

You may also find these links useful:



### Torbay SEND Local Offer

<https://torbayfamilyhub.org.uk/local-offer/>



<https://www.sense.org.uk/get-support/information-and-advice/support-for-children/play-toolkits/>



### SENSORY PROCESSING RESOURCE PACK: EARLY YEARS

<http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/10.2EY-sensory-processing-profile-Leics.pdf>



<https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/families-with-disabled-children/activities-for-disabled-children/>

# TORBAY COUNCIL

## Sensory Play



## Why focus on senses?

In early childhood practice it is well established that children learn through their senses, absorbing information through sight, taste, touch, hearing, smell, body awareness and balance. All of the information that the child receives, processes and integrates gives them an understanding of who they are, where they are and what is happening around them. It is from this starting point of exploratory play that a child can be encouraged to interact with their environment and also with the adult sharing this experience with them.



<p><b>Enclosure</b> Filling and emptying</p> <p>Helps learn about size, estimation, width and how to fit inside containers</p>	<p><b>Touch</b> Protective function – pain, temperature and touch</p> <p>Discriminative function – where and how our bodies are positioned, information about objects and the direct environment</p>
<p><b>Enveloping</b> Being inside and enclosed, wrapping up,</p> <p>Helps develop the concept of object permanence</p>	<p><b>Taste and Smell</b> Taste and smell controls our emotions, memory and learning.</p>
<p><b>Transforming</b> <b>Changing things</b> Helps to understand the effects of change and cause and effect such as with colour, shape and size</p> <p>Connection and disconnecting Joining things up and taking things apart</p> <p>Helps develop understanding of how things work and how they are put together</p>	<p><b>Auditory</b> The recognition and making sense of sounds. Loudness, pitch, length and direction of sound is processed. Being able to 'cut out' unwanted noise.</p>

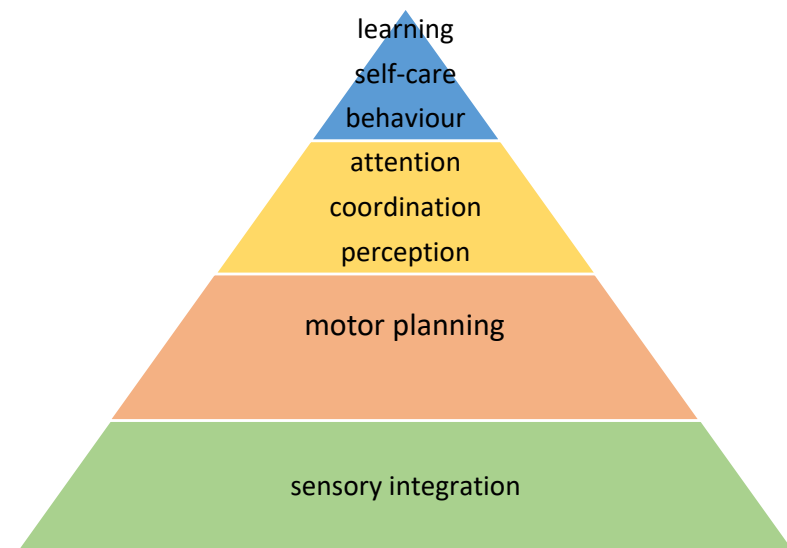
## Links between schemas and senses

There are many different types of schemas and they operate at different levels of thought and action, helping to develop a range of senses. Schematic play provides children with possibilities for thinking and an opportunity to develop their ideas. They focus on what the child can do rather than what they cannot, and encourages spontaneous investigation and thinking skills. The table below lists possible schemas and key sensory skills:

