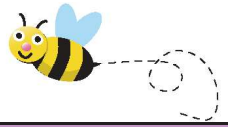
Sensory Play

Toddlers

Preschoolers

Early experiences with sensory materials, such as sand and water, enable older toddlers and preschoolers to use their senses to learn about the natural world.

Sensory Play provides toddlers and preschoolers opportunities to develop their fine motor skills. Introduce sand and water at about 18 months and older. While it appears that children are only performing simple experiments, they are actually solving problems and developing logical thinking skills.



Sensory Play WINGS

W **W**onder	**I** **I**nterests	**N** **N**eeds	**G** **G**oals	**S** **S**kills
Appropriate **Sensory** experiences offer diverse choices in tools and concrete materials causing children to *wonder*: ▪ What can/should I do/ make today? ▪ What materials can/ should I use? ▪ How much sand/water will it take to . . . ? ▪ How much more sand/ water do I need to . . . ? ▪ What would happen if . . . ?	Appropriate **Sensory** experiences include the *interests* of both the adult(s) and children in the classroom. Example: *If children are interested in dinosaurs, the teacher should add related objects for children to explore.* She may hide large bones in the sand and encourage the children to play the role of archaeologists to find the 'fossils.' Objects the teacher may be interested in often include an upcoming holiday, the current season, or selected theme and should be added as well. What the children may create and discover is a constant mystery/puzzle in emergent curriculum.	Appropriate **Sensory** experiences consider developmental, cultural, or exceptional conditions or situations that must be addressed for proper development and learning to occur. Example: *The teacher should provide accessible sand and water materials representing all cultures of the children in the classroom (containers and measuring materials from represented/ related cultures).*	Appropriate **Sensory** experiences enable children to: **Cognitively:** Learn about size, weight, classification, measurement, and cause–and–effect concepts; understand mathematical concepts (lighter/heavier than); develop logical–mathematical thinking; experiment with scientific concepts;. **Physically:** Exercise small muscles; develop an awareness of space; increase eye–hand coordination; extend fine motor control. **Social–emotionally:** Reduce stress; relax; learn self–restraint; improve cooperation skills; adapt to others' needs and interests; gain self–confidence in abilities; support peers; follow routines and social rules in groups.	During **Sensory Play**, children exhibit abilities and talents such as: Testing/experimenting, mixing, creating, molding, collecting, dumping, filling, measuring, pouring, sifting, scooping, squeezing, stirring, spraying, predicting, comparing, classifying, role playing, compromising, negotiating, turn–taking, sharing, etc.

Equipping the Sensory Play Center

Container options for **Sensory Play**:

- Dishpans or foot tubs
- Pails or buckets
- Commercially–made sand/water tables
- Sand boxes/pits

> **Teachers' Tip:**
> The Teacher's Role during **Sensory Play** is to ask a balance of closed–ended and open–ended questions. Materials should be rotated when children no longer find them interesting or challenging to prevent boredom.

Appropriate **Sensory** materials include a variety of:

- Sand Toys—measuring cups/spoons, funnels, baking pans, sifters, colanders, cookie cutters, scoops, pails, shovels, rakes, combs, molds
- Water Toys—measuring cups and spoons, sponges, rotary egg beaters, objects that sink and float, turkey basters, plastic tubes, medicine/eye droppers, pitchers, whisks, ice trays, buckets, plastic spray bottles, thermometers
- Dramatic Play Toys—various sizes of plastic vehicles: airplanes, cars, trucks, boats; toy people, animals, dolls, dinosaurs, diggers and dumpers; unbreakable cooking toys: pots, pans, dishes, pitchers

***Items that are small enough to fit in the tube of a cardboard tissue paper roll are too small for children under the age of 3 and are choking hazards. Please choose appropriate materials.**

10 Points to Ponder about Sensory Play:

1. Maximize mathematical thinking and literacy–learning opportunities by gradually introducing and using new vocabulary words:
   - *Opposites*: fast, slow; wet, dry
   - *Temperature*: hot, cold, warm, cool
   - *Differences*: drip, drop; sink, float
   - *Comparisons*: alike/different, half/whole, less/more, heavy/light
   - *Measurement*: width, length, height, weight, long, short, tall, wide
   - *Other vocabulary words*: pour, scoop, splash, squeeze, stir, spray, bury, flow, dissolve, absorb, container, etc.
2. Vary activities to broaden learning by adding bubbles, color sand or water, shells, toy sea creatures, wet sand for molding, bird seeds instead of sand, or allowing children to play in sprinklers.
3. Cover the floor/carpet with a plastic covering to promote safety and ease cleanup. An inexpensive covering is a plastic or vinyl tablecloth from the dollar store.
4. Demonstrate to children how water can take many forms (liquid, solid, etc.) by allowing them to explore with chunks of ice. They can see that when ice gets warm it melts and becomes water again.
5. Place picture books involving sensory play in the learning center to give children ideas of what they can do.
6. Make classroom books of children engaging in creative sensory play and place in the area for reflections.
7. Change out measuring cups/spoons and other sensory play materials according to concepts children are learning. For example, if children are learning about the color RED, put red food coloring in the water and/or place more red materials in the sand/water table. Become a fan of your local dollar store to collect such items in various colors.
8. Be sure to fill the water table with fresh water each morning. Clean and sanitize the water table and the toys in it before the next use.
9. Reduce the spread of illness by only allowing children without colds, ringworms, cuts, scratches, or sores to play in the sand and water area. Require children to wash their hands before and after playing in the area.
10. Supervise children at all times to ensure safe sensory experiences, especially during water play.