

Sensory Activities to boost brain development

Touch

Cooked spaghetti add a little oil to keep it slimy. This can be placed on trays, bowls, plates or in the water table! The noodles can also be colored. This is a great sensory activity for squishing and manipulating. Great for the imagination—can be made into snakes or worms! The spaghetti can also be used to paint with.

Flour. Just flour. Let toddlers explore flour freely. Once they seem to get bored with it, add water!

Painting Fun Using materials other than paint to paint with. Jello, pudding, colored ice cubes, yogurt, ketchup, or any other material that is safe and non-toxic.

Tissue Paper Fun Tissue paper can be torn, scrunched up, and thrown!

Texture Painting Along with tempera paints, supply toddlers with textured materials - sand, (mild) spices, Epsom salt, corn meal, etc. Gritty items can be spread on painted paper and stick with the paint. A great touch experience during and afterwards, when the painting can be enjoyed after it is dry!

Texture Collage Provide a variety of textured materials - sandpaper, cotton balls, scraps of fake fur, soft yarn, twine, even dryer lint - and let your toddler glue them to a piece of heavy card stock. Depending on the toddler's age, they may enjoy making a picture, sorting by type, or just creating a multi-textured surface.

Bubble wrap painting Using different sized bubble wrap (big or little bubbles) paint with paint brushes or finger-paint on bubble wrap.

*Children can also take off their shoes and socks and walk on bubble wrap!

Wash the babies Using warm water, bubbles and bins, children can wash the plastic baby dolls from the classroom-or any other plastic toys that need to be cleaned!

Sensory Walk Have children take off their shoes and socks and enjoy the feeling of the grass, sidewalk, or sand on their feet. Items can be collected from outside to make a collage out of the nature they were able to feel on their feet.

Smell

Smells Like Infuse cotton balls with various scents, including recognizable oils or extracts (vanilla, vinegar, cinnamon, perfume, peppermint, lemon oil) and place in 35mm film canisters with pinholes punched in the top. Other canisters can have small amounts of other items inside (diced onion, cocoa, coffee grounds). Allow toddlers to smell and compare them, and discuss the various smells with them - what they smell like, what they remind them of and where they come from. Best for older toddlers.

Coffee Sand Mix dried coffee grounds with play sand. The blended "coffee sand" has two distinct textures and a coffee-like smell.

Smelly Painting Spice painting using spices and glue

Kool-Aid painting Kool-Aid can be added to paint to make it smell fruity.

Paint with Flowers Children can paint with different types of flowers. (Funeral homes will sometimes donate flowers if you ask!) Flowers can also be used to make a beautiful collage. Just as good when they are dried!

Shaving Cream Prints Toddlers love to use shaving cream to paint. Food coloring can be added to make color.

Smell this! Children can explore cinnamon sticks and peppermint sprigs.

Play Doh Kool Aid or spices can be added to play doh for a "scent"ational activity.

Perfume Save perfume ads that contain the fragrance to allow the children a chance to smell something different in the classroom.

Potpourri Bags Children can make potpourri bags with paper bags and potpourri. They can be used as gifts for Mother's Day.

Blindfold eating Older toddlers can be blindfolded and fed familiar foods. Let them smell them first and see if they can identify what the food is before eating.

Scratch N Sniff Scratch N Sniff stickers are back! Use these to make a smelly bookmark.

Sound

Sound Memory Game Put "pairs" of objects that make distinct sounds (beans, pennies, jingle bells) in paper cups and cover with construction paper, then label the "lids" with paired images. Turn upside down and play a memory matching game with sounds!

Crunch! Egg shells can be cleaned with a bleach solution and used to CRUNCH!

Whistle Game During circle time, teachers give one child a whistle and have them go and hide. When the child is hidden, instruct the child to start blowing the whistle. The other children are then to follow the sound of the whistle to find the child. The child who finds the hidden child is next to get to hide.

