



Sensory Play

Although many sensory play theorists have held differing views over the years, they've agreed on the importance of sensory play to spark the senses and help children learn. The benefits of sensory play in pre-schoolers are as follows:

1. Brain Development

Sensory play has been proven by research to strengthen the nerve connections in the pathways of the brain. This occurrence leads to stronger memory skills and also builds a foundation for even more complicated learning tasks in the future, including those related to language skills and problem-solving.

2. Cognition

The acts of observing, trying new experiences and manipulating new materials all work together to expand the thought processes of children. They can learn pre mathematics skills, such as size comparison, sorting patterns and matching. Children also learn about science when they take part in experiences such as determining what sinks or floats in water and how gravity works with their bodies or various materials on the playground. They also begin to see connections between the various materials they work with, such as those having similar properties, like sticky, smelly, cold or smooth.

3. Awareness

Taking part in sensory activities helps children to become more aware of the spaces that physically surround them (and their position in space) and also more mindful of themselves as individuals, separate from their parents, siblings and playmates. They could also become more aware of their strengths and abilities, which can lead to enhanced self-esteem.

4. Adaptability

During sensory play, children regularly find themselves in interesting, new situations to which they must adapt successfully. These affirmative experiences help them gain confidence and make them even better able to adapt when the next new situation appears. Because of this positive feedback they have received, children could be more apt to seek out fresh challenges, going forward.

5. Comfort

The emotional benefits of sensory play are sometimes overlooked. For many children, tactile play can be very soothing, such as using their hands to knead cool playdough or running sand, rice and water through their fingers in sensory bins. Children who are tense, worried or upset can often become more involved in a pleasurable sensory activity and then set those negative emotions aside, at least for the time being.

6. Communication

While they take part in sensory play together, children have countless opportunities to practise communicating verbally. They attempt to talk about their world and what they are experiencing or to convey their ideas, wishes and opinions. The strong oral language skills they form in this way can then lay a solid foundation for learning to read. In addition, when children use the muscles in their fingers and hands during sensory play, they build pre-writing skills that are necessary for written language.

7. Motor Skills

Children touch and move things as a form of texture and shape exploration. While pinching, turning and pouring, they exercise and fine-tune their small muscles mainly in their fingers and hands. As children crawl, jump, kick, climb and run while interacting with things like stairs, balls and playground equipment, they develop the large muscles in their arms, feet, legs and torsos.

8. Creativity

An open-ended project where the process is more important than the end product is important when offering exciting sensory materials to children.

While “painting” with shaving cream on a tabletop, for instance, children can picture touching the clouds up in the sky. When children have fun using their imaginations and feel good about the outcomes, their self-esteem grows, making it even easier to explore their creativity the next time.

9. Problem solving

When children interact with a wide assortment of materials and open-ended activities, they have many opportunities to make predictions, solve problems, make decision and compare the results against their original predictions. They can then try alternative strategies the next time to see if their results are different.

10. Social and Emotional Development

Children often work in small groups or side-by-side during sensory play, which helps them learn to communicate, share and get along together. These types of situations also help them gain empathy and guide them in learning to see situations from another child’s point of view, which leads to enhanced mindfulness. Sensory play in early childhood is especially valuable because it encourages inclusion and acceptance.

Assuming adults give children safety and kindness guidelines, all outcomes are okay, with no “right or wrong” answers and results. This openness benefits all children, including those who speak a second language or those with additional needs.

These are just a few sensory play benefits. Here are some ideas for Sensory Stations you can set up at home:

1. Sand play
2. Water beads
3. Painting with textured items
4. Tasting games
5. Coloured rice
6. Calm down area with classical music.
7. Musical instruments
8. Light table
9. Kinetic sand
10. Sensory object bags
11. Threading
12. Playdough
13. Water play
14. Loose part play
15. Jumping on an indoor trampoline
16. Crawling through a tunnel



