

# Developmentally Appropriate Early Childhood Play Spaces

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Creating Echo-Free and Sensory-Friendly  
Play Spaces for Early Childhood Centres



**Presented To :**  
Robyn Papworth



# Create appropriate Spaces

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## Think of a time...

We all have our own sensory profile. Some of us love the hustle and bustle of a busy concert or party environment, while some of us much prefer sitting reading a book alone on a quiet beach.

Even in the same 24 hour period, you often find yourself seeking sensations such as twirling your hair, rocking on your chair, flicking your pen, or sitting on your feet at the desk. However, you'll also possibly have moments of sensory quiet, where you like to have the bright lights turned off, the background noise turned down, etc.

It's important to always keep in mind, that we are all sensory human beings, children included. So a bright lit, noisy, busy classroom environment, may not suit all children, all of the time. That's why it's our role to create developmentally appropriate, and sensory friendly environments and play spaces that cater for all different sensory seeking, and sensory avoiding needs.

Because although the space may look stunning, and be photo worthy. Does it suit the children who need proprioception equipment to explore with their body? Does it suit the children who like to curl up in the corner with a cozy cushion and a book? Does it suit the children who like to gather in a group and play with blocks on the floor?

## In this handout we will explore

- How the early childhood environment can significantly impact a child's wellbeing, sensory processing, development, self-regulation and behaviour.
- How appropriate sensory experiences are vital to healthy brain development.
- How creating a supportive physical, social, and emotional environment can facilitate thriving in early childhood
- How the use of sensory-rich, and low sensory play spaces and activities can positively and/or negatively impact children's behaviour and engagement.

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

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## Sensory processing

The early childhood environment plays a crucial role in children's sensory development, which involves detecting, interpreting, and differentiating sensory information. For example, in a sensory space we detect the light from outside, beaming into the classroom and placing shadows onto the colourful rug on the ground. Our sensory system's role is to then interpret what this lighting and shadow means, and whether our brain needs to respond to this sensory information, or filter this sensory information out so we can pay attention to the other senses happening in the space.

Differentiating sensory information means knowing that the visual input of the shadow on the rug, is different to the visual input of a train track on the rug. A shadow we can step onto without causing any damage. Whereas, we may upset our friend if we step onto their train track, or may break the toys if we treat them in the same way we treat a shadow on the ground.

This development of our sensory behaviour occurs as children play and experience 3D, sensory rich, daily activities, and it is essential for their ability to engage in learning and perform tasks appropriately.

Children with sensory processing difficulties may have challenges related to sensory stimulation, which can impact their attention, concentration, and daily functioning.

While sensory processing typically develops naturally during childhood, it is increasingly recognised that environmental factors, such as the early care environment, screen time, and opportunities to explore through indoor and outdoor 3D, real world, play, can influence the development of sensory processing for children.

Therefore, creating a supportive environment that incorporates a range of sensory activities and provides predictable and structured spaces can enhance the attention, focus, play and social skills of children with sensory processing difficulties, as they learn to detect, interpret, and differentiate all of the different sensations in the space.

How I explain sensory processing in more details to educators and families is, imagine you have a classroom full of young children, each with their unique way of experiencing the world around them. Some children might be more sensitive to things like sounds, textures, or lights, while others may not notice these things as much. These differences in how children process sensory information are what we mean by "sensory processing".

Sensory processing doesn't just exist for children. We also see our sensory likes, dislikes, and unique sensory differences in a staff room. Some of us love to go to the staff room when it is busy, where we can enjoy the laughter and conversation with others.

Others prefer to go to the staff room for their lunch break when the staff room is dark, quiet, and a low sensory environment. No sensory profile is better or worse, right or wrong. It's great that we all have different sensory profiles, because that's what makes us unique, and that's what allows us as professionals to be able to empathise and engage with children who also have their own unique sensory profile.

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

## Create a designated quiet space

Establish a designated quiet space for children who need a break from the sensory or social input that you can feel in the room or play space.

