

*Created by Child Care and Early
Years Division, Training
Specialist Team*

S IS FOR SENSORY

Implementing sensory-based learning
experiences into your program



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	A note from How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years
4	The benefits of sensory play
5	Considerations for classroom set up
6	Dry materials to use for sensory
7	Music and movement
8 - 9	Sensory activities you can implement in your program
10	Resources
11	References

» Introduction

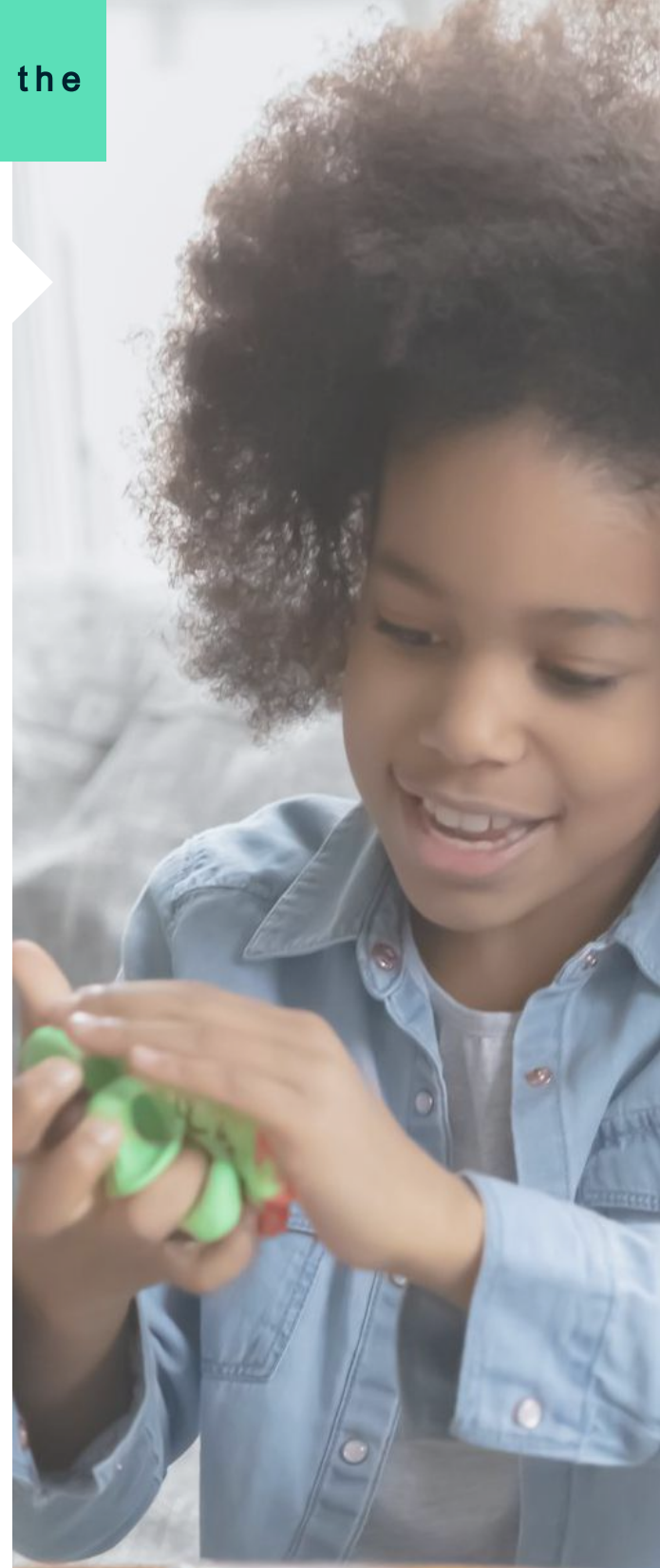
"While there are general principles and knowledge we can refer to, we must always think, feel, and act in ways that reflect the environment, the circumstances, and most importantly the children, families, and colleagues we have before us in every unique situation. As we question, research, reflect, respond, and co-construct our understanding of the world around us with children and families, we gain new perspectives and new and more complex questions arise."

How Does Learning Happen?, 2014, page 5

How Does Learning Happen? provides pedagogical direction for educators as they:

- cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of **belonging** amongst children, adults, and the world around them.
- nurture children's **healthy development** and support their growing sense of self.
- provide environments and experiences to **engage** children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
- foster communication and **expression** in all forms.

How Does Learning Happen?, 2014, page 13





"Sensory play includes any activity that stimulates a young child's senses of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing, as well as anything which engages movement and balance."

