

BACK TO BASICS FOR SENSITIVE KIDS

10 Sensory Activities for a Healthy Brain and Body

BY LINDSEY BIEL

Of course, there's no cookbook recipe for a sensory program. Hopefully you are working with an occupational therapist who can help you determine what activities work best to calm your child when he's wired, and pep him up when he's tired. Here are some sensory smart activities to get you started:

- 1. MOVE!** To rev up a sluggish child or reorganize a bouncy one, have him jump on a mini-trampoline, bounce on a therapy ball, do jumping jacks, jump onto a crash pad of cushions, or dance together to favorite music. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, take a stroll outdoors, go for a bike or scooter ride, do funny animal walks, or wheelbarrow walk from one room to another.
- 2. GET HEAVY!** Have the child wear a reasonably weighted backpack, push a cart full of groceries or stroller full of toys, carry books, or play catch with a weighted medicine ball.
- 3. SQUISH!** For calming deep pressure, make a "kid sandwich" between pillows, sofa cushions, or mats. Add pretend ingredients such as spreading on peanut butter, massaging in some jelly and patting on some pickles. Then press out all the extra stuff, watching the child

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carefully to make sure she enjoys it. You can also make a "burrito" by rolling up the child with his head out in a blanket or mat, again watching the child to make sure it's fun.

- 4. CLEAN UP!** Using big movements of the arms, wipe down tables, countertops, windows, and mirrors with a non-toxic cleanser. If your child can deal with the noise, let him vacuum the rug for wonderful vibration and proprioceptive input. Mopping the floor provides great input too.
- 5. TAKE A BREAK!** At school or when doing homework, all kids should get frequent "sensory snacks." Five minutes of chair push-ups, wall-push-ups, stretching, jumping jacks, or other organizing physical activity keeps everyone focused and comfortable. If kids are working at a computer, they should shift their gaze into the distance every 20-30 minutes.
- 6. COOK!** Pick out a recipe from a cookbook or online (search: fun recipes for kids), shop for ingredients, measure everything out, pour, mix, stir, and serve. While you do want to start with foods you know your child will enjoy, you can also try some less-favored foods. This may make the food item interesting and familiar enough that your child may be willing to try it.
- 7. CHEW!** Chewy foods like bagels, fruit leather, and chewing gum give lots of great input to the jaws and mouth awhile building oral-motor strength. Glee Gum is gluten- and casein-free. Spry Gum is extra chewy and does not contain artificial sweeteners or colors. If gum is not an option, consider "chewies" such as Dr. Bloom's Chewable Jewels, Chewlery bracelets, Chew-Eaze, Kids' Companions, and Pencil Toppers.
- 8. DRINK!** Up to 80% of your body weight is water. Not drinking enough



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fluids can result in headaches, constipation, dizziness, and worse. Be sure your child drinks lots of pure water throughout the day. If your child insists on juice, be sure to water it down. You can make water more fun by adding a silly straw or picking out a cute non-toxic, BPA-free reusable water bottle.

- 9. SMELL!** Smell is the one sense that travels directly to the limbic system, the emotional center of the brain. Sniff herbs, spices, flowers, grass, and other items. Explore essential oils in the health food stores to find a favorite you can bring along wherever you go to conjure up pleasurable feelings.
- 10. BREATHE!** We all take breathing for granted, but it's actually an important way to shift arousal states. When a child is in fight-or-flight mode, breath is shallow and rapid. When we prompt kids to breathe when stressed out, they usually just breathe more quickly. Teach kids to focus on *exhaling* deeply and loudly. The inhale will happen automatically. Taking just a few moments to deeply exhale 3-10 times will help you feel and function better too!

For more sensory smart ideas, please see *Raising a Sensory Smart Child* and visit www.sensorysmarts.com.