

## STRATEGIES FOR *SENSORY PLAY*

GOAL: To create fun activities that encourage relationships and interaction and that use motor planning, visual-spatial abilities, language, and sensory modulation as much as possible.

The activities that work on engagement together with all the sensory inputs need to be geared to the child's initial abilities and very gradually increased in complexity. The foundation is the two of you spending lots of time on basic fun activities together, including rolling on the floor, crawling, slithering, and cuddling with rhythmic movement.

Initially, work to get interaction and fun going. Bring in sensory play or toys or other objects that the child is interested in, one of which can be you. Children who like this type of play are often seeking sensory stimulation. Sometimes seeking, searching for, or chasing a caregiver to get a self-stimulatory object, such as a stuffed animal with lots of texture, can motivate them to engage. The key is to vary the challenge.

Surmounting obstacles, which incidentally gives practice using different senses, can lead to special moments. For example, when the child crawls through a small tunnel and makes sounds, you are waiting at the end to give that favorite tickle. Children who like to play the airplane game and be swung in the air might have to climb onto a platform (with the caregiver's help), gesture and say "jump" as they jump into the caregivers arms to be the airplane. To get a favorite toy or cookie could mean the child has to search for it in the caregiver's hand.

If the child is aimless or avoidant, the usual enticements may not work. You may also see a lot of sensory craving along with this behavior. Playful obstructive may be the key (e.g., pretending to be a playful dog who's always in front of the seemingly aimless wanderer or the smiling, talking, moving fence who's always putting its arms around the aimless wanderer

without touching, so that the aimless wanderer has to duck under the moving fence or push up the moving fence or, even better, say “up” or “out”). During such playfully obstructive activities, try to bring in as many of the motor, spatial, language, and sensory modulation challenges as possible, for example, having the “doggy” block quickly from the left or right so that the child has to move quickly too.

## ACTIVITIES

### A. Floortime Summary

Discover what the child enjoys and create activities that build on those while providing sensory experiences.

- Use lots of rhythmic activity.
- Use sensory pleasures to help child enjoy relating and interacting.
- Be playfully obstructive as needed.
- For children who are very sensory craving, active and avoidant, use playful obstruction such as the moving fence game and also, if needed, hold the child’s hands gently and move the child’s arms rhythmically in synchrony with your voice in order to encourage synchronous head and facial gesturing and vocalizations and, if possible, words.

#### Specific Floortime Goals (in order of development)

1. Take note of individual sensory and motor profile.
- *Become aware of unique style of hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, and moving.*
  2. Harness all these senses in enjoyable ways that simultaneously involve the child’s hearing, vision, touch, smell, and movement.
    - *Entice the child into the world.*
  3. Observe what kinds of interactions – silly sounds, kisses, tickles or favorite games – bring pleasure and joy.
    - *Make the most of those “magic moments” of availability and relaxed alertness.*
  4. Tune in to natural rhythms, feelings, and movements.
    - *Peek-a-boo and hiding-the-toy-under-a-box are visual games that delight most children.*
  5. Follow the child’s true interests, even if it’s simply making silly noises.
  6. Become a part of an object the child likes rather than competing with it.
    - *Put a valued block on your head and make a funny face.*
  7. Be very animated as you exchange subtle facial expressions, sounds, and other gestures as well as words and pretend dramas with the child.
  8. Go for the gleam in the child’s eye that lets you know the child is alert and aware and enjoying this exchange.
  9. Help the child open and close circles of communication.

10. Treat all the child's behaviors – even the seemingly random ones – as purposeful.
  - *For instance, if the child flaps hands in excitement, you could use this behavior as a basis for an interactive, “flap your hands” dance step. If the child's play seems a little aimless as the child idly pushes a toy car back-and-forth, you might announce that your doll has a special delivery letter that needs to be carried straightaway to Barney. See if the child takes the bait!*
11. Help the child go in the direction the child wants by first making the child's goal easier to achieve.
  - *You could move a bright new ball closer to the child after the child points a finger and indicates that the child would like to play with it.*
12. Then, encourage the child's initiative by avoiding doing things for or to the child.
  - *When it's time for the child to go to bed, for example, see if the child can put the child's favorite teddy bear to bed at the same time, rather than relying on you to do it.*
13. Challenge the child to do things to you.
  - *For example, when the two of you are roughhousing, entice the child to playfully jump on you or climb up onto your shoulders, rather than simply picking the child up and swinging the child yourself.*

## B. Motor Interventions

Support purposeful actions with objects of strong interest, encouraging looking and reaching, listening and reaching, and simple exchanges. Encourage coordination, left-right integration and balance.

*The Evolution Game:* In the Evolution Game the child progresses through the following activities. (Do it together.):

- wiggling and rolling worms
- slithering snakes
- creeping alligators or turtles
- crawling doggies, cats, or rabbits (of increasing speed)
- walking chimps
- walking person
- running person
- jumping, hopping, skipping, etc. person

When the child is ready, create simple obstacle courses, placing desirable objects at the end of the obstacle course. Start with something really simple such as crawling through a short tube.

## C. Visual Spatial

Use simple search games, for example searching in the caregiver's hands for something that is highly prized. If necessary, let the child see it and keep tempting him into the search activity.

- Try mirror games where the child can see his image in the mirror. Observe how he reacts to it or if he ignores it. If he reacts, do funny things together in the mirror, such as waving hands or making funny faces. If he ignores it, try again after a few months.
- To support tracking and following objects, try the moving toy or moving cookie game where the child needs to follow it with his eyes and reach for the desired moving object. If the child gives up easily and is very avoidant, keep tempting him and move the object very, very slowly so that he succeeds 70-80% of the time. Also, try the bubble game where the caregiver blows bubbles or eventually the child blows bubbles and then the caregiver and child try to catch the bubbles in their hand.

#### D. Rhythm and timing

Move to music, including holding the child and having him move with you and feel your rhythm. If he is unable to move together with you, just hold his hands.

#### E. Auditory Processing and Language

During Floortime, challenge the child to use vocalizations and words along with purposeful actions. When the child is going down a slide, enthusiastically say 'Whee' so he can copy you.

- As the child becomes more purposeful, use problem solving interactions where the child has to use sounds or words to get what he wants.
- Use the exercises in the Affect Based Language Curriculum book (ABLC).
- If possible, explore if the child will drink fluids through straws that have circles or other designs which encourage sucking activity and strengthens oral/motor capacities.

#### F. Sensory Modulation

- Enjoy activities such as swinging, jumping, spinning, and firm hugs together many times a day. When possible, combine these activities rhythmically with music.
- Also explore experiences involving gentle massage combined with moving hands, fingers, and toes. If possible, entice the child to indicate preferences so that over time he can direct what you do.

**These activities support the different processing areas and should be practiced 3-4 times a day for 20 minutes or more each time. It is not possible to do all these activities each time.**