Listening Game During a few days before playing the game, point out and describe sounds as they occur. You might say, "Wow, (child's name), your car makes a loud, roaring sound when you move it". Or "(child's name), can you hear the wind blowing? Come put your ear close to the window. It's a very soft sound." "That sound is so loud, I can't hear the music. Oh, listen it's a jackhammer, fire engine etc."

Preschool children and teachers take a "listening walk" together. If the weather is mild, take a walk outdoors. If not, stroll around indoors. To help focus children's attention on sounds before your walk, ask a few open ended questions such as, "What kinds of sounds do you think we will hear on our walk?" "How can we make sure we hear on our walk?" "How can we make sure we hear everything? Where should we go to hear lots of sounds?" As you walk, encourage children to tell you about the sounds they hear. Help them use descriptive words such as loud, soft, banging, roaring, ringing, etc.

After the walk, sit together and talk about the sounds you heard. Invite children to try to re-create the sounds using only their voices. Provide helpful clues such as, "Yes, (child's name), that sounds like the bird we heard but I think the bird made a softer sound." Or, "(child's name), that does sound like water running in the sink." Continue to re-create sounds. You might want to record them on a tape recorder to play back and try to identify at another time.

Taste

Orange Juice Using a juicer, children can make their own orange juice or lemonade.

Taste Party Bring in several different foods for toddlers to taste, along with a picture of the same food. Children can make a chart of the foods that they tasted and if they liked them or not.

Make Ice Cream You will need:

1/4 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup milk

1 cup whipping cream or half & half

Crushed ice (1 bag of ice will freeze 3 bags of ice cream)

1 cup rock salt

1 quart and 1 gallon size Ziploc freezer bags

Duct tape

Bath towel

What to do?

In a 1 quart freezer bag, pour in milk, whipping cream, sugar, and vanilla. Seal and fold a piece of duct tape over the seal to keep it well closed.

Place the bag with the ingredients inside a gallon freezer bag.

Pack the larger bag with crushed ice around the smaller bag.

Pour 3/4 to 1 cup of rock salt evenly over the ice.

Wrap a bath towel and shake for 10 minutes. (This works well if there are more children to share this). Open the outer bag and remove the inner bag with the ingredients. Wipe off the bag to be sure salt water doesn't get into the ice cream.

Sweet Sour Salty Bitter Use foods that are sweet, sour, salty and bitter and explain to the children the differences and see if they can tell the difference. Make a chart of foods that are sweet, salty, sour and bitter and see if the children can identify which food belongs to the correct group.

Eating Blindfolded Have toddlers taste some of their favorite foods with a blindfold on. See if they can identify what food they are eating.

Yogurt Painting Children can use yogurt to "paint" their waffle and taste it!

Sight

I Spy Book Take pictures of familiar objects that are in the classroom and make a book with them. While looking through the book with the children, ask them where they have seen this picture before. See if they can locate the place the picture was taken.

Overhead Projector Using an overhead projector or light box, place different colored and shaped items on and let the children explore naturally! If your center does not have a projector, try looking on Craig's List or Freecycle for one.

Eye Spy Bag Using a Ziploc bag, tape, small items to fit in the bag and clear body wash, place the items and body wash into the baggy, zip it closed, and tape it shut for extra protection. The items will "float" in the baggy. Children can explore freely as long as the bag doesn't break! Watch closely as the items in the bag may be choking hazards.

Brail Reading Borrow Brail books from the library and show children how people who cannot see can read with their hands. Let children explore the books with our without a blindfold on.

Matching games Have parents bring in pictures from home of the children's family. Play a guessing game with the children; see if they can match who belongs to each picture. For example, you can ask- "Can you guess which picture is of Christian's mom and dad?" They may know this by seeing the parents pick up and drop off Christian.

