



Sensory Bin Activity Guide

Taking the stress and guesswork out of
keeping your kids occupied while you
enjoy your secret stash of chocolate -
ALONE.

mostlyundercontrol.com

What did you just download?

WHAT'S IN HERE?

In this guide, you will find

- Explanation of sensory play
- Sensory bin basics
- A guide on how to build your own sensory bin(s)
- Sensory bin filler ideas
- Sensory bin ideas and activity guide for ages 0-5 WITH other activities outside of sensory play to target

WHO AM I?

My name is Melanie and I am a mom looking for stuff to do at home with my kids, just like you. I have a background in Early Childhood Education so I know what works and what doesn't work. In my experience as a teacher, I have learned that kids LOVE sensory play and you can pretty much work on any developmental skill with sensory play. They are much more likely to work on a skill if it involves a little extra fun - not flash cards and rote memorization.

My absolute favorite thing to plan when I taught 3 and 4 year olds was the sensory and science center. I loved sitting with the kids and seeing their eyes light up and learning that sensory play doesn't only teach them, but it helps them regulate their feelings and find what is troubling them. Pretty cool, right? 9 times out of 10 when my kids are having a rough day, sensory play helps knock them right out of it; and I am all for that!

COME JOIN ME!

If you haven't already, head over to my social media to get more ideas, tips, tricks and funny stories while I try to navigate this thing called motherhood too.



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Why Sensory Play?

What are the benefits?

Aside from exercising their 7 (yes, I said 7!) senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, hear, vestibular and proprioception), here are some other benefits for sensory play.

Emotional Regulation

Did you know that a lot of times kids who have meltdowns are craving sensory activities? It's true! Trampoline jumping, pushing chairs, playing in sensory bins. All of these can be helpful and can help avoid tantrums if added to your daily routine.

Safe Exploration

Sensory bins allow for kids to explore new textures in a safe and controlled environment. You're right there with them while they're exploring the items and you can be there to guide their play.

Develop Motor Skills

Sensory bins/bags oftentimes use fine motor skills. Strengthening fine motor skills from the start is so important. It helps build muscles to assist in life skills such as writing, using eating utensils, hand eye coordination, tying shoes, etc.

Encourage Learning

Some children do not learn well from rote memorization (ie, flashcards, repetition, etc). When incorporating sensory play, you can teach them other skills (letters, numbers, colors, math, etc) without them even realizing they're doing it.

Visual Development

This is especially important in infant sensory play. Exploring sensory items in bins or bags, you can incorporate bright colors which helps stimulate babies' visual development.

Keeps them BUSY!

Isn't this the most important aspect?!

Sensory Bin Building Basics

Building your own bins

**First, you
need a
base...**

- Please be mindful of this part! Nothing your littles can choke on your will fit in their nose if they are of the nose-shoving age.
- Food is okay, but don't pick something that will spoil if you plan on reusing the bin.
- If you think you found something great, try to freeze it! This usually buys you some extra time.

**Then you
need a
learning
tool...**

- What skill do you want to work on? Letters, numbers, colors, sorting, animals and their sounds, body parts. etc.
- If it's sorting, don't forget some small bowls or cups to do the sorting when they fish the items out of the sensory bin.
- This part is super easy to switch out—it's the extra educational tool!

**Finally, you
add some
tools!**

- This one isn't necessary but can add a challenge.
- Add tweezers, tongs, plastic spoons, etc.
- Be creative, but safe!

And of course, you'll need a plastic bin with a lid!

Ultimate List of Sensory Bin Combinations

Take 1 idea from the fillers column and 1 (or more) ideas from the tools column.

Fillers

- *Decorative shred
- *Sand
- *Rocks/pebbles
- *Balloons
- *Crepe paper
- *Buttons
- *Cut up drinking straws
- *Pipe cleaners
- *Tissue paper
- *Rice
- *Pasta
- *Dirt
- *Clean mud (shredded bar soap, torn up toilet paper and water)
- *Water beads
- *Shaving cream (will need new each time)
- *Hair gel
- *Popcorn kernels
- *Dry beans
- *Wrapping paper
- *Salt (table, sea or Epsom)
- *Play-doh
- *Tinsel/garland
- *Battery powered-Christmas lights (seasonal)
- *Pom poms
- *Fake leaves (seasonal)
- *Feathers
- *Easter grass (seasonal)
- *Marbles (NOT FOR LITTLES!)
- *Pony beads (NOT FOR LITTLES!)
- *ABC beads (NOT FOR LITTLES!)
- *Raffia cord
- *Ribbon
- *Cotton balls
- *Bird seed
- *Foam shapes/letters
- *Oatmeal
- *Construction paper
- *Soapy water
- *Fake snow
- *Coffee grounds
- *Dry cereal
- *Baby oil
- *Yarn
- *Googly eyes
- *Frozen veggies

