



Sensory ideas for daily activities

Toothbrushing

- Before cleaning teeth, let your child use her index and middle finger to press all around her mouth.
- To desensitize gums, provide tactile input. Wear a rubber finger cot, press with a clean face cloth, or use an infant finger brush (available from Boots or Superdrug)
- If your child can't tolerate adult toothpaste, try toddler toothpaste, which does not foam or taste strong.
- Develop a predictable routine for when and how to brush. Help your child choose the brushing pattern which will always be used. For example, she could decide to always start with the top teeth and to brush from left to right, front to back. A consistent brushing pattern will help your child motor plan this complex activity, learn to predict when and where she will feel various sensations (rather than be a "victim" of horrible sensations), and help your child feel proud about keeping her mouth and teeth nice and clean.
- Have a visible timer available, so that your child knows there is an end to this task.

Bathing

- If your child doesn't like "slimy" soap or shampoo, try foamy soap (also good for tactile play—unlike shaving cream, it doesn't have a strong smell).
- Try using a large container of water for rinsing hair since the extra weight of the water might feel soothing. Alternately, your child might be more comfortable if he simply feels in control of the water. In this case, provide a sprinkling can (beach or garden toy) or a hand-held shower attachment. Count down together to rinsing: "1, 2, 3, rinse."
- Use a foam visor or a dry face cloth held over the face when rinsing hair. This is good for a child who hates water on his face or who hates tilting his head back for rinsing. You might also have him dry his face immediately after washing it even if he's still in the shower or bath.
- If toweling dry is a problem, experiment with softer (or harder) towel textures. You can also try pre-warming the towel in the dryer for a few minutes.



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Going to Bed

- Make sure the room is dark enough (or light enough) for your child to sleep. A small amount of light might comfort one child, while light creeping in through the curtains or under the door might disturb another.
- Try a white noise machine, fan, aquarium, or even a radio set on static to create white noise to block out sleep-disturbing sounds. Some children fall asleep more easily listening to gentle music such as Mozart or CDs specifically designed to promote sleep. Other children find listening to an audio CD comforting.
- Give calming deep pressure input via a backrub or massage using long, firm strokes. Even just squeezing feet, legs, hands, and arms, can be very soothing at bedtime. You can also try using a weighted blanket (available from companies such as Rompa).

Getting a Haircut

- Use the word "trim" instead of "cut."
- Visit the hair salon to simply check it out and watch other children get their hair trimmed. Familiar places are less scary.
- Massage your child's scalp before a haircut using your hands, handheld massage vibrator, or vibrating hairbrush (available from Rompa).
- The heavy shaped rubber mats can help calm your child as it provides deep, heavy and sustained pressure.
- Many children dislike the plastic cape with its scratchy closure. Instead use a soft towel and clip or an oversized shirt.
- Go to a child-friendly haircutting salon or ask around for a home visiting hair dresser.
- Have the barber or stylist give the child a big soft brush or a dry face cloth with baby powder on it to brush off stray hair as it is cut. Use baby powder on irritated skin afterward.



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Clothing

- Some tactile-defensive kids insist on supersoft, all-cotton clothing. Many parents swear by the all-cotton clothing. Some children insist on pre-worn clothes (pre-word = pre-softened!). Charity shops or ebay can be an excellent resource
- Some children are more comfortable wearing snug clothing or tight clothing worn beneath their other clothes. Try bicycle shorts, tights, "too small" t-shirts, etc.
- When buying clothes for a tactile-sensitive child, avoid scratchy nylon threads and items made of polyester blends which can pill and cause discomfort.
- Buy seamless socks where possible.

Shopping

- Avoid shopping during peak hours when shops are most crowded and noisy.
- Let your child push the grocery cart for sensory input. Many grocery stores have junior carts for smaller children. Also, pushing a stroller can help a toddler or preschooler get calming input. Add packages for extra weight.
- Give your child some control and a sense of predictability. Young children can help find groceries on the shelf, match groceries to a picture list, or follow a picture list of chores you will be doing that day. Older kids can help you write lists, find items, pull out coupons, or check items off your to-do list.

Potty Training

- Some children are disturbed by the size and feel of a large toilet seat. Bring your child to the shop and help her to pick out a potty chair or a small, cushioned vinyl ring that fits onto an adult toilet seat.
- Some children are frightening by the sound of flushing. A sense of control might help: together, count off to the flush, for example: "1, 2, 3, FLUSH!" Make lots of noise as the toilet is flushing, shouting "hooray!"
- Sometimes, tight clothes provide sensory input that distracts a child from the sensation of needing to use the potty. Loose clothing such as boxer shorts may help him recognize when he has the urge to go.
- Sometimes you just have to let it go, wait a few months and then try again