

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.



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Sensory Play in Summer

By Meghan Pallante

Sensory play is what I consider the great “equalizer” of early childhood education. Children of various ages and abilities can enjoy sensory play, and summer is the perfect time for these activities! Outdoor play provides a great opportunity for some of the messier sensory activities. Many activities can also involve water play to help cool off on the hot summer days!

Images in this month's Coach's Corner provided by Meghan Pallante.



Sensory play supports early learning

Sensory play can be defined as any activity that stimulates one or more of the 5 senses. In addition to providing tons of fun, these activities can encourage growth with the following skills:

- Fine motor skills
- Cooperative play/social skills
- Communication and language
- Creativity/imagination
- Emotional regulation- sensory activities are great ways to help children calm down from emotional moments
- Spatial awareness

Just one activity can stimulate a child's senses and promote skill development in multiple areas. Below we will break down, by age, some must-have activities for your program's daily experiences.

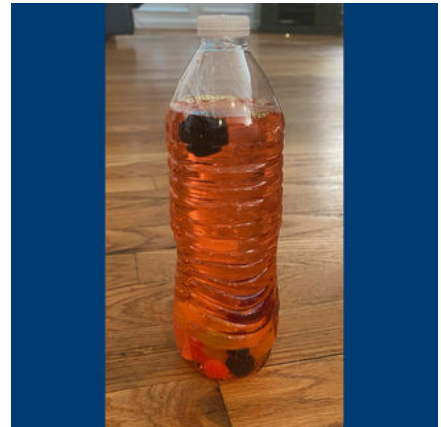
Sensory play activities

Keep in mind that the activities below can be offered as a choice during indoor or outdoor free play. They are not designed to be large group experiences. For infants and toddlers it is best to provide some one-on-one support.

Infants

Educators should always be closely monitoring sensory play with all ages, but this is especially important with infants.

Sensory bottles- Fill recycled plastic water bottles with water and food coloring. Add items such as glitter, rice, beads, pom poms etc. You can even add vegetable oil for a cool “lava lamp” effect. Be sure to glue the cap on tight!



Zip-top bag paint- Add a generous amount of paint to a heavy duty zip-top bag. Seal the bag and then put the sealed bag inside a second bag and seal that one. You may also want to apply some tape as an extra support to keep the bags sealed. Tape the bags to the floor and let the babies squish the paint around. This is also a great way to encourage some tummy time!



Sensory hoop- Grab a cheap hula hoop and wrap it with different textured fabrics or materials. Attach baby-safe toys to the hoop. Place the baby in the center and let them explore.

Toddlers

Painting with objects- Instead of painting with brushes, use objects such as combs, sponges, plastic forks, fly swatters, cotton balls, etc. When in doubt, finger painting is always a crowd favorite!



Painter's tape collage- Let the child choose a piece of paper and give them some pre-ripped pieces of painter's tape. Super simple, and it is so much fun to see each child's unique creation!



Hide the letters- This one is super simple! Fill a container or sensory bin with rice and hide some foam letters. Let the children dig through the rice with a spoon or a larger paintbrush to find the letters.



Preschool/School-age

No fancy title, just 2 ingredients- vinegar and baking soda! Cover a tray with baking soda. Put some vinegar mixed with food coloring in little cups. Children use eye droppers to sprinkle drops of vinegar on the baking soda and watch it bubble!

Another trick is to put food coloring in the different cups of a muffin tin. Then cover the food coloring with baking soda. Children use the eye droppers to sprinkle plain vinegar over the baking soda and watch the magic colors appear and bubble!



Chalk paint- Take large pieces of sidewalk chalk and use a cheese grater to grind them to powder. If you have older children/school-agers, let them try this. If not, teachers can do this part! Mix the chalk powder with water and let the children paint the ground! The kids will love it because the colors are so vibrant!



Multi-age (Toddler/Preschool/School age)

Tissue paper mosaic– Tape contact paper (sticky side out) to the wall or an easel. Use painter's tape so it doesn't mess up your walls! Cut up some tissue paper or have some older children do it. Let the children stick the tissue paper to the contact paper. You will have a beautiful mosaic masterpiece in no time!



Car wash- Fill containers or a sensory table with water and some soap. Add some toy cars and some sponges and let the kids wash! You can also do this activity with vinyl baby dolls or other toys.



Image: istock

* **Sensory tip**-For older children, consider adding scented oils to the painting activities. This adds an additional dimension to the sensory experience by engaging the sense of smell!

These are just a few of the many sensory activities to try! A quick Google or Pinterest search will lead you to thousands more- just be sure to review for safety before trying them at your program. Sensory activities are a fantastic addition to any summer camp plans, especially if you have school age children joining your program for the summer. Sensory activities are also great to share with families since many of them use materials that they may have at home. Lastly, if you think school age kids are too old for sensory activities, I assure you that they are not! My 10 and 6 year old kids love them (and are featured in many of the pictures above!)

We would love to see your sensory activity ideas. Tag DIEEC in any social media posts!

And remember, don't be afraid to get messy!

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Professional Learning Experiences

- [Supporting Sensory Learning: Infants, Toddlers, and Beyond \(Hybrid\)](#)
- [Supporting Sensory Learning: Infants, Toddlers and Beyond \(Virtual Live\)](#)
- [The Wonder of Outdoor Learning PLUS](#)

Resources

- [Preschool Play Plans- Mud-licious Play \(NAEYC\)](#)
- [Designing Messy Play for Infants and Toddlers \(ECLKC\)](#)