

Rich Sensory Experiences

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

IV. Supporting Children's Development

E. The provider offers a wide range of opportunities for children's sensory, large, and small motor development.

4. The provider plans for developmentally appropriate sensory experiences both indoors and outdoors.



The Basics

Sensory experiences involve play with one or more sensory systems, including visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, olfactory, vestibular, proprioceptive, and interoceptive. Children experience the world through sensory modalities – sensations like sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, balance, body awareness, and internal state.

Why is sensory play important? Positive sensory experiences are essential in early brain development. As the brain processes sensory information, it stimulates neural pathways among specialized regions of the brain, laying a strong foundation for all future learning. With opportunities to engage the senses in a variety of ways, children strengthen their ability to receive, process, and utilize information. Sensory integration develops when children receive and process information from multiple sensory sensations. For example, children exploring water *feel* the wetness, *sense* the temperature, *see* the color and movement, and *hear* the splashing. Children begin to explore their preferences, which informs their sense of self and how they may **seek** or **avoid** sensory experiences to remain regulated. Sensory play opens opportunities for children to practice language, cognitive, motor, and social skills.

How can I incorporate sensory experiences?

- ❖ Consider your program's environment and activities-through a sensory lens. What opportunities do children have throughout the day to engage one or more sensory systems in playful, child-directed experiences?

- ❖ Consider your own sensory preferences and how it may impact your practice. What types of sensory experiences do you enjoy? What is calming to you? What do you avoid?
- ❖ Talk with children about sensory experiences by describing what they are doing and asking open-ended questions. “What does it feel like?” “How does it smell?” “What do you notice?”
- ❖ Keep it child directed. Encourage children to explore at their own pace and listen to their bodies as they explore their own sensory preferences.
- ❖ Plan and invite children to play with one or more sensory systems. Consider developmental appropriateness for each age group. Explore the resources below for fun and engaging sensory play ideas.

I want to learn more!

- [Sensory Play: Tip Sheet for Early Years Educators](#) (Resource)
- [Ooey Goey Squishy Plop! Sensory Play for Every Day!](#) (Resource)
- [The Sand and Water Center in Child Care](#) (Article)
- [From Neurons to Neighborhoods](#) (Book)
- [The Importance of Sensory Play: Start Engaging the Senses!](#) (Webinar)

