

Play Time Strategies for Children with Tactile Processing Deficits

Small Sample of Recommended Activities by Antonia Lull, MOT, OTR/L

Activities for spring and summer that facilitate tactile processing, feeding, and family fun:

<https://mpowermetoys.com/yummy-sensory-summer-fun-entry-1/>

DIY Sensory Bottles: <https://mpowermetoys.com/diy-sensory-bottles/>

Small Sample of games to play – *The play recommendations are not individualized and may not be appropriate for your child. If your child is under the care of a therapist please confer with them prior. **If your child mouths non-edibles, close supervision required -- some of the activities may not be safe without **highly** close supervision. ***

Play that includes resistive muscle action, active movement combined with tactile exploration allows for them to shift to activities that calm vs activities that might be overly stimulating. For example:

- Have them pull a heavy wagon to deliver items to use in a sandbox or to large bins filled with uncooked rice, corn, beans (*not kidney*), or moon sand. ** raw kidney beans may be toxic, use uncooked, dry black, white, garbanzo, and navy beans, black eyed peas.
- Create an obstacle course in the back yard that includes commando crawling on the grass or over a tarp, jumping over obstacles, having to pour soapy water into a cup, then carrying the filled cup to another part of the course to fill a container.
- Build towers with large foam blocks, then knock them over by throwing water balloons, balloons filled with different items, bean bags made with various textured clothes, or wet/gelled cotton balls.
- Combine active, safe jumping on a mini-trampoline before and after introducing craft projects or finger painting (can modify by using cotton balls or cut-cubed sponges to touch the paint with instead).

Fun food preparation and gardening are forms of functional play, sensory exploration, and bonding time, that directly build skills – digging, watering, planting bulbs; mixing dough (with hands or large spoon depending on their preference or aversions), rolling dough, using cookie cutters, spreading icing, making whip cream by hand, blending in cut fruit or chocolate chips by hand (or tongs depending on their readiness to touch the items).

“I am the sandwich or taco” game – You pretend to make a big sandwich with your child as the main “stuffing” -- use a preferred blanket or pillows for the bread. Have your child lie in between, either face up or down (whatever is comfortable for them), then you pretend to add salt and pepper using sprinkling/shaking actions. Add a piece of “cheese” and compress down the pillow/blanket over their back and legs (asking them “harder” softer”?) and then use a foam roller to add “mayonnaise”, again applying gently-firm pressure. Alternate between the salt-shaking action

and compression – always checking if they want more or less pressure, salting action, or foam roller actions. Then you can let them make you into a sandwich.

If your child enjoys bath time play, include sponges with varying textures and firmness, body washes with varying textures/thicknesses, and squeeze toys. After bath, introduce different textured towels for drying and a variety of lotions with different smells and textures.

Build towers with large foam blocks, then knock them over by **throwing** water balloons, balloons filled with different items, bean bags made with various textured clothes, or wet/gelled cotton balls.

Spray Bottle – Have your child water the plants or play a water game using a spray bottle (or one in each hand to increase bilateral coordination as well). Start by filling a bottle half way, until your child is strong enough for a full bottle, switch hands as needed. You can have outside targets at varying heights. Or simply water all the plants inside and out. Use colored water to spray hanging blankets or white t-shirts to create “cool” clothing or bed sheets.

Hide/Bury small house hold items, small plastic animals, or the like -- in clean sand or uncooked rice, corn, or beans and then have the kids find them with eyes closed (when ready) and then identify the objects through “feel” vs sight. Otherwise, they can hunt for the items with their eyes open using their hands and/or use tweezers, tongs, child chopsticks to pluck them out, while naming the object. For example, keys, paper clip, tea spoon, coins, eraser, tape, pencil, small toys with distinct shapes, 3-D shapes like cubes, cylinders, pyramids etc. **** If using beans, do not use uncooked kidney beans, they have been reported to be toxic when not cooked.****

Use a Hole Puncher to create patterns on colored paper and make confetti with it. Use the confetti to create craft projects using various media like glue, finger paint, gel etc. (let them choose). If they do not want to touch the “sticky” stuff, then have them use tweezers or child tongs to place the confetti. Use regular thickness paper and work up the hand strength to hole-punch through construction paper.

Tin Foil Balls – make tin foil balls with your child (ranging from the size of a marble to the size of a golf ball). While creating them, inside some, you can hide a bead, pom-pom, putty, or some small treasure your child will like (they can do the hiding as well). Play together making up to 10 varying sized tin-balls. You can then hide the balls around the house or outside and have your child go on a scavenger hunt. Once they are all found, you and your child can open them carefully (trying not to tear the foil) and find the one’s with the “treasure” inside. You can extend the time it takes to find the treasures, by only opening a few a day. *Barring any food allergies*, you can also use almonds, fruit gummies, and other small treats they enjoy as the treasures. Complete the game in crisscross or sitting on a bench or stool or even standing if they prefer.