. Painting with cool whip (cool whip/shaving cream + food coloring or washable watercolor)
   a. can be put inside a plastic bag for no direct contact to hands. Try adding a set of googly eyes for extra fun!
   b. can use brushes to explore the item with little to no direct contact to hands
   c. can be put inside disposable foil pan for contained mess but direct contact to hands!
04. Collecting items while on a walk: pinecone, rock, leaf, etc. For the child who is ready for more exploration here, take those items home to paint later!
05. Exploration bin: rice, marbles, dry beans, pasta, etc.
VESTIBULAR SYSTEM

What is it?
Your child’s sense of balance! It is responsible for them being able to balance and stay in control of their body when moving and stems from the inner ear!

How it impacts you:
If your child is having trouble regulating their vestibular system, you may notice they do things such as fall down a lot, seem clumsy, and experience increased difficulty with activities like using stairs or walking on a sidewalk curb. They also may feel dizzy or nauseous frequently. A well “balanced” vestibular system will set your child up for success when walking, running, avoiding obstacles, and more.
Alerting:

01. Downward dog yoga pose
02. Swing your child back and forth using a large cozy blanket. You will need two adults: each adult will hold two corners of the blanket while your child sits in the middle and you’re ready to swing! *Ideally one adult in front of the child-added bonus of eye contact!
03. Gentle rocking back and forth in a rocking chair

Calming:

01. Make an obstacle course using household furniture or support your child to play on top of a yoga ball (help them roll on their belly or sit on the ball and move them side to side)
02. Allow your child to sit inside a small laundry basket. You can tip them side to side in the basket while singing “row, row, row your boat!” For added comfort, place a cozy blanket around your child inside the basket.
03. Jumping (on the floor or trampoline) or frog jumps!

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PROPRIOCEPTION

**What is it?**
Your child’s perception of their body in space! Proprioception also contributes to a person’s ability to feel regulated or process their emotions and pay attention to an activity.

**How it impacts you:**
If a child is seeking more opportunities for this kind of feeling to their body, you may notice your child running around, crashing into things such as a couch or pillows, throwing items, or having frequent meltdowns. The proper level of proprioceptive input or feeling will help them feel more calm & in control of their own body.
How can I support my child with what I have at home?

**Alerting:**
01. Deep pressure through hugs/bear hugs or “squishes” directly to the arms, legs and feet
02. Slow swinging
03. Opportunities for “heavy work” meaning your child pushing/pulling/picking up heavy objects
   - Ex. pushing a stroller with items in it, carrying a backpack with items inside for added weight, helping to bring in or put away groceries!

**Calming:**
01. Wheelbarrow walking & log rolls
02. Tapping/Hitting a yoga ball as fast as you can OR you tap the yoga ball and your little one can put their hands on the ball to feel the vibration this makes!
03. Tug of war games
SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

WEBSITE:
ASensoryLife.com

INSTAGRAM:
@thesensoryproject208
@funandfunction
@allthingssensorypodcast

PODCAST:
All Things Sensory by Harkla


Inside the Orchestra. (2019, April 17). 8 pieces of comforting music for children and grown-ups too. https://insidetheorchestra.org/2019/04/17/comforting-music-for-kids/#:~:text=Listening%20to%20comforting%20music%20that%20has%20brainwaves%20we%20have%20when%20we%20are%20relaxed.


THANK YOU!

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