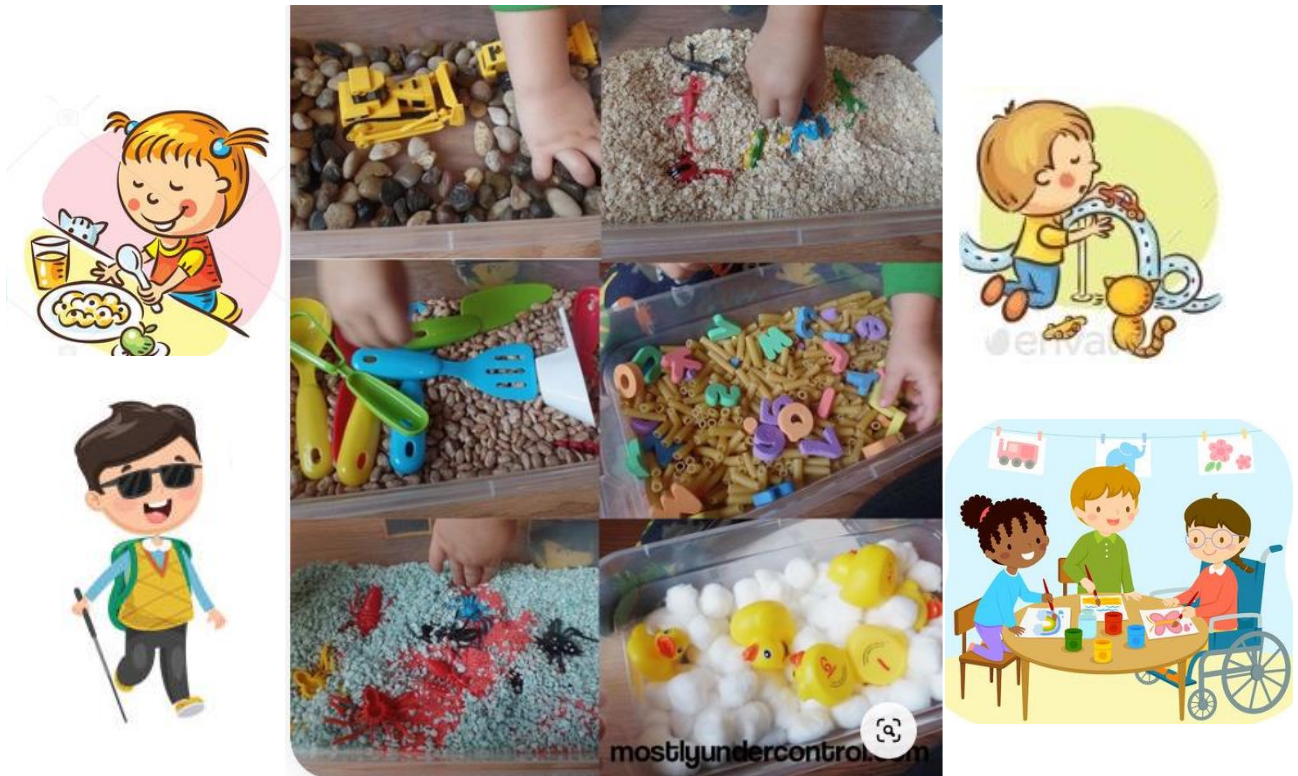
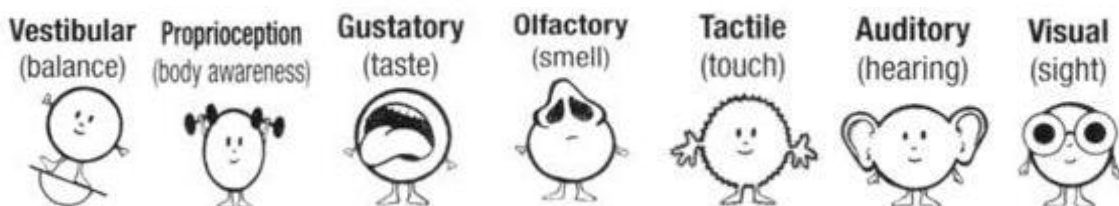


SENSORY BINS



WHY IS SENSORY PLAY IMPORTANT?