Windchimes Hang commercially made wind chimes or make your own by stringing small bells from a wooden dowel, in an area where they can catch the wind. Place the baby where he can see and hear the chimes. When the movement of the wind starts them chiming, follow the baby's gaze to the source of the sound and talk about the pretty sounds you are hearing. Make a windsock by attaching streamers made of crepe paper or strips of colorful fabric to a ring made from a plastic lid from a coffee can with a hole cut in the center. The wind will move the streamers and visually delight the baby.

Gelatin Blocks Make blocks using three different colors and flavors of gelatin. Give the baby a small block of each one. Talk about the color, taste, and feel of each one as the baby explores the blocks.

Nature

Mud Play Allow children the opportunity to dig in the dirt. Add water to make mud. Children can use shovels and sticks. Using their imaginations, they can add little people or animals to the mud!

Planting Flowers/Plants Children can help create a garden outside that they can care for, or make a window box. Allow children to help water and feed the plants. Explaining how the roots of the plant feed the flowers. An extension of this activity can be showing the children how the flower ‘drinks’. Put a carnation into water and food coloring and watch the flower ‘drink’ the liquid.

Flying Kites Children can ‘fly’ helium balloons with streamers attached to them. These ‘kites’ will fly even without wind!

Shadow Tracing Take the children outside and trace their shadow with chalk. The children can color their outlines with chalk and add grass for hair, leaves for eye, etc.

Wet Sponges Children can ‘clean’ the sidewalk or building with a bucket and some wet sponges.

Melting Ice Teachers can make ice melting more exciting by putting objects into the ice cube tray while the water is freezing such as little animals or people. (If you are worried about choking the ice can be made in different sized containers to hold different sized objects).

Rose colored glasses Make eyeglasses out of different colored cellophane. Children can go outside and look at the world in different colors!

Story Time Nothing like a change of scenery to excite the senses! Read a story book outside!

The Secret Garden: Choose a place on your playground--where your toddlers can create their own unique garden to plant collected rocks, sticks, and plastic dinosaurs...anything they wish.

Nature Bracelet: Wrap a piece of masking tape to your child's wrist, sticky side up. As you explore, help him attach colorful leaves, flowers, and other interesting discoveries to his bracelet. When done, use scissors to snip off the nature bracelet. Display on a bulletin board, shelf, or wall.

Treasure Bucket: Perfect for toddlers who like to collect things...and dump them out only to refill it again. Use a small toy bucket or container they can manage. Collect leaves, rocks, small trash flown in after a windy day, or specially hidden toys. If collecting natural items from your yard, it's a good opportunity to teach the

non-removal of things from protected areas. Have them dump their bucket outside, leaving their natural items where "they live." If picking up trash, have them wear gloves, make sure what they're picking up is "safe" and have them empty their buckets in the trash can to teach good environmental habits.

Natural Art On rainy days, sprinkle powdered tempera paint or food coloring drops on a paper plate and stick the plate out in the rain for a moment to let the rain paint you a picture. If it's cold but sunny, stick some rocks, sticks or other nature-collection items on a colored sheet of construction paper and leave in a sunny window. Later remove the items and see where the sun faded the paper around the item.

Plants Plants in the classroom. Allow children to help water and care for the plants. Set up a class schedule so each child has a turn watering and caring for the plants and flowers.

Seeds Take sunflower seeds and put them between a wet paper towel. Go back each day to make sure the paper towel is wet (putting it in a plastic baggie helps) and check the progress of the growth. Create a growth chart with the children to chart the success. When ready, plant the seedling in a cup with dirt for the child to take home and care for.

Measure the trees Using a measuring tape, have children measure the tree trunks, tree limbs, or the leaves. Make a chart to show how big or small the trees are. Take pictures of the trees and compare each season to see if they have grown and chart how much.

Earthworms Fun with worms! Worms can be dug up or bought at a bait store. This activity can be done indoors or out. Place worms on a tray and have fun watching the worms! Squirting the worms with a little bit of water will make them a bit more active.

