



## Sensory and Play Therapy

### What is Play Therapy?

Play therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach to help children learn how to process and express their thoughts, emotions and feelings in a safe space. The aim of play therapy is to also nurture the development of empathy, self-esteem, problem-solving skills, resilience and independence.

The use of sensory play particularly assists children who are anxious or frustrated. It dissolves outside distractions and troubling thoughts, giving children the ability to shift their focus on their senses; hearing, touch, smell and taste.

### Benefits of Sensory Play Therapy:

- Helps children retain what they've learned from the session through use of senses stimulation.
- Helps improve their articulation of words and language i.e.; describing what they are touching, hearing, smelling or tasting.
- Exceptionally beneficial in self-regulation particularly for children who have behavioural issues (calming anxiety).
- Improves fine motor skills
- Super fun and engaging

### How to support an anxious child:

Although sensory and play therapy can really assist and benefit children in regulating thoughts, emotions and feelings, there are other strategies and approaches that are also particularly helpful with highly anxious or stressed children.

- Meditation - useful apps like headspace provide a range of audio recordings catered to certain feelings, emotions as well as bedtime stories for restful sleep.
- Music - playing soothing melodies and/or nature sounds of rain, birds chirping, wind etc. to help calm the mind and distract your child of overwhelming thoughts.
- Breathing exercises
- Scrap book - have a handy book for your child to scribble in any thoughts and emotions, even if it is just random drawing. This will help prevent your child from internalizing their thoughts and emotions as well as being a great tool for venting.

### Useful Links:

<https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/age-1-5/social-and-emotional-development/understanding-your-child's-temperament>

<https://blog.sensorytheraplaybox.com/2016/09/07/20-calming-strategies-for-children-managing-anxiety-stress-2/>



## Play Therapy and Sensory Activities

### HOMEMADE RUBBERY GOOP

Homemade Rubbery Goop is perfect for sensory play opportunities as it is safe and non-toxic using basic ingredients found in your pantry.

Rubbery Goop looks and feels like basic play dough but it is textured differently. It is smooth, soft and slightly stretchy. Moulding it in the hands is very addictive as the texture is delightful.

It is so much fun to play with, you can pull the goop apart and roll it back together to form a smooth ball. You can squeeze it and it will squish through your fingers.



#### LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- Creativity and imagination
- Fine Motor Development
- Hand-Eye Coordination
- Sensory- Development of the sense of touch. Feeling and manipulating objects.
- Oral language development- using descriptive language.

#### Ingredients:

- 2 cups bi-carbonate soda (baking soda)
- 1 ½ cups water
- 1 cup of cornflour (corn starch)
- Food colouring (optional)

#### Instructions:

1. Combine all ingredients into a saucepan.
2. Mix the ingredients together using a whisk to remove lumps.
3. Heat on the stove stirring with a wooden spoon.
4. Bring the mixture to the boil continuously stirring.
5. Small lumps will begin to appear, continue to stir until a thick mixture has formed.
6. Turn out onto the bench. Be careful the Rubbery Goop will be very hot!
7. Knead together to form a smooth ball of Rubbery Goop.
8. Store in a plastic zip-lock bag or air tight container.

#### SOME IDEAS

- Play with Rubbery Goop much like play dough using rolling pins, play scissors and cookie cutters.
- Add gemstones, bottle tops, shells, toy cars, dinosaurs or any other nick knacks from around the house.
- Use descriptive language to describe the experience, how does the Rubbery Goop feel? It feels soft, smooth and stretchy.

## COLOURED RICE FOR SENSORY PLAY

Playing with rice fascinates children. Children may respond to sensory experiences like rice play in a variety of ways.

It can be very calming to run your hands through a textured material like rice.

During rice play, you can talk about how things move, feel, smell and sound. Make a comment, pause and wait. Give them a chance to add to the conversation. Ask occasional questions that require some thinking and reasoning e.g. "What would happen if we ...." "What could we use to ...." Encourage experimenting and exploring through these questions. This helps develop early science skills.

Rice play can give children something new and interesting to talk about. Many children will enjoy story-telling through 'small world' play. The imagination involved in creating a land of dinosaurs or a haven for mini-beasts provides opportunities for introducing new words and simple story-telling skills.

During rice play, fine motor strength (including the pincer grip when picking up tiny grains of sand) and hand-eye coordination are developed. These are helpful for handwriting later on at school.

### Ingredients:

1 cup dried rice

1 teaspoon food colouring (I have also used diluted paint before with the same outcome.)

Paper towels

Tray or plate (this for drying the rice)

A container with a screw on the lid on.

### Instructions:

#### STEP 1:

Add food colouring to the container and pour in one cup of rice.

#### STEP 2:

Screw on the lid and shake, shake, shake until the rice is completely covered. Add a little more food colouring if needed to achieve desired colour.

#### STEP 3:

Place the wet rice onto a paper towel and plate.

Using a spoon spread the wet rice out evenly to dry out.

If it is a sunny day, I place the wet rice out in the sun to air dry.

