

Activities to Support a Child with Sensory Differences

Every child (and adult) experiences the world through their senses – sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. For children with sensory differences, these everyday sensations can sometimes feel too strong, too weak or just strange and unfamiliar. Some children might look for more sensory input (seeking movement, pressure or texture), while others might find certain noises, lights or sensations overwhelming.

This is all perfectly OK, and with gentle support and practical activities, you can help your child feel calmer, more focused and comfortable in their own body. These activities are designed to do just that.



Sensory Tent or Quiet Corner

Create a small, calm space where your child can retreat when they need a break. Use soft fabrics, cushions, gentle lighting and familiar objects. It's not about hiding away – it's about offering a safe space to reset and feel grounded.



These resources are those which we have generally found to be of benefit to learners with SEND. However, every learner's needs are different and so these resources may not be suitable for your learner. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate to use these resources with your learner.



Heavy Work Activities

Encourage activities that give muscles and joints deep pressure without overloading them – carrying shopping bags, pushing a laundry basket or wiping tables. These ‘heavy work’ movements help regulate the body and improve focus.

Texture Play

Offer your child items with different textures to play with – dry rice, modelling dough, pieces of fabric, sand or water. Encourage them to explore at their own pace. Some children may prefer tools or gloves if direct touch feels uncomfortable.

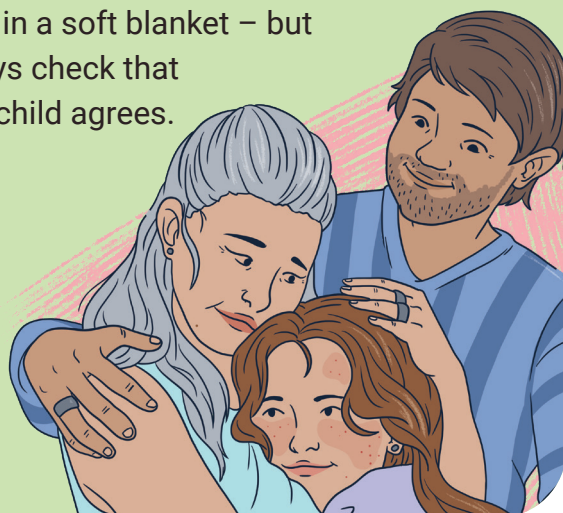


Movement Breaks

Incorporate short bursts of movement throughout the day – jumping, stretching or dancing to a song. This can help release energy and enable children to re-focus, especially during transitions.

Deep Pressure Hugs (When Welcomed)

Firm, steady pressure can be soothing for some children. You can use a weighted blanket, a gentle squeeze hug or a tight wrap in a soft blanket – but always check that your child agrees.



Scent Exploration

Use pleasant, familiar scents such as lavender, vanilla or citrus. Encourage your child to explore smells in small doses – scented modelling dough, a drop of essential oil on cotton wool or a fragranced hand lotion. Avoid anything overpowering.

Sensory Walks

Go outside and explore textures and sounds in nature – leaves, grass, stones, birdsong. Walking barefoot on safe surfaces (like sand or grass) can be calming and help develop body awareness.



Temperature Play

Safely explore warm and cool – for example, dipping hands in warm water, then cool, or playing with ice cubes. This helps children learn to tolerate and enjoy different sensory experiences.

Visual Calm Boards

Create a visual board with calming images that mean something to your child – soft colours, nature scenes or favourite characters. Looking at something familiar and peaceful can help a child focus when overstimulated.



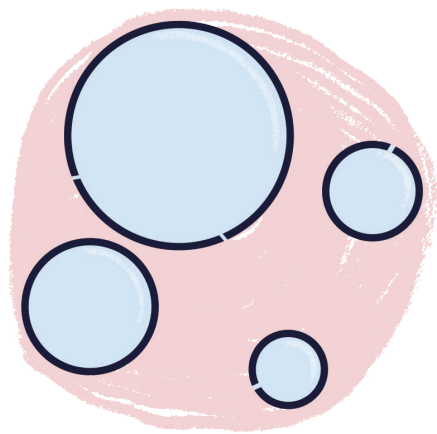
Barefoot Balance Play

Encourage safe barefoot play indoors or in the garden. Walking on textured mats, grass or sand helps develop sensory awareness and strengthens balance. Keep it playful – hopscotch or stepping stones games work brilliantly.