- A sensory quiet space for children who are introverted or have sensory processing difficulties should be designed to provide a calming and comfortable environment. Based on research, try to provide these options as best you can:
  - Outside views:
    - Offer outside views with natural light but not too much sun, view of nature and greenery.
      - When we are exposed to soft natural light, it reduces our fight/flight response
      - When we can see nature, our body feels more connected and calm as we're human beings that are designed to be in touch with the real 3D natural world
  - Dim and adjustable lighting:
    - Create a space with dim lighting, away from visual clutter or harsh reflections/shadows
      - If needed, provide a tent, or table cloth over the top of a table, to create a space where children can hide away from the bright lighting and visual stimulation of a typical early childhood space
  - Limit noise:
    - Limit noise near the space to help the child regulate their sensory input and relax
      - You may need to add soft furnishings (sheets, cushions, rugs, blankets) to absorb some of the sound of other children playing
  - Soft and comforting elements:
    - Include soft textures, calming sensory experiences, and comfortable seating to create a soothing environment
      - Try to keep these soft elements only for the quiet area, so children can experience consistency with this space, and this may help to reduce their nervousness and anxiety

This designated quiet area should be clearly marked and equipped with comfortable seating and sensory-friendly elements, allowing children to retreat when they need a break from sensory stimulation or social interactions.

Also ensure that this designated quiet area is protected from noise and busy play. For example, if children want to play and be busy with their peers, encourage these children to play in the more sensory-rich play zone, leaving this quiet area available for the children who need the quiet, low sensory environment, and relaxing activity options. Maybe build a second forte, or small covered play space where one of these fortes is for quiet time, and one is for social and busy play time.



# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

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## Comforting, sensory elements

When I think of a play space, I use my skills and knowledge in developmental education, interior design, and as a mum of a daughter who is very introverted.

It's of course important to create spaces that foster play and learning, but we also need to be mindful that not all children have the social energy, or sensory processing skills, to play and be around children all day.

The important of play space design is creating zones that cater to children who seek sensory input, children who like times of play on the floor, children who enjoy sitting at table activities, as well as children who enjoy taking a break from the busyness of a group play environment.

When you're looking to create comforting spaces for toddlers and children who prefer relaxing in quiet corners, the following items can be helpful:

- **Calming Treasure Baskets:** To provide sensory stimulation for children in quiet spaces, change up these treasure basket items each fortnight:
  - **Soft Fabrics:** Include a variety of soft and textured fabrics such as velvet, satin, fleece, or faux fur. These fabrics can be soothing to touch and explore and easily sourced from the scrap fabrics bin at Spotlight
  - **Feathers** can provide a gentle and tactile sensory experience as children run their fingers over them.
  - **Silk Scarves** can create visual interest and offer a delicate tactile experience when feeling stressed or overwhelmed.
  - **Sensory Balls:** Be sure to teach children that these balls are only for squeezing or rolling up and down your arms and legs. There is a separate tub of balls for playing rolling, throwing, and kicking games.
  - **Soft Bean Bags:** Small bean bags filled with soft materials offer a gentle and squeezable texture for tactile exploration. Again, remind children that there are a tub of bean bags for relaxing, and a tub of bean bags for throwing and catching.
  - **Natural Materials:** Incorporate natural items like pinecones, smooth stones, or seashells. These items offer tactile exploration and connect children with the natural world.
  - **Soft Brushes:** Soft bristle brushes can be used for gentle tactile stimulation on the skin or to brush over different textures for a calming sensation

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

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Comforting, sensory element examples



## Comforting, sensory elements continued

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- **Pom-Poms:** Soft and fluffy pom-poms in different sizes and colors provide a pleasant texture for children to touch and explore.
- **Soft Chews or Teething Toys:** With supervision, you can include soft chews or teething toys designed for oral sensory exploration. Teething toys aren't just beneficial for babies. These resources can also stimulate the vagus nerve and reduce stress and anxiety for older children.
- **Scented Sachets:** Include scented sachets with calming scents like lavender or chamomile. These sachets can engage the sense of smell and promote relaxation.
- **Soft Texture Books:** Books with soft and textured pages can engage both touch and visual senses as children explore the textures while reading.
- **Soft Sponges:** Soft sponges or makeup applicator sponges can be used for gentle tactile exploration and can be moistened for added sensory input. When children apply gentle sensory input to their face, they are stimulating their vagus nerve, which helps to reduce stress and anxiety quickly.
- **Ribbon Rings:** Attach ribbons of different colors and textures to a wooden or plastic ring for children to hold and manipulate.
- **Sensory Tent or Quiet Forte:**
  - As mentioned previously, create a dedicated space with limited noise and adjustable lighting to help children regulate their sensory input and relax through a sensory tent or sheets that create a quiet and calm forte.
- **Soft Cushions and Pillows:**
  - Plush and comfortable cushions and pillows create cozy and inviting spaces where children can relax and unwind. Choose a variety of textures and colors to cater to different sensory preferences.