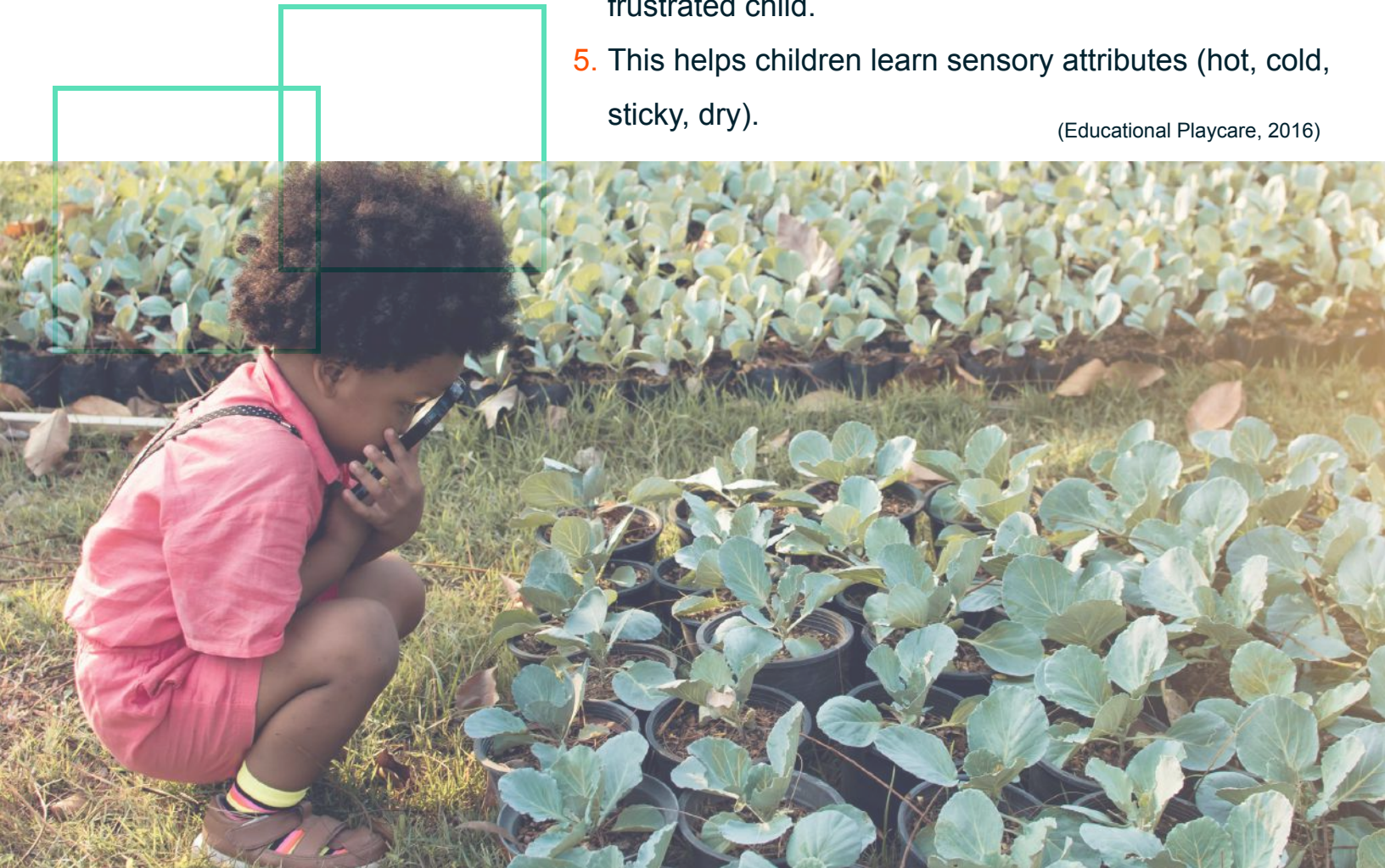
(Goodstart Early Learning, 2018)

Providing opportunities for children to actively use their senses as they explore their world through sensory play is crucial to brain development because it helps build nerve connections in the brain's pathways.

Five reasons why sensory play is beneficial:

1. Research shows that sensory play builds nerve connections in the brain's pathways, which leads to the child's ability to complete more complex learning tasks.
2. Sensory play supports language development, cognitive growth, fine and gross motor skills, problem-solving skills, and social interaction.
3. This type of play helps develop and enhance memory.
4. Sensory play is great for calming an anxious or frustrated child.
5. This helps children learn sensory attributes (hot, cold, sticky, dry).

(Educational Playcare, 2016)



When using art materials:

Open and accessible art shelves are a great resource to children as they engage in sensory learning. Having access to materials that allow them to explore through their senses helps children to



better understand the world around them and share their own ideas as well. Organizing materials in bins helps them to know exactly where the items are. Each bin should contain a variety of art supplies such as markers, glue stick, paintbrushes, scissors, and sensory accessories such as rollers, cookie cutters, or playdough scissors. This allows children to follow their own curiosity and interests as the materials they might want to explore with are readily accessible.

Material placement



Set up your activities in an inviting way that promotes critical and creative thinking. Providing adequate space for a child to work independently can help them to focus and share their thinking.

Grouping Similar Learning Areas

The science table to the left invites children to engage in play by offering a variety of materials for open-ended experiences. Placing it near the light table allows children to explore different concepts but also combine materials from the nearby science area to expand their thinking.