Schemas	Key sensory skills
<p><b>Trajectory</b> Moving up and down, back and forth, pushing or pulling</p> <p>Helps develop an understanding of speed, balance, distance, height, and motion</p>	<p><b>Vision</b> Processing what we see, helping us to concentrate on a single stimuli and not be distracted by other things in the visual field</p>
<p><b>Transporting</b> Moving from one place to another.</p> <p>Helps develop an understanding of quantity, space, position and direction</p>	<p><b>Proprioceptive &amp; Vestibular system</b> Where the body is in space and how it handles movement.</p> <p>It ensures we remain upright, what force we place on objects and dictates the resting tone of our muscles.</p>
<p><b>Orientation</b> Seeing the world from different physical viewpoints</p> <p>Helps understand position, height, space and direction</p>	<p>The vestibular system is stimulated when we move our head. Enables us to keep orientated, stabilises our visual field and impacts on attention levels.</p>

## Exploratory play and investigation

A child can be supported to develop their exploratory play and investigative skills through providing a multi-sensory environment. Providing multi-sensory play experiences for children to explore and interpret will in turn strengthen learning and development. When our senses are integrated correctly we are able to respond appropriately to the sensation. Children with sensory processing difficulties have difficulty in figuring out what is happening inside and outside of their bodies.



## The importance of sensory play

Play is usually a social activity where children use their communication skills and their imaginations, for some children their play may be solitary or parallel, playing alongside with little interaction. Early child play is characterised by sensori-motor actions, such as mouthing, shaking, banging and throwing toys.

There may be other sensory elements to their play such as needing to smell objects or line up toys. Children can demonstrate sensory seeking 'hyposensitivity' or sensory avoiding 'hypersensitivity' behaviours. Sensitivities can impact significantly on a child's ability to sustain a focus on play activities with others and access the play environment effectively. Each child will have a unique profile of their sensory needs and their reactions to sensory information can sometimes be extreme. In order for others to understand a child's sensory difference it is important to establish a sensory profile of the child, through observations.



## Top Tips

- Follow the child's lead
- Introduce one or two new toys at a time
- Finish when you feel the child has had enough
- Have sets of identical toys – one for you and one for the child, to practice copying skills
- Make up a 'Finished Song' to signal the end of play
- Use visual cues for turn taking activities – Makaton 'My' & 'Your' or sand timers
- Establish the play with an adult before introducing another child



## Play should be fun!

What really motivates the child may well not be the toy itself but how it moves or the sound it makes, finding the motivator will be key to joining the play of the child. Get down to the child's level, lie on the floor if needed. You may need to be very animated to entice them to interact, equally the child may prefer a low arousal approach. Be observant of fleeting interest in items. Develop a routine with the bag by laying out a sensory mat first as a place to be. Sing a song to signal that something will come out of the bag. Reveal one item at a time, packing away the toys as you go.

Remember to pause and wait for a response from the child. Sometimes it takes TIME for a child to process the information in front of them. Wait for a signal from the child before continuing the play. In this way you will be establishing some interaction between you



## Observing sensory / exploratory play

By observing the child's play and responses to a range of sensory situations, it will enable you to find a starting point to join their play and then help develop play skills. Discover the schema of play that the child is engaging in to aid further planning (see list of schemas below). Make up a sensory bag with a variety of objects to provoke the range of senses and to enable you to be irresistibly interesting to the most 'hard to reach' child. Take note of motivators and items that provoke sensory reactions to develop the child's profile. For further support refer to Sensory Processing for Early Years (Leicestershire LA).



Items which may capture interest in a sensory bag:

Bubbles

Toys for blowing – windmills

Fabric of different textures

See-through fabrics

Foil blankets – noisy as well as visually stimulating



Spinning toys

Wind-up toys

Vibrating toys

Musical toys

Stress balls

Stretch toys – action figures

Cause and effect toys –  
squeeze toys, press or wind toys



Sound books – Noisy Peekaboo! Books

Textured books

Playdough

Crazy foaming soap (canister)

Sensory balls – stringy balls



Sensory bean bags

Sensory play mat



Bells and shakers

Light swivel fans

LED gloves



Coloured beads

Pom-poms

Hats

Dusters and sponges

Noisy pet toys – squeak and crinkle toys

