13

Te tākaro tairongo | Sensory play

Sensory play is any activity that stimulates children's sense of touch, smell, taste, hearing, or sight. A lot of early learning happens through the senses. Giving tamariki materials and time to explore sensory play builds a curious and active brain. It also encourages physical ability and language development. Finger-paint, slime and gloop as well as mud and clay give tamariki opportunities to learn about different textures and materials.

Links to *Te Whāriki*

Sensory play materials can provide satisfying experiences to stimulate emotional wellbeing (**Wellbeing | Mana atua**) as well as support tamariki to relax and regulate their emotions. Because sensory play experiences are open-ended, they encourage experimentation and curiosity (**Exploration | Mana aotūroa**). Sensory play experiences are often enjoyed as a group (**Belonging | Mana whenua**) and they support the **Contribution | Mana tangata** strand by providing opportunities for tamariki to use a range of strategies and skills to play and learn with others | te ngākau aroha.

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

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Sensory play can help tamariki to:

- relax – it can be a very soothing activity
- experiment with and explore the properties of the medium, e.g. does it hold its shape or pour or run? What happens when substances combine?
- learn new vocabulary, e.g. 'this mud is gritty'
- learn about colour mixing, patterns, design, texture, and rhythm
- develop hand–eye coordination and practise pouring, measuring, mixing, scooping, and beating skills
- share in group activities.

Adults can support tamariki by:

- letting tamariki participate in a way they are comfortable. Some tamariki might be reluctant to touch or feel something new or unusual. You can join in, to show it is okay to play, offer a stick or paintbrush to use instead of their hands, and let them know it is okay to choose something else to play with.
- watching younger ones to keep them safe
- encouraging experimentation — there are no right or wrong ways to engage in sensory play using descriptive words such as slimy, runny, warm, lumpy
- using chants, rhythms, songs, stories and music from a range of different cultures while playing
- encouraging them to talk about how it makes them feel (calm, excited, peaceful).

Providing for sensory play

Make sure there's enough room for sensory play experiences like finger-painting and try to keep the play area away from the other equipment. Give tamariki a flat, smooth surface to work on; low tables or water baths/troughs are ideal for group play. Tamariki can be provided with small trays each for more individual experiences. It is good to set up a place close by for hand-washing. Lining the floor or providing for sensory play outside can make cleaning up easier. Many types of music (think classical or Pacific drumming) and sensory play go together nicely. It is important to recognise and respect cultural differences and attitudes because not everyone feels the same way about sensory play experiences.

Ideas for equipment

The great thing about sensory play is that little additional equipment is necessary.

- Tamariki can use their hands and fingers, feet and bodies to experiment with.
- Introduce a range of mark-makers. Try anything that might make an interesting pattern:
  - brushes with different length bristles
  - cardboard scrapers — flat or with patterns cut into the bottom
  - natural materials such as leaves, twigs, stones, flower, or seed heads (minus the seeds)
- Try second hand shops for dining tables and cut the legs down. If you do not have access to a large table, try a large sheet of plastic on the ground
- You could provide aprons for tamariki to cover clothing while they play.