



Sensory play is any activity that stimulates the senses. It is crucial for the cognitive, emotional and physical development of children (and adults!) of all ages. Sensory activities are open-ended and encourage exploration of materials and processes, rather than the end product.

Recognizing and interpreting sensory information provides many benefits, including:

- Builds nerve connections in a child’s brain that help them engage in more complex and sophisticated learning tasks.
- Supports language development as the child learns to use adjectives to describe items and experiences (hot, cold, wet, sticky, etc.).
- Encourages the child to use scientific processes as they play, create, investigate and explore using their senses.

Engaging children with extra needs in sensory activities is especially beneficial. Encouraging a child to engage in sensory play may help with social and communication abilities, while also helping them self-regulate overwhelming experiences. Along with the cognitive and physical benefits, sensory play is an effective coping strategy to help children (and adults) reduce levels of stress and anxiety.

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Sensory Ice Play Activity Ideas

Ice and water make for amazing sensory materials and provide countless opportunities for science learning and discovery.

From observing the physical changes of matter to exploring the effects of salt on ice, ice encourages imaginative play and experimentation.



Ice Block Challenge

Invite your child to engage in an activity that will demonstrate the chemical reaction between ice and salt.

1. Fill a large container with small toys and water. Let it freeze overnight.
2. Place the frozen ice block on a deep tray or pan, as the ice will be melting quickly.
3. Challenge your child to free the toys from inside the ice block using a special ingredient — salt!

Give your child some salt in a salt shaker or in a cup. Encourage your child to touch it and feel the coarseness of the salt. You can also prefill squirt bottles with salty water and a few drops of food coloring.

Make sure to provide some tools for excavating the toys from the ice such as spoons, forks, plastic chisels, paintbrushes, etc. Eye droppers, cups and basters are also good tools that can encourage scooping and pouring movements.

4. Let your child have fun sprinkling salt and squirting colored salty water on the ice block. They'll enjoy the process of discovering how salt speeds up the melting process, making it easier to dig out their treasures.

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Ice Building

Make a fun engineering challenge for your child with ice! Try putting a sensory spin on this time-honored activity by building structures with colored ice cubes.

1. Start by filling ice cube trays, plastic cups or other molds with water and a few drops of food coloring. Let them freeze overnight.
2. Remove the ice from the container. If you find that the ice is hard to remove, try running the base of the container under warm water. Don't forget to take this opportunity to talk to your child about solids and liquids and what caused the water to change its form.
3. Set the colored ice on a flat surface and encourage your child to build with the frozen ice. If your child has trouble at first, show them how the ice can be stacked up like sandcastles or lined up to make a wall. Try making sculptures or patterns. Use drops of lukewarm water to "glue" the ice cubes together.

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