Give the container a wipe and a rinse, and proceed with your next colour!

#### STEP 4:

When the rice is dry, gently rub the rice between your fingers to break up any rice that may be stuck together.

Coloured rice will last for several years if stored correctly in an air-tight container.



## DIY STRESS BALL

Children who have autism or ADD/ADHD use Stress Balls as a way to keep calm and stay focused, as squeezing the stress ball sends sensory signals that occupy one part of the child's brain, the anxious one, making them attentive.

The toys and stress balls are effective self-regulatory tools that help children to focus more, be attentive, listen, and be calm.

### Strengthened grip

Squeezing and squishing the stress ball contracts hand and arm muscles. When the pressure is let off the ball, tension leaves the arms and hands. This relieves stress, making writing easier.

Besides the stress relief, dexterity and hand strength improves, tremendously enhancing your child's grip on a pen. Just like when you work out, there is increased blood flow to your extremities and other parts of the body. The same applies to use of stress balls. There is more blood flow to the hands, and this also enhances the growth of muscles resulting in a firmer grip.

### Concentration in class

Children who use stress balls have been shown to have heightened concentration in the classroom. They can listen and stay attentive for longer durations.

### Ingredients:

An empty plastic bottle  
A bowl of flour (you can also use rice)  
A funnel  
Balloons

### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### STEP 1:

Put the funnel into the water bottle, and pour the flour through it.

#### STEP 2:

Stretch the balloon around the opening of the water bottle.

#### STEP 3:

Turn the water bottle upside down and gently squeeze the flour into the balloon.

Make sure to use some pressure because the air helps the balloon to open up so the flour can all go in.

#### STEP 4:

After the flour is all in, pinch the balloon and release it from the bottle. The balloon should have a snug fit to the flour inside it. Just make sure there isn't any extra air in the balloon.

Tie the balloon and wipe away any excess flour from the outside



## BASIC FLUFFY SLIME RECIPE

While making slime with kids can be a messy process, the reality is that making slime with kids is beneficial.

Making slime and then playing with it helps kids understand their senses. Many of kid's senses such as touch and scent are used as they work to build a fun slime following their favourite slime recipe.

When several senses are stimulated at once, children build their creativity and learning through exploration.

Sensory play also encourages the development of fine motor skills and coordination.

### INGREDIENTS:

½ cup of shampoo

¼ cup of corn-starch

A bowl

Food colouring (optional)

Water

### STEP 1:

Put 1/2 cup shampoo and 1/4 cup of corn-starch in a bowl.

### STEP 2:

Mix well

### STEP 3:

Add 3 drops of food colouring (optional).

### STEP 4:

Add 1 tablespoon of water and stir.

Slowly add 5 more tablespoons of water, stirring well after each one.

### STEP 5:

Knead the slime for around 5 minutes.



## BUCKET OF COLOURFUL SPAGHETTI WORMS

A bucket filled with coloured spaghetti worms with hidden number rocks is a motivating learning experience for kids to explore numbers and their senses.

### Here are some ideas:

- Lots of squeezing, squishing and manipulating fun exploring the textures of the wet, slimy spaghetti worms.
- Sensory play is a great opportunity for kids to explore language and use descriptive words. Words to describe what they are experiencing, their senses and what they are feeling; slippery, slimy, soft, squishy and sticky.
- Search for the hidden number rocks in the spaghetti worms. Start searching at the beginning with number 1 and hide the numbers you are not looking for back into the spaghetti worms. As your child finds each number, place them in order from 1 – 10 along the tray. Point at each number and count out loud.
- Talk about the number shapes and how each number looks, such as number 5 looks like it has a big tummy. Funny little things like this help children learn their numbers as they associate it with something familiar to them.

### Tips:

If the spaghetti becomes too dry and sticky, have some water handy to squirt onto the pasta to help keep it smooth and slippery to handle.

### Learning Opportunities:

- Mathematics – number recognition and number sequence
- Problem solving and overcoming challenges
- Sensory play encourages children to manipulate and mould materials, building up their fine motor skills and coordination
- Sensory play is unstructured, open-ended, not product-oriented; it is the purest sense of exploratory learning
- Self-esteem: sensory play offers kids the opportunity for self-expression because there is no right answer and children feel safe to change or experiment with what they are doing
- Language development – experimenting with language and descriptive words.
- Encourages imagination and creative play

### Ingredients:

cooked and cooled spaghetti  
large tray, pebbles  
small bucket or container  
food colouring  
liquid paper  
permanent marker pen



### INSTRUCTIONS:

#### STEP 1:

To colour the spaghetti, place approximately 8 drops of each colour food dye into separate bowls. Evenly share out the cooled spaghetti into the bowls and gently stir until the colouring has evenly dispersed. Add more colouring for depth in colour, if desired.

#### STEP 2:

To make the number rocks, paint on the pebbles with liquid paper to create the base for writing the numbers. Once this is dry add a second coat of liquid paper to the pebbles and then directly write the numbers on using a permanent marker.