

10 low- and no-cost activities and resources for sensory play

Sensory play is a fun and beneficial way to support the development of children's emerging gross and fine motor skills, as well as their social and emotional skills. Educators can support children who have emotional regulation difficulties by allowing them to explore and ignite their senses through sensory play.

Here are some low- and no-cost ideas to help children regulate their emotions and senses:

1 **Water play:** Water is one of the most simple and accessible ingredients to use for sensory play. Try freezing it, melting it, adding colour, bubbles or scents to it for different textures and smells.




2 **Sand play:** Playing with sand can be a calming sensory experience for children who are anxious or nervous. Try setting children up with objects in a sand tray and asking what they are doing as they play. This can help children explore and express their thoughts and feelings.



3 **Fidget toys:** Educators can provide children with access to fidget toys to aid their concentration and emotional regulation. There are lots of different types of fidget toys now available on the market.



4 **Noise-cancelling headphones** Noise-cancelling headphones can help children who become overwhelmed by noise to manage their emotional regulation. If possible, have more than one pair accessible within your environment so several children can access them at once.




5 **Homemade play dough:** An all-time favourite! Increase the sensory experience of play dough by including real herbs such as lavender or rosemary.




6 **Crunchy foods such as carrots and apples:** In addition to the nutritional benefits, crunchy foods can boost sensory stimulation, sharpen focus and enhance emotional regulation.



8 **Sensory bottles:** Sensory bottles can support mindfulness and self-regulation. Make your own using water, oil or liquid soap, food colouring and sand. Secure the lid well, tip it upside down, and see the sand fall slowly to the bottom.



10 **Heavy work:** Heavy work consists of movement that involves the larger muscles of the body. Heavy work activities have many benefits for children, such as increasing attention, focus and calm. Activities could include wall push-ups or chair push-ups, holding a weighted stuffed animal, a game of tug of war, doing yoga or going on animal walks.



Did you know... Sensory play aligns with the five common senses, along with additional senses related to balance and proprioception (the perception or awareness of the position and movement of the body).

7 **Slime, putty or goop:** Slime is a fun, tactile play experience which helps children build hand and finger strength. Get creative and make it from scratch! It can be made using simple ingredients such as cornflour and water.



9 **Swinging, rocking and spinning:** These repetitive movements support children's vestibular stimulation (which influences emotion) and can aid in sensory regulation. For example, the back-and-forth motion of swinging can help regulate children's sensory input and soothe their nerves.



Helpful links:

- Crunchy foods: patches.com.au/embracing-the-crunch-how-crunchy-lunchbox-snacks-can-benefit-your-child
- Further information on sensory play: oac.edu.au/news-views/sensory-play
- Sand play: raisingchildren.net.au/guides/activity-guides/sensory-play/sand-tray-play-activity-children-disability-autism
- Sensory swinging: sourcekids.com.au/ways-a-sensory-swing-can-help-your-child

Some children may have a sensory sensitivity or need. Every child who has a sensory sensitivity is different and their needs may change over time. It's always best to work alongside families and allied health professionals to support the individual needs of all children.