Tools

- *Fake flowers
- *Measuring cups
- *Measuring spoons
- *Cars
- *Spatula
- *Silicone pasty brush
- *Serving spoons
- *Nesting bowls
- *Fork/knife/spoon (play versions)
- *Plastic food
- *Chalk
- *Kid scissors
- *Cups
- *Party favor cups
- *Magnet letters
- *Fake money
- *Stickers
- *Plastic bugs
- *Plastic snakes
- *Easter eggs (seasonal)
- *Rubber ducks
- *Ice cubes
- *Plates
- *Baby bottles
- *Socks
- *Tweezers
- *Toothbrushes
- *Toothpicks
- *Small ceramic pots (seasonal)
- *Gardening tools
- *Potato masher
- *Sand toys (seasonal)
- *Large blocks
- *Gardening tools (seasonal)
- *Superhero/Disney figures
- *Dinosaurs
- *Funnels
- *Whisk
- *Sponges
- *Cookie cutters
- *Small plastic storage containers
- *Slotted spoon
- *Tongs
- *Water balloons (seasonal)
- *Cleaning brushes

Sensory Bag - Ages 0-1

Baby water sensory bag

SUPPLIES

- Gallon sized freezer bags
- Water
- Baby oil
- Food coloring
- Glass vase filler gems
- Glitter
- Duct tape



SET UP

- Place all items into the gallon sized bag in this order: baby oil, food coloring, water, glass gems, glitter.
- Zip the bag closed, releasing as much air as possible.
- Seal the opening with the duct tape.
- Slip the bag into another gallon sized bag to make it double layer secure.
- Seal the bag closed with the duct tape.

SKILLS

• LARGE MOTOR - MOVEMENTS YOUR BABY MAKES WITH HIS/HER ARMS, LEGS, FEET OR BODY.

- **Tummy time:** Allowing baby to play on their tummy while exploring the bag in front of them strengthens their core which will help in sitting up unassisted and lifting their head.
- **Crawling:** If your baby is working on crawling, set it up a few feet from him and encourage him to crawl to the bag.

• FINE MOTOR - MOVEMENTS YOUR BABY MAKES WITH HIS/HER SMALLER MUSCLES SUCH AS FINGERS AND HANDS.

- **Fingers:** Feeling the gems in their hands/fingers as they explore them in the bag. This helps with hand eye coordination and learning cause and effect. They are still learning that they are the ones making those movements.

Sensory Bag - Ages 1-2

Squishy hair gel exploration

SUPPLIES

- Sandwich sized zipper bags
- Clear hair gel
- Food coloring (You could also get colored hair gel)
- Packing tape

SET UP

- Fill the sandwich bags with the clear hair gel and food coloring or the colored hair gel.
- Let out as much air as possible and tape the bags to a window or glass door at eye level for baby.

SKILLS

• LARGE MOTOR - MOVEMENTS YOUR BABY MAKES WITH HIS/HER ARMS, LEGS, FEET OR BODY

- **Standing:** Some babies have no desire to work on standing! Put them in front of the door or window where these bags are attached and they won't even realize they're doing it. This also helps strengthen their core and trunk strength.
- **Walking:** Put the bags a good distance apart from each other so baby has to walk back and forth to explore them all. Similar to furniture cruising.

• FINE MOTOR - MOVEMENTS YOUR BABY MAKES WITH HIS/HER SMALLER MUSCLES SUCH AS FINGERS AND HANDS.

- **Touching:** Squishing around the gel in the bags helps strengthen their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination.
- **Sensory:** Feeling the gel in their hands/fingers as they explore it in the bag. This helps with hand eye coordination and learning cause and effect.

This is a great activity to keep up on your glass back door for when you need 20 minutes to work on dinner/dishes, etc!



