

### **Inexpensive Sensory Activities**

#### **Mesh Bath “Poofs”**

- Touch and manipulate poofs (*tactile stim*)
- Use poofs in water play (*tactile stim*)
- Paint with poofs (*visual stim, fine motor skills*)

#### **Combs**

- Touch combs on arms, hands, face, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Use combs to paint (*visual stim, fine motor skills*)
- Use combs to manipulate/decorate play dough or sand (*visual stim, tactile stim, fine motor skills*)

#### **Play Dough**

- Touch and manipulate play dough (*tactile stim*)
- Squish and roll play dough (*hand strength, fine motor skills*)
- Form into shapes (*shape recognition*)
- Trace lines, shapes, and letters into play dough, using opposite end of paintbrush (*pre-writing*)
- Cut play dough (*cutting skills, fine motor skills, hand strength*)
- Find beads or toys hidden in play dough (*tactile discrimination, visual discrimination, fine motor skills*)

#### **Gloves and Socks**

- Use Velcro and textured fabrics to make your own tactile mitts, with interchangeable textures
- Fill gloves or socks with rice, beans, sand, etc. for a different sensory experience (*tactile stim*)

**Rolling Massager**

- Roll on arms, shoulders, back, legs, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Grasp and roll on table or wheelchair tray (*reach/grasp, active arm movement, fine motor skills*)
- Roll in paint, then on paper (*visual stim, fine motor skills*)
- Roll in sand (*visual stim, fine motor skills*)
- Roll on bubble wrap or space blanket (*auditory stim, fine motor skills*)

**Textured Mitts**

**(car wash mitts, exfoliating mitts, sensory gloves)**

- Rub mitts on arms, hands, face, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Have students request a preferred texture from 2 or more choices (*choice making*)
- Observe reactions to different textures to develop understanding of preferences

**Vibrating Toothbrush**

- Rub on arms, hands, face, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Brush on lips and in mouth, with clean brush head (*oral stim*)
- Paint with vibrating toothbrush (*tactile stim, visual stim, cause/effect if used with battery interrupter and switch*)

**Brushes and Toothbrushes**

- Rub on arms, hands, face, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Use for painting (*visual stim, fine motor skills*)

**Flavored Extracts**

- Use on cotton balls for different scents
- Add to paint to add an olfactory component
- Add to play dough to add an olfactory component

**Cotton Balls**

- Apply different scents, and store in film canisters or Ziploc bags (*olfactory stim – calming/alerting*)
- Rub on arms, hands, face, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Pull cotton balls apart (*fine motor skills, bilateral hand use*)
- Color with food coloring or watered-down paint (*visual stim, color recognition*)

**Tinsel/ Easter Grass/ Shredded Paper**

- Touch and manipulate (*tactile stim, visual stim*)
- Pull apart (*fine motor skills, bilateral hand use*)
- Shine flashlight through tinsel (*visual stim*)

**Reflective Foil/ Wrapping Paper**

- Use as background to provide contrast
- Use with flashlight for visual stim

**Plastic Leis**

- Touch and manipulate leis (*tactile stim, fine motor skills*)
- Use as a fidget toy (to keep hands occupied)

**Whisk Broom/ Feather Duster**

- Brush on arms, hands, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Use to sweep objects on wheelchair tray or table (*grasp, purposeful hand use, eye-hand coordination*)
- Use with sand or paint (*visual stim, fine motor skills*)

**Pom Poms**

- Touch and manipulate pom poms (*tactile stim*)
- Watch the pom poms being shaken (*visual stim, tracking*)
- Use as a fidget toy (to keep hands occupied)
- Grasp and shake pom poms (*grasp, active arm movement, fine motor skills*)