- **Weighted Blankets:**
  - Weighted blankets can provide a sense of security and comfort for children who seek deep pressure. Be sure to contact an allied health professional about which weight the blanket should be for the child, as typically the weight of the weighted blanket should be 8 to 10% of the child's body weight.
  - Weighted blankets can be used during quiet time or mat time to help children feel more grounded and relaxed. However, avoid using weighted blankets for more than 20 minutes in a row, as the weight of the blanket will lose its impact on the nervous system after 20 minutes due to a sensory/neurological process called habituation.

## Comforting, sensory elements continued

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- **Sensory Lighting:**
  - Consider using calming sensory lighting, such as softly glowing LED lights, fiber optic lights, or light projectors that create soothing visual effects. These can help create a calming atmosphere in quiet corners.
  - Make sure the sensory lighting has an on/off switch out of reach of the child. You can turn the lighting on or off depending on whether this type of sensation is calming the child, or heightening (agitating) the child.
- **Calming Music or Sound Machines:**
  - Use soft and soothing background music or sound machines with nature sounds like ocean waves or gentle rain. These auditory cues can help children relax and reduce anxiety.
  - Nursery sound machines are often portable and easy to operate. Make sure they are not battery operated as it will be hard to constantly supervise children with batteries when in the quiet area.
- **Gentle Fidget Tools:**
  - Offer discreet fidget tools like stress balls, putty, or tangles that children can manipulate quietly in their hands when they need sensory input to self-regulate.
  - Make sure children are aware that these fidget tools are only to be used in the quiet area, to ensure that these resources don't go missing.
- **Calming Sensory Bottles:**
  - Create plastic sensory bottles filled with water, glitter, and calming objects. These bottles can be shaken gently to provide a mesmerising visual and auditory experience that can help soothe children.
- **Soft Blankets and Lap Pads:**
  - Soft, cozy blankets and lap pads with textures like fleece or minky fabric can be used to provide gentle sensory input and comfort during quiet time or while sitting.
- **Quiet Activity Kits:**
  - Prepare quiet activity kits with colouring pages, crayons, puzzles, and other low-stimulation activities that children can engage in while enjoying their quiet space.
  - I understand colouring pages can sometimes be deemed as templates. However, some neurodivergent children enjoy the predictability and structure of templates, so it's important to match the sensory strategy with the children's needs who are using this space.
- **Soft Rugs or Carpets:**
  - Provide soft rugs or carpets with inviting patterns or textures that children can sit or lie on comfortably. These rugs define the space and make it more inviting.
  - Rugs also reduce the sound and echo of the space, making this area more calming for children with sensory processing difficulties, or need a sensory reset.

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

## Sensory processing

When observing your early childhood spaces with a sensory processing lens, it's important to not just provide a sensory tub, water play table, weighted blankets, and/or fidget toys.

We need to take a step back and look at all of the elements of the sensory space, including:

- Shadows from windows, doors, and lighting
- Lighting (is it adjustable? bright? dull? distracting?)
- Background sounds (fridge, fan)
- Furniture (colour, texture, height, temperature, sound)
- Flooring (warm carpet, cold tiles, echo floorboards, range of rug textures)
- Colours on the walls (calm? inviting? intense? distracting?)
- Hanging decorations
- Smells (are they near the kitchen, cleaning products, outdoor play space, toilets)
- Crowded play areas (too many toys, resources, children all in one area)
- Cluttered play spaces (items not labelled or zoned)
- Excessive movement
- Loud music (too loud and too upbeat)
- Busy patterns
- Temperature extremes (very hot or cold)
- Vibrations (rumbling washing machine, fridge)
- Sudden touch (children brushing past, unexpected physical contact)

Understanding and addressing these sensory elements in the early childhood environment can help create a more inclusive and comfortable space for all children, especially those with sensory sensitivities.

The first step is looking at your spaces with a sensory processing lens, and completing the checklist on the next page.



# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

## Indoor checklist for a child who is sensitive to sensory input

| ✓ | Check these sensory elements                                                                       | Action needed | Completed |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
|   | Check for harsh or flickering lights that could be overwhelming for children.                      |               |           |
|   | Identify loud noises or equipment that might be distressing to children.                           |               |           |
|   | Assess any strong or overpowering scents                                                           |               |           |
|   | Consider if wall decorations are too busy or visually overwhelming.                                |