Recipes

Play Doh

Recipe 1

3 cups flour

1.5 cups salt

6 tsp. cream of tartar

3 tbsp. oil

3 cups water

Pour all ingredients into a large pot. Stir constantly over medium heat until a dough ball forms by pulling away from the sides. Knead dough until the texture matches

play dough (1-2 minutes). Store in plastic container. Should last for at least 3 months.

Recipe 2

1 cup baking soda
1/2 cup corn starch
3/4 cup water

Have your child mix the baking soda and corn starch in a pot. Use hands to make sure all the lumps are broken up. Add water. The adult should put the pan on the stove over medium heat and stir constantly. As soon as the mixture gathers together, remove from the heat. When it cools, have your child knead it into smooth dough. Don't overcook this dough or it will crumble.

Recipe 3

1/4 cup salt
1 cup flour
1/4 cup water

Have your child mix the flour and salt in a bowl then add water. Knead and squeeze the dough to make a clay consistency. You may need to add more water. Note: This dough doesn't last as long as the cooked recipes.

Ideas Divide into sections, and then knead in food coloring (liquid or paste). Kids love making the white play dough change colors. Use unsweetened Kool-Aid for color and scent. Add glitter for sparkly play dough.

Flubber

3 cups Warm Water
2 cups Elmer's White Glue
Liquid Water Color (food coloring stains)
20 Mule Team Borax, available in the grocery store laundry section.
(Please see NOTES section below for safety information about Borax.)
Glitter (optional)
White Vinegar (for cleaning)

The Steps

In a large container combine and mix:

1 1/2 cups very warm water

2 cups Elmers white glue
A few drops of water color and/or glitter if using clear glue

Make sure this combination is completely mixed

In a small container combine and mix:

1 1/3 cups very warm water
2 level tsp 20 Mule Team Borax. Adults, please do this step.
(Please see NOTES section below for safety information about Borax.)

Make sure the Borax is completely dissolved.

Combine the glue and borax mixtures:

Mix well using your hands until all the liquid is absorbed. You may need to squish, mix, and break up the flubber to get it fully combined. Store the flubber in a plastic, air-tight container at room temperature. For best results, measure precisely and mix well as noted above.

Silly Putty Recipe

This will bounce and pick up pictures from the paper just like the name-brand stuff.

- Add: 1/2 cup water to 1/2 cup **Elmer's glue** (Not School Glue!)
- Mix and add 3 drops of **food coloring** (optional)
- Make **Borax** solution: Take 2 tablespoons borax (You can buy this at a grocery store or **online**) and add to 1 cup of water and stir.
- Add 1/2 cup of **Borax** solution to water and glue mixture
- Stir and store in a plastic bag

Mix well. Add food coloring if you wish. Let it dry about an hour. When ready, it will be smooth and rubber-like. Store in an airtight container.

METAMUCIL FLUBBER

You Need:

1 tsp Metamucil or similar soluble fiber

8 oz water
microwave-safe bowl
microwave oven
food coloring (optional)

Mix 1 teaspoon of Metamucil with 1 cup (8 ounces) of water in a microwaveable bowl. You can add a drop or two of food coloring if you wish. Alternatively, you could add a little powdered drink mix or flavored gelatin to get color/flavor.

Place bowl in the microwave and nuke on high for 4-5 minutes (actual time depends on microwave power) or until the goo is about to bubble out of the bowl. Turn off the microwave.

Let the mixture cool slightly, then repeat step 3 (microwave until about to overflow). The more times this step is repeated the more rubbery the substance will become.

After 5-6 microwave runs, (carefully - hot hot HOT) pour the flubber onto a plate or cookie sheet. A spoon can be used to spread it out.

Allow to cool. What you have is a Non-stick flubber. A knife or cookie cutters may be used to cut the flubber into interesting shapes.