**Furry Boa**

- Touch and manipulate the boa (*tactile stim*)
- Use as a fidget toy (to keep hands occupied)
- Reach for and manipulate boa (*reach/grasp, purposeful hand use*)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Noisy Balls</u></b> <b>(cat toys with bells in them work well)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to the balls (<i>auditory stim, sound localization</i>)</li><li>• Push/roll the balls (<i>reaching, eye-hand coordination, purposeful hand use</i>)</li><li>• Pick up and drop the balls (<i>grasp/release, eye-hand coordination</i>)</li><li>• Roll the balls in paint, then use for painting (<i>visual stim, auditory stim, cause/effect if done with a hairdryer and switch</i>)</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Bubbles</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Watch the bubbles (<i>visual stim, tracking</i>)</li><li>• Try to catch/pop the bubbles (<i>reaching, eye-hand coordination, isolated finger use</i>)</li><li>• Blow bubbles (<i>oral motor</i>)</li><li>• Use fan with switch to blow bubbles (<i>cause/effect</i>)</li><li>• Use scented bubbles for olfactory stim</li></ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Flashlights/ Tap Lights</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shine on reflective surfaces (space blanket, foil, wrapping paper, tinsel) (<i>visual stim</i>)</li><li>• Use hands to turn tap light on/off (<i>visual stim, cause/effect, reaching, purposeful hand use</i>)</li><li>• Use fingers to turn flashlight on/off (<i>visual stim, isolated finger use, finger strength, cause effect</i>)</li><li>• Use battery interrupter and switch with flashlight (<i>cause/effect, visual stim</i>)</li><li>• Follow light beam in a darkened room (<i>visual stim, tracking</i>)</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Sensory Balls</u></b> <b>(squishy, spiky, textured, “spaghetti balls”, etc.)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Touch and manipulate balls (<i>tactile stim</i>)</li><li>• Squish balls (<i>hand strength</i>)</li><li>• Roll/throw/catch balls (<i>grasp, eye-hand coordination</i>)</li><li>• Color recognition</li></ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Shaving Cream</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manipulate with hands (<i>tactile stim, olfactory stim</i>)</li><li>• Spread layer of shaving cream on wheelchair tray or table, and use finger to draw lines, shapes, letters, etc. (<i>tactile stim, isolated finger use, pre-writing</i>)</li><li>• Use fingers to put dabs on face, arm, leg, etc. (<i>tactile stim, fine motor skills, body awareness</i>)</li><li>• Mix with glue (½ shaving cream, ½ glue) and food coloring, and use as finger paint (<i>tactile stim, fine motor skills, isolated finger use</i>)</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Scented Lotion</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rub on hands, arms, feet (<i>tactile stim, body awareness</i>)</li><li>• Use different scents to calm or alert (<i>olfactory stim</i>)</li><li>• Have students rub lotion on themselves (<i>tactile stim, hand strength, purposeful hand use, ROM, body awareness</i>)</li></ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Hair Gel</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Put in a Ziploc bag (double-bag to be safe) to make a sensory mat (add food coloring, glitter, sequins, etc. as desired) (<i>tactile stim, visual stim</i>)</li><li>• Trace lines, shapes, etc. in sensory mat, using finger (<i>tactile stim, fine motor skills, isolated finger use, pre-writing</i>)</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Sponges/ Scrubbers/ Scouring Pads</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rub on arms, hands, face, etc. (<i>tactile stim</i>)</li><li>• Use different colored sponges, reflective scouring pads (<i>visual stim, color recognition</i>)</li><li>• Use in water play – splash, squeeze, etc. (<i>tactile stim, visual stim, reach/grasp, hand strength</i>)</li><li>• Use for painting (<i>visual stim, tactile stim</i>)</li><li>• Cut into different shapes to use as stamps (<i>visual stim, tactile stim, shape recognition</i>)</li></ul>

**Furry Paint Roller Covers**

- Rub on arms, hands, face, etc. (*tactile stim*)
- Roll on different body parts (*body awareness*)

**Bead Chains**

- Watch chains moving (*visual stim*)
- Manipulate beads (*visual stim, tactile stim, fine motor skills, reaching/grasping*)
- Use as a fidget (to keep hands occupied)

**Foam Pieces and Shapes**

- Use in sensory bin (*tactile stim*)
- Manipulate pieces (*fine motor skills, reach/grasp*)