Sensory Bin - Ages 2-3

SUPPLIES

- Pom poms
- Kitchen tongs
- Ice cube tray or a few different small cups/bowls

SET UP

- Place the pom poms into the plastic bin.
- Separate the small cups and bowls (if you didn't use an ice cube tray).
- Encourage your child to sort the pom poms into the different cups/bowls or spots in the ice cube tray.
- For a little challenge, have them use the kitchen tongs instead of their fingers!
- If you're feeling ambitious, freeze the pom poms! Just fill the bin with water and the pom poms the night before and pop it in the freezer. This will buy you some extra play time because they will have to work to separate all the pom poms.

Pom Pom color sorting



SKILLS

• LARGE MOTOR - MOVEMENTS YOUR CHILD MAKES WITH HIS/HER ARMS, LEGS, FEET OR BODY

- **Walking/Running:** Do you have a kiddo that works better when he's moving? Try putting the cups/bowls/ice cube tray on the other side of the room so he has to walk them over to sort them.

• FINE MOTOR - MOVEMENTS YOUR CHILD MAKES WITH HIS/HER SMALLER MUSCLES SUCH AS FINGERS AND HANDS.

- **Picking up:** When they are picking up the pom poms, they are exercising their fingers which helps strengthen their fine motor skills. This will help with pre-writing skills and also hand-eye coordination.

• MATH/RELATIONSHIPS

- **Sorting:** Sort the pom poms by color using the ice cube tray or bowls/cups.

Sensory Bin - Ages 3-4

Stringing Pasta

SUPPLIES

- Dry pasta (with holes so you can string them like beads)
- Small letters (magnets, foam letters, etc)
- String or pipe cleaners



SET UP

- Place your dry pasta in a bin with the pipe cleaners/string and small letters.
- Encourage your child to string the pasta onto the pipe cleaners/string to strengthen their fine motor skills.
- Take it a step further by having them make patterns on the string/pipe cleaners.
- Working on letter recognition? Have them pull the letters and use the pasta to recreate the letter!

SKILLS

• LITERACY - WRITING AND READING

- **Letter recognition:** At this age, we are not totally concerned about letter sounds—we are more so working on letter recognition. You could also throw some numbers in there because kiddos should know the difference between letters and numbers!

• MATH AND RELATIONSHIPS

- **Patterning:** Working on creating patterns with your kiddos helps with their math skills. If they can't create their own patterns, you start and have them repeat.
- **Spatial vocabulary:** Work on spatial vocabulary with them. “This piece is next to this piece. This piece is on top of this piece.”

Feeling ambitious? Dye your pasta! Check out [this article](#) on how to do it!

Sensory Bin - Ages 4-5

SUPPLIES

- Water beads
- Plastic animals from different habitats
- A sorting mat (super easy to make—just take a piece of paper and draw circles on it.)
- Dry erase marker

Animal Sorting



SET UP

- Water beads take overnight to soak up water, so set them in a plastic bowl/cup at night. Cover them with LOTS of water—they absorb a ton!
- Place the finished beans in a bin with the plastic animals.
- If desired, laminate your sorting mat or slip it into a plastic page protector.

SKILLS

• MATH AND RELATIONSHIPS

- **Sets:** As your kiddo explores the bin, have them take out the animals and sort them how they wish—by color, habitat, etc. Ask them questions about how many are in each set as you teach them the concept of sets.
- **Patterns:** Have your child create an original pattern with the animals based on their habitats.
- **Counting:** Working from numbers 1-30, have your child count out how many animals are in each set or even in the bin.
- **Comparisons:** Talk about the differences in all the animals. How many legs? How many fins? How is this animal the same as this other animal in terms of physical attributes? How are they different?

• SCIENCE

- **Habitats:** Separate the animals into different habitats and talk about what happens in those habitats and what other animals you can find. What's the weather like? Where can you find them?

What did YOU learn?

Let me know!

Thank you so much for downloading my Sensory Bin Activity Guide!

While the goal of this was to show you how easy it is to teach your kiddos with sensory activities, what did you learn? Did you do something different that I didn't mention?

Come over to Instagram and LET ME KNOW!

Tag me in your activities (@mostlyundercontrol) and let's talk about it!

You might even end up being featured on my account and win some extras!



@mostlyundercontrol

