

Sensorimotor Stimulation Activities for Preschool Children with Significant Visual Impairments

(Add your own ideas in the blank spaces)

Sensory Development

Kinesthetic: Children without optimal vision are limited in their ability to learn about body movements and the expression of feelings by imitating others.

- Physically and verbally prompt appropriate body responses to communication from others, such as "yes" nods, "no" head turns and facial expressions that convey emotions.
- Relate body actions to language, such as teaching prepositions by physically directing movements of under over, into, beside, etc.
- Provide opportunities for experiencing as many physical movements as possible, such as pivoting, stretching, jumping, running, etc.

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Tactual: The sense of touch will play a major role in development, as children explore, compare, classify and label objects.

- Physically and verbally prompt touching of surfaces that differ, encouraging comparisons and descriptions, such as coarse, fine, wet, dry, soft, hard, smooth, rough, sharp, dull, etc.
- Encourage experiences of different textures on many parts of the body, such as walking and jumping on grass, gravel, dirt and concrete; rolling on mats and carpets, up and down hills, etc.

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Auditory: Another important modality for learning is sound, but children need help interpreting what they hear.

- Help identify and label sounds that are high, low, loud, soft, close by, far away, slow, fast, moving, stationary, etc.
- Increase attention span through games and multiple sequences instructions.
- Use music, radio, and television to help develop listening skills and organization of memory, such as "What is today? What program do you like to listen to tonight?"

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Olfactory: The sense of smell can alert children to danger or pleasure (food) and stimulates environmental awareness.

- Encourage verbal identification of places and events by smell, such as gas station, bakery, shoe store, hospital, etc.
- Provide opportunities to smell and identify a wide variety of objects, such as clothes, furniture, cleaning supplies, food seasonings, paper products, soaps, lotions, etc.

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Gustatory: Early sampling of a broad array of foods will decrease the tendency toward food aversions.

- Clarify differences between the confusing use of words such as "hot" for temperature and also for spicy.
- Offer and help label foods that are sweet, sour, salty, mild, rich, bland, cold, lukewarm, raw, cooked, etc.

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Visual: Maximal use of residual vision will increase functional efficiency.

- Introduce high contrast items, such as yellow on black.
- Find or make heavy outlines on pictures, letters, etc.
- Gradually decrease size and intensity as proficiency identifying objects improves.

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Motor Development

Reaching: If objects are not within the near or central visual fields, children may not reach for them.

- Bring noisy objects close for touching, then gradually withdraw but continue the sound to encourage searching.

- Reward exploration by facilitating grasp fairly soon.
- Gradually extend exploration time as successes occur.

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Grasping: Children who do not use vision to identify objects in near space will use sweeping motions of the hands to locate them. This primitive palmar pattern may persist unless higher forms of grasp are facilitated.

- Hang mobiles with a variety of shapes and textures, and holes for poking fingers.
- Find toys that squeak when squeezed and horns to blow, with buttons for different tones.
- Use non-structured, no-fail materials such as play-do and magnetic blocks of various sizes.

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Midline skills and transferring: Children may persist in manipulating objects unilaterally instead of bilaterally.

- To encourage transfer, begin with a toy car rolling on a table from hand to hand.
- Present a favorite toy or food to the non-preferred hand.
- Offer toys that need to be held with one hand while the other performs the action, such as a drum and drumstick, or a toy activated by turning a handle.

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Locating objects: Finding objects in far space relates to object permanence, the concept that even if an object is not visible, it still exists.

- Use objects with sound attributes to stimulate searching the room, such as a CD player.
- Suggest dropping or throwing a ball and retrieving it.

Crafts: Even young children can learn to enjoy simple crafts.

• In addition to clay, bread dough can be used to sculpture objects air-dried or baked in a conventional oven.

- Paper, cloth and thick yarn weaving can increase sensitivity and manipulation skills.
- Finger painting, painting with a brush and easel can be done with bright colors for visibility.
- Stringing beads and macaroni with large string can result in wearables and gifts.

Cutting: Using scissors is a bimanual task with each hand performing a different skill.

- Begin with a four-finger-hole scissors, if necessary, so adult can guide the movements.
- Glue string or yarn to paper for a 3-dimensional guide for cutting.
- Raised-line designs can be made on paper pressing with a ball-point pen, then reversing the paper.

Drawing: Children can combine their limited vision with their sense of touch to succeed in drawing, printing, and writing.

- Begin with drawing between two lines of hard liquid glue, and expand to shapes.
- Templates can provide an edge to follow.
- Thick dark lines can then be traced, then copied, and finally produced from memory.

Reproduction: Various 3-dimensional materials can be used to copy designs, presented in developmental sequence of difficulty.

- With two pegboards, a design can be felt on one and copied on the other.
- Toothpicks or match sticks (head cut off) can be glued on cardboard, for designs to be copied with loose pieces on a felt-covered board.

- Cereal bits can also be glued in designs on cardboard and duplicated.

Adapted from:

Garwood, S. G., Alberto, G., DuBose, R. F., Hare, B. A., Hare, J. M., Kauffman, J., Kodera, T. L., Langley, M. B. & Page, D. A. (1979). *Educating young Handicapped children*. Germantown, MD: Aspen Systems Corporation.