

## News Release

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# Play with the senses

Sensory play is a vital part of children's learning. It aids their development and helps them gain an understanding of the environment around them. From birth, babies may experience the world utilising their senses; sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. The first few years of life offer new experiences with each sense, every day. It is this explosion of the senses that children use to explore, process and understand this new information they are gathering from the world around them. The childminder's role is to provide opportunities to enhance this fascinating journey of discovery.

Catherine Clark, Early Years New Product Development Director from TTS explains how childminders can use sensory play imaginatively to inspire and encourage learning during these vital early years.

"It is vital that children are given the space and time to imaginatively investigate the world around them using all their senses. There are endless opportunities to develop sensory play within the child's own environment. They also need the freedom to explore safely. Manipulation of materials through pouring, pressing, moulding, lifting and sorting will improve their fine and gross motor skills as well as aiding their understanding. Interesting and thought provoking materials will encourage the use of creative skills whilst self confidence and social skills are developed as well as language being enhanced.

Sensory learning possibilities are everywhere. Children need to be able to explore them independently as well as in a more directed way (safety permitting). There also needs to be the provision to return to an activity when appropriate.

A lot of the activities are obviously age dependant. With careful planning and sometimes serendipity a host of skills can be fostered. It is difficult to separate the different senses as looking at a beautiful rose, touching its velvety petals and then experiencing its beautiful perfume utilise an array of senses simultaneously.

Digging in the garden with squelchy mud is a wonderful activity. Looking at caterpillars, butterflies and spider's webs etc through magnifying glasses or colour viewers fosters a better understanding of nature's wonders.

Mud pies and petal potions rekindle happy memories in adults and hopefully for future generations. Obviously a water tray, or even a bowl, is great for sensory work, whether it is filled with cornflour, glimmer sand, jelly flakes or food colouring and water. When there's no real snow, use Magic Snow as it really has a sense of awe and wonder as it feels so realistic. Children will be pouring, emptying, filling, patting, digging, scooping etc all of which aid their fine motor and coordination skills as well as being good messy fun!

## **Sight**

Children need to be exposed to a variety of stimulating experiences. The world is full of fascinating, amazing objects and textures. Playing in the garden or a walk in the park will provide a rich treasury. Lying on the ground, looking up towards the moving clouds, or feeling the gnarled bark on a tree, all help children to understand more of our world.

Everyday simple things such as going to vegetable patches, shops, woods, the pond etc all provide varied things to look at. Whilst exploring these places it is important that we interact with children and talk about what they are experiencing, the colours, shapes, textures, smells as well as the name of things.

Use mirrors, viewers, binoculars, microscopes, cameras etc to help children to see the world in different ways. Mixing water and food colouring is a great way for children to observe what happens with the colours of the water. Use everyday items of different colours such as buttons, ribbons or beads so the children can match, sort, thread etc.

## **Smell and Taste**

How things smell and taste can also be part of the learning journey. We strongly associate certain smells and tastes to past events and memories. Exploring the outdoor world offers limitless opportunities; the smell of freshly cut grass, flowers, a rain shower and fruit. Aroma Bags (TTS - £18.99) offer an interesting way to introduce children to new smells and aromas. They can return to them time and time again, trying to recall the smell of either rosebuds, oranges, apples, cinnamon, lavender, aniseed or cloves contained within the 7 drawstring bags.

Simple strong smelling foodstuffs provide an easy way for children to recognise the familiar aromas. By cooking together, or making pretend potions, children learn how materials change and how they feel and smell.

## **Sound**

Children usually become aware of the sounds immediately from birth, they quickly establish the sound of their mother and the comfort that this brings with it. They begin to listen and identify people, objects and things. This is vital for their personal development. Singing songs and game playing is an easy and fun way to introduce young children to a world of colours, shapes, sizes and sounds. Children need time to observe and reflect as well as time to participate.

Playing with music and musical instruments is important for children. They enable children to learn songs and rhymes that help them to gain a sense of rhythm and pattern. Encourage actions in time to the music or movement where they can whirl and twirl freely. A mix of instruments; things to bang, rattle and plonk are great items to have around any childminders home but equally pots, pans and wooden spoons are all super to improvise with.

## **Touch**

It is important to let toddlers satisfy their curiosity and urge to touch things. Babies enjoy the sense of touch very early on, snuggling with soft toys and furry blankets. They like to explore textures, and sharing touch and feel books together is a great way to do this. Babies need things that rattle, squeak, crinkle etc. Things that have a stimulus then a response are great for cause and effect, e.g. if you press this button... this happens. Have a collection of materials including soft, rough, smooth and shiny which are great for developing matching activities and sensory awareness.

Making collage collections using a variety of things such as leaves, found materials, fabrics, sequins and so on, is a lovely shared experience as well as a tactile one. Have times when the children can explore the different textures with their feet; e.g. water, sand, carpet, jelly, mud, grass and stones. As long as it is in a safe environment allow them to experience how the different sensations feel. Going on sensory treasure hunts are a brilliant way for children to learn how things touch, smell and sound.

Sensory play offers a wide range of learning opportunities. It is open ended! It is fun! It can be experienced indoors and out! All ages can access some aspects of this type of play, ranging from babies with treasure basket type experiences to older children playing with gloop or investigating mini-beasts. By providing a rich variety of sensory play experiences you are opening up fascinating new worlds"

For further information on TTS please call 0800 318 686 or visit [www.tts-shopping.com](http://www.tts-shopping.com)

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