Sensory Development for Infants & Toddlers

Infants use their senses to learn about the world around them. Sensory stimulation is linked to emotional, cognitive and physical development. All of the senses need to work together so that infants and toddlers can move, learn and behave in a typical manner. Activities provided for seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting should be numerous and repetitive for proper sensory stimulation.

What kind of activities and materials provide sensory stimulation?

0-12 months:
- Touch: texture mats, warm water play
- See: close face to face interactions, books
- Hear: talking with children, listening outdoors
- Smell: scented lotions and oils
- Taste: sucking on food, bottles and teething rings

1-2 years:
- Touch: gloves, books, creative experiences with finger paints
- See: mirrors, other reflective surfaces
- Hear: music playing, wind chimes
- Smell: scratch n sniff books, items in environment (flowers, fabrics, etc.)
- Taste: different foods

2-3 years:
- Touch: art materials – brushes, sponges, stamps
- See: books with pictures & print, sun catchers, see through color plates
- Hear: rain sticks, games that involve listening (Hokey Pokey)
- Smell: foods as they bake
- Taste: cooked foods


Remember: Art is a Sensory activity for infants & toddlers. The process is more important than the product!!

Here are fun, simple sensory activities for Infants & Toddlers.

Foaming Bath Soap

Soap foam
Clear plastic/bubble wrap
- Bath soap for babies is available in foam. This soap can be colored and scented.
- Cover a low table with clear plastic or bubble wrap.
- Squirt the foam on the table for the infant to touch, mash and push around.
- Allow time for exploration. Do not rush the process.
- If soap foam gets in the infant’s eyes, rinse with clear water.

Sticky Wall

Large cardboard box
Contact paper
Items to stick to wall: juice tops, plastic lids, cardboard pieces, disposable cups, plastic flowers, etc.
- Select a large cardboard box that is the appropriate height for mobile infants.
- Cover the outside of the box with contact paper.
- Securely attach contact paper, sticky side out, to the outside of the box.
- Collect a variety of items for the infant to stick to wall.
- Make sure all items do not pose a choking hazard.