Please follow your centre's policies and procedures regarding the use of dry food as sensory, such as rice, pasta, beans, cereal, etc.

Also be mindful of developmental appropriateness.

1



Bird seed

2



Pebbles

3



Beads

These materials are great for fine motor development (e.g., scooping, picking up, sorting, etc.). They also come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colours!

Incorporating music and movement!



Music and movement provides children with so many benefits. They help children develop skills such as cognitive growth, problem-solving, self-expression and social development. Without music and movement in early childhood education, a child's learning is incomplete. Music and movement activities are a great way to incorporate sensory play that allows children to explore their bodies in different ways.

Making music by singing or with instruments and dancing promotes self-expression and strengthens their self-identity. Music and movement is a great way to get children moving when the weather does not allow for outdoor play. Remember you can also take sensory activities from inside to the outdoors as well!

Music and movement ignites all areas of children's development as it makes children happy, allows them to develop gross motor skills and promotes their sense of belonging in program!



Sensory activities you can implement in your program

Sensory play can be done individually or as a group. Using individual sensory bins are a great way to engage children in single-use sensory experiences during cold seasons or outbreaks. Group sensory allows for children to build social, problem-solving, and co-operation skills.

Engaging in sensory play will support children in developing language skills. It also helps them to understand what they are doing with their body and as their vocabulary increases, they are able to explain it as well.

Sensory bin play also helps to support fine motor development. This type of tactile play allows children to practice dumping, pouring, mixing and squishing which build small muscles and helps with coordinated movement.

As per regional public health guidelines, diapered children must have individual sensory experiences.



Sensory bin suggestions:

- Use rocks, water, and add ocean-themed creatures.
- Use kernels and/or beans and add farm animals.
- Use soap, water, a toothbrush and add toy cars.
- Use magnets to uncover hidden metal objects in uncooked rice.
- Use ice cubes and add arctic animals.
- Use sand and add bulldozers, trucks, and cars.
- Use bird seed with scoops, spoons, and cups/empty containers.
- Sort different types of dry pasta into cupcake tins.
- Build your own sensory bags and/or bottles by adding beads, water, glitter, letters, etc.
- Use salt and let children use their fingers to draw images, letters, etc.
- Use tweezers to pick up different objects (rocks, beads, penne, gems, etc.).



» "Opportunities to experience nature enhance children's sense of wonder and joy in the world around them, whether programs are located in large urban centres with small patches of green space, gardens, and trees or in vast fields and forests. A growing body of research suggests that connecting to the natural world contributes to children's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being"

(How Does Learning Happen?, 2014, page 21.)

Sensory activities to implement outdoors:

Sensory activities may change depending on the weather/season.

- Use nature materials as loose parts (leaves, rocks, sticks, grass, flowers, etc.).
- Bring individual sensory bins outside and fill them with a variety of materials, such as water (add food colouring for some extra fun!), sand, and bird seed.
- Enjoy an outdoor scavenger hunt.
- Bug hunting.
- Bring out some paint to paint rocks, leaves, sticks, etc. (you can even use cedar branches as paint brushes!).
- Plant a garden.
- Climb, jump over things, walk across different platforms, or balance.
- Create a pinwheel or a wind chime to measure out different wind speeds.
- Look and listen for birds.
- Use water and brushes to paint a fence and tree trunks.



Other sensory activity suggestions:

While participating in tasting and smelling sensory activities, be mindful of allergies and restrictions.

- Identify different noises that you hear.
- Discuss what different foods taste like while trying them during snack and meal times (sweet, sour, etc.).
- Look through telescopes, binoculars, kaleidoscopes, and coloured lenses.
- Walk across different surfaces and objects at different heights to test out children's balance.
- Use a light table with loose parts and other manipulative materials.
- Identify different smells (put vanilla, cinnamon, vinegar, etc. in different bottles and have the children smell and guess what they are).



Check out these amazing resources to enhance your program!

If you are viewing this in PDF format, you can also access these documents by clicking on the title of the document.



[How Does Learning
Happen? Ontario's
Pedagogy for the Early
Years](#)



[Durham Region Operating
Criteria Guidelines and
Assessment](#)

How to use a QR code:

To use the QR codes above, open your camera on your phone and hold it up to the QR image you wish to view. The QR code will then generate a link for you to click on.



Educational Playcare. (2016, October 27). *Why Sensory Play is Important for Development*. <https://www.educationalplaycare.com/blog/sensory-play-important-development/>

Goodstart Early Learning. (2016, October). *Exploring the Benefits of Sensory Play*. <https://www.Goodstart.Org.Au/News-and-Advice/October-2016/Exploring-the-Benefits-of-Sensory-Play>. <https://www.goodstart.org.au/news-and-advice/october-2016/exploring-the-benefits-of-sensory-play>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years: A resource about learning through relationships for those who work with young children and their families*. <https://Files.Ontario.ca/Edu-How-Does-Learning-Happen-En-2021-03-23.Pdf>. <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-how-does-learning-happen-en-2021-03-23.pdf>