EDIBLE SLIME

One 14- ounce can of sweetened condensed milk

One Tbs of cornstarch

10-15 drops of red or green food coloring

Directions:

1. Pour the can of SWEETENED condensed milk into a saucepan.
2. Add the cornstarch and cook over a low heat, stirring constantly.
3. When the mixture thickens remove it from the heat and then add the food coloring.
4. Allow it to cool before playing or eating; it can also be used as a fun paper paint.

PAPER MACHÉ RECIPES

#1 PAPER MACHÉ WITH LIQUID STARCH

Liquid starch, water, newspaper strips

Mix equal parts of liquid starch and water.

Stir until starch is dissolved.

Soak newspaper strips in liquid mixture and pat into place.

PAPER MACHÉ WITH FLOUR...

#2

Place 2 or 3 Tablespoons plain flour in a bowl.

Add a little bit of water.

Stir to make a smooth paste.

Gradually add more water until the paste is the consistency of thick cream.

Apply paste with a brush or your fingers.

#3 PAPER MACHÉ

For 1 to 1 1/2 cups paper mache paste, mix together one cup of flour with 1 cup water. Keep adding water (about 3 cups) and mix until all the lumps are gone.

Bring to a boil in a saucepan and cool completely.

#4 PAPER MACHÉ

Mix 1/2 cup all-purpose flour, and 2 cups cold water.

Add that mixture to 2 cups boiling water and allow it to return to a boil. Remove from heat and add the sugar.

Let entire mix cool and thicken.

Once the mixture cools its ready to use.

#5 PAPER MACHÉ MADE FROM GLUE

Materials:

White glue,

Water

Paper

Mix two parts of the white glue with one part of fairly warm water.

Stir well to produce the paper mache paste.

SIDEWALK CHALK

1/3 c. quick setting Plaster of Paris

3 t. water

1 T. paint

Glitter (optional)

Mix all ingredients.

Scoop into empty toilet paper tube.

Let set for 20 minutes.

Peel off cardboard. Let dry for one day.

HOMEMADE 'MOON' SAND

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups water

3 cups corn starch

6 cups play sand

Optional: Add package of Kool-aid if want it colored

Recipe for 1 batch...

1. First thoroughly mix together the sand, cornstarch and water. It will take a few minutes to get it smooth. Really work it in with your fingers...and then it's done!
2. You may need to add a bit more water--but be careful and add just a small amount at a time; it could get goopy.
3. When done--Place in an airtight container. Next time, revive it with 2-3 tablespoons of water. Just sprinkle it over and work it in.

DRYER LINT MODELING MATERIAL

3 cups Lint (from laundry dryers)

2 cups Cold or warm water

2/3 cups Non-self-rising wheat flour

3 drops oil of wintergreen

Old newspaper Put lint and water in a large saucepan.

- Stir to dampen all parts of the lint.
- Add flour and stir thoroughly to prevent lumps.
- Add oil of wintergreen.
- Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture holds together and forms peaks.
- Pour out onto several thicknesses of newspaper to cool.
- You can play with it as dough or...press over a mold or use as you would paper-mâché pulp. You can shaped over boxes, bottles, balloons, etc.
*This material will dry in 3 to 5 days to a very hard, durable surface.

When wet it has a felt like consistency. It dries to smooth or rough, depending on how it is used. When pressed into a mold, a hard, smooth finish is obtained.

*Stored in an airtight container, it will keep for several days.

HOMEMADE SNOW

Need:

Four bars of Ivory Soap

Twelve rolls of toilet paper

3 cups borax

Warm water

Large plastic tub with a tight lid.

- Unroll and shred toilet paper into plastic tub.
- Add water until paper is covered.
- Grate the soap into the soaking paper.
- Add the borax.
- If the mixture ends up too wet, drain over a fine screen or cheese cloth.

Play with SCOOPS, AND BOWLS, AND MOLDS.

*This will keep for several weeks in an airtight container if no ingredients are added.

