Sensorial experiences for preschoolers

Children explore the world using all of their senses. Senses help a child to develop socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically. This activity sheet offers ideas to incorporate a variety of sensorial activities into a holistic preschool or early child care curriculum.

**Touch:**
Create an environment that is safe for children to explore independently, incorporating a variety of materials and textures throughout.

**Taste:**
Provide experiences that encourage children to try a variety of foods, discussing each.

**Smell:**
Notice and discuss smells in the environment, adding new smells for children to discover.

**Hearing:**
Include a variety of music, instruments, objects that make noise. Vary tone and pitch when speaking. Allow time for quiet.

**Sight:**
Create a visually stimulating environment at child’s level. Change and rearrange items in the environment.

**Paint with something other than a brush:** Scrubbers come in a variety of shapes, textures and materials, with handles and without. Paint with them!

**Paint on aluminum foil:** Crumple the foil into a ball and then smooth it out. Paint over this bumpy texture.

**Sensory gloves:** Fill latex gloves with different materials such as beans*, flour, cornmeal, popcorn kernels, rice, sugar. Tie the wrist of each glove. Put the gloves in a bin or basket for children to take and explore. Enhance learning by filling the gloves in pairs and having children find the matching glove.

**Smelling jars:** Plastic opaque spice jars are perfect tools to create a matching game. Collect pairs of jars, filling each pair with the same scent. Put one of each scent in a basket and its matching scent in another basket. Children smell each jar in the first basket and smell for its mate in the second basket. Use dried spices, herbs or liquid extracts on cotton balls.

Use and encourage descriptive language when talking with children about what they experience:

- **Does it feel** smooth, sticky, bumpy, rough, soft, hard, hot, cold, wavy?
- **Does it taste** spicy, sweet, sour, tangy, yummy, yucky, delicious? Is it crunchy, chewy?
- **Does it smell** sweet, strong, yummy, stinky, flowery, spicy?
- **Does it sound** loud, quiet, soft, tinkling, pounding, musical?
- **Does it look** colorful, dark, light, bright, patterned, different, the same, big, little?
Sensory tables
Purchase or make from plastic bins, basins or kiddie pools. Keep them interesting by changing their contents. Here are some ideas:

- Shredded paper/confetti
- Pom-poms
- Bird seed
- Bottle caps – different sizes and types
- Ping-Pong balls
- Colored sand
- Items from nature – leaves, sticks, acorns, shells, rocks, etc.
- Corks of various sizes
- Add baby oil to equal parts flour and sand until it is moldable
- Hide small toys, coins or buttons for children to discover
- Add metal objects such as washers and give children a magnet to find them

Excavating through icebergs!
Make plain gelatin according to package directions. Pour into greased muffin cups. Add a plastic dinosaur or other small toy to each cup. Put in refrigerator to set and then in freezer overnight. Remove the “icebergs” and put on a large tray for children to explore. Ask the children, “What happens when it sits for a while?” “When warm water is added?”

You can do this with water for a different texture and bigger icebergs. Use plastic cups, or other containers as molds. Add to the sensory table and allow children to experience the changes that occur as the day progresses.

How does it sound?
Fill a small pitcher with dried beans.* Provide child with different containers—tin can, plastic cup, paper cup, glass jar. Encourage the child to shake each container after he has poured the beans into it. Ask the children, “What does it sound like?” “Do the beans sound the same in each of the containers?”

“What if something else is poured into the containers?” “What if different containers are used?”

Make maracas using plastic toy eggs. Fill each egg with rice, pebbles, sand, etc. Tape or glue closed. Ask the children, “Do they all sound the same?” Use them to keep rhythm with your favorite music.

String a few small bells on a pipe cleaner. Wrap the pipe cleaner around a paint brush at the easel. Ask the children, “How does it sound as you paint?”

Choking cautions
Young children can choke on small objects and toy parts. All items used for children under three years of age and any children who put toys in their mouths should be at least 1¼ inch in diameter and between 1 inch and 2¼ inches in length. Oval balls and toys should be at least 1¾ inch in diameter. Toys should meet federal small parts standards.

Any toys or games labeled as unsuitable for children under three should not be used. Other items that pose a safety risk and should not be accessible to children under three include, but are not limited to: button batteries, magnets, plastic bags, styrofoam objects, coins, balloons, latex gloves, and glitter.

Be aware of choking risks and food allergies when preparing and serving meals and snacks. Think about the size, shape, and consistency when choosing foods due to the potential choking risks in children. Food cut in large chunks, small hard foods, and soft and sticky foods should be avoided. The top choking hazards for children include:

- hotdogs, meats, sausages, fish with bones
- spoonfuls of peanut butter, popcorn, chips, pretzel nuggets, raisins, whole grapes, raw carrots, fruits and vegetables with skins, and marshmallows

Be sure that food is cut in small pieces (no larger than ½ inch), grated or finely chopped. Be sure that children are closely supervised when they are eating.

*Do not use dried kidney beans for activities. If the beans are eaten (even just a few beans), it can trigger “red kidney bean poisoning,” which is an illness caused by the type of lectin (Phytohaemagglutnin) in the beans causing severe nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

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