**Fabric/ Ribbon/ Yarn/ Textured Wallpaper Samples**

- Touch and manipulate (*tactile stim*)
- Make tactile mitts using gloves or socks and Velcro (*tactile stim*)
- Use as a fidget (to keep hands occupied)
- Use colorful and shiny textures (*visual stim*)

**Sand/ Beans/ Macaroni/ Vermiculite**

- Use in sensory bins/ sensory table (*tactile stim*)
- Watch material “pour/ rain” down (*visual stim*)
- Have student grab a handful and slowly release it (*tactile stim, visual stim, purposeful hand use*)
- Hide objects in the material, and have student find them (*fine motor skills, reach/grasp, object permanence, visual discrimination, tactile discrimination*)

**Wind Chimes**

- Listen to chimes blowing in the wind outside (*auditory stim*)
- Touch chimes to make noise (*auditory stim, visual stim, reaching, eye-hand coordination*)
- Use fan to blow chimes (*auditory stim, visual stim, cause/effect if used with switch*)

**Assorted Plastic and Metal Pieces**

- Touch and manipulate pieces (*tactile stim*)
- Use different colors and reflective pieces (*visual stim*)
- Grasp and manipulate pieces (*fine motor skills, grasp/release*)

**Pinwheels/ Wind Socks/ Wind Twisters**

- Watch them blowing in the wind outside (*visual stim*)
- Touch them to make them move (*visual stim, reaching, eye-hand coordination*)
- Use fan to blow them (*visual stim, cause/effect if used with switch*)
- Blow them with mouth (*oral motor*)

**Mirror**

- Observe self in mirror (*body awareness, cause/effect, visual stim*)
- Watch other people or objects in mirror (*visual stim*)

**Colored Cellophane**

- Place on different surfaces or objects to change color (*visual stim*)
- Crinkle and flatten out (*auditory stim, visual stim, fine motor skills*)
- Place in front of eyes to change color of visual field (*visual stim*)

**Bubble Wrap**

- Pop with fingers (*auditory stim, tactile stim, fine motor skills, finger strength, isolated finger use*)
- Roll wheelchair over bubble wrap (*auditory stim*)
- Jump or stomp on bubble wrap (*auditory stim, gross motor skills*)
- Roll it up and twist to pop (*auditory stim, tactile stim, hand strength*)

**Reflective Emergency Blanket**  
**(“Space Blanket”)**

- Place blanket in front of student (*visual stim*)
- Manipulate and crinkle blanket (*auditory stim, tactile stim, visual stim*)
- Place blanket over head (*visual stim, body awareness*)

### Some ideas of activities created using the sensory items...

#### **Textured Puzzle (from a preschool teacher)**

- At our local “Recycling for Education” shop, we found thick foam sheets with shape cutouts in them, as well as the foam shapes that fit into the cutouts, and textured fabric
- The teacher used heavy cardboard to create a back for the rectangular foam sheet
- She chose a different texture for each shape, and glued the fabric onto both the shape and the cardboard showing through the corresponding cutout
- The students completed the puzzle by matching either the shapes or the textures

#### **Tactile Board (from a preschool teacher)**

- Maintenance provided a piece of wood, sanded and varnished
- She used glue and bolts to attach various sensory materials, including a tap light, mop head, bead chains, textured fabric, scouring pad, and mirror
- We added a base so that the board could be used in either a vertical or horizontal position

#### **Bead Curtains (from OT and COTA)**

- Many of our kids love the bead chains from Enabling Devices, but they are pretty expensive and break very easily
- We collaborated with our maintenance guy to make our own...they consist of a wooden base, with a PVC pipe frame bolted onto it. Elbow connectors are used to attach the top piece, which has a slit in the bottom. We get bead chains in bulk from the Oriental Trading Company, cut each chain to make one long strand, and slide the end bead of each strand through the slit. Very colorful, and very durable!
- These were so popular that we decided to make a big one for outside, when the “Recycling for Education” shop had long strands of beads. It uses a much bigger piece of PVC, still with a slit, with hooks on either end so that it can be suspended from chains hung from an awning on the playground. It was a big hit!