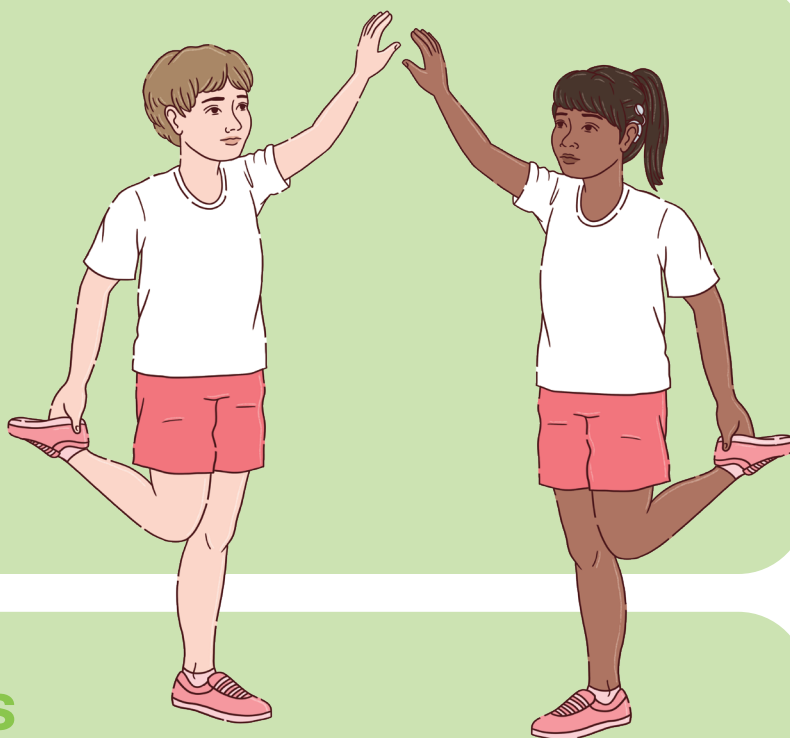
Bubble Trails

Blow bubbles and encourage your child to follow their trail or pop them in slow motion. It's a simple hand-eye coordination game, but with a magical, mindful twist. For extra fun, use scented bubble mix (lavender or lemon works well).



Mirror Movement Game

Face your child and take turns leading slow movements that the other person mirrors – stretching arms, tilting heads, making calm hand shapes. Great for developing body awareness and self-regulation through gentle connection rather than instruction.

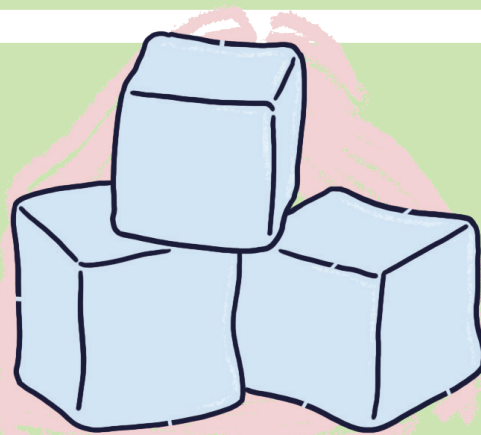


Tactile Story Stones

Collect smooth pebbles and decorate them with simple images – a sun, a tree, a cat, a smile. Encourage your child to create stories by arranging or handling the stones. The element of touch helps children stay engaged, while creative play helps with communication.

Frozen Treasure Hunt

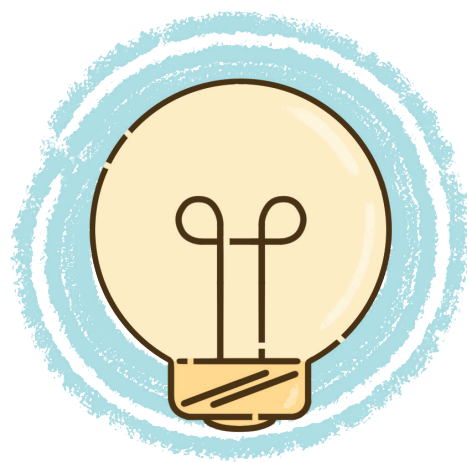
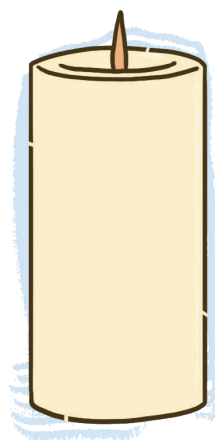
Freeze small toys or natural items (like shells or beads) inside ice cubes or moulds. Let your child explore, freeing them using warm water, spoons or spray bottles. It's a great mix of fine motor skills, patience and temperature exploration.



More Top Tips

Calm Lighting

Bright or flickering lights can be overwhelming for some children. Try soft, warm lighting or use dimmer switches and fairy lights. Natural light is best where possible.



Sound Soothers

If your child is sensitive to noise, try noise-reducing headphones or quiet background sounds such as nature music or gentle instrumental tracks.



Chewy or Fidget Tools

Offer safe items to chew, squeeze or fiddle with – silicone chewies, stress balls or fidget spinners. These can help with self-regulation, attention and calming.