Sensory play encourages integration of how we use all the senses together. This is important for learning the skills we need for doing all everyday activities. The brain is constantly taking in sensory information from all the well-known five senses as well as our sense of balance and movement (vestibular) and sense of body awareness (proprioception). For children with visual impairment, reduced vision or vision loss means the other senses need to be engaged that little bit more. Playing and exploring through the other senses can be a little less enticing, or even a little scary with reduced vision or sight loss. So, children with visual impairment can need a little extra encouragement and a sense of security to engage other senses to learn those foundational skills for activity engagement. Sensory bins offer a great way to do that with so many possibilities for lots of learning opportunities!



Images from: Smith-Myles et al, 2000

THE BENEFITS OF SENSORY BINS

Apart from sensory integration, sensory bins offer lots of other learning and development opportunities including:

Motor Development Skills: Adding tools and toys to the sensory bin encourages lots of exploration and creativity through play that builds great motor skills for actions like dumping, filling, scooping, pinching, using tools etc. You can also encourage lots of different positions e.g. standing, sitting (supported/unsupported), lying on tummy, over a gym ball etc. when playing with the sensory bins.



Play Skills: Sensory bins can involve and promote independent play and social play. Sharing a sensory bin activity is a great way to encourage playing side-by-side and cooperation.



Language Development: Sensory bins increase language development from experiencing with their hands to learn lots of concepts e.g. positions concepts – “put in,” “take out” or shapes – sorting, matching etc. It is also a great opportunity to explore through sensory stories and imaginative play with themed sensory bins e.g. animal or ocean themes.



Sensory regulation: Sensory play can have calming effects for many children, a great way to build attention and focus. Explore lots of different sensations and activities using the sensory bin to find what works best for your child. This could be a great activity to do just before your child needs to be focused for certain routines or activities in the day e.g. just before mealtimes.

HOW TO MAKE A SENSORY BIN

Making a sensory bin is easy – you can keep it simple or get as creative as you like but all sensory bins need just three main things:

1. A box/container:

Plastic storage boxes are good to use as they can double up as storage for your sensory bin materials and are easy to clean. It's good to get a box your child will have to reach into so that all the contents stay as contained as possible. If your child has particularly busy hands, it might be an idea to lay out some newspaper or a sheet underneath the sensory bin if spillages (either intentional or accidental!) are likely. The box offers a great boundary to make play feel secure and more fun as things are easy to find if misplaced for children with visual impairment. Using bright coloured boxes can offer high contrast if using light coloured contents e.g. rice or sand. Or if using colourful contents e.g. dyed rice/rainbow rice and lots of bright toys/tools, opt for a black or white (clear is fine) box for high contrast.



2. A filler:

Next choose the main filler you want to use. Tactile sensitivity can be common for children with visual impairment so start with something your child is comfortable with and gradually add in new textured fillers, if needed. Fillers could include rice, sand, lentils, seeds, pom-poms, shredded paper, pebbles, water-beads etc. Some ideas and recipes can be found at the Little Bins for Little Hands website. For example see <https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/our-favorite-sensory-bin-fillers/> or <https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/must-try-non-food-sensory-bin-fillers/>.



As with all play with small pieces, always supervise play with sensory bins – there are lots of safe materials you can use so that exploring by mouth won't be a problem, but supervision is always best!

3. Tools and toys:

Add lots of different types of tools – there's so many you can use and find that will be available in the house already by just raiding the kitchen e.g. scoops, tongs, funnels, small plastic containers etc. Tool use is an important foundation for lots of activities, building great skills for physically using tools (gross and fine motor skills), working out their uses (cognitive skills) and along with lots of toys, more opportunities for being creative (imaginative play skills; language skills). Some children with visual impairments can prefer to use their hands directly as this gives lots more tactile feedback, avoiding tool use while others prefer to use tools if they find too much tactile feedback is overwhelming. Encourage a good mix and balance between both when using the sensory bins. Below are some ideas for tools, toys and other materials.

Scoops, funnels, containers



Sponges and water toys



Kitchen tongs & tweezers



Ice-cube trays or muffin tins



Kitchen spoons, ladels etc.



Small toys



Natural materials



Craft materials



Your sensory bin is ready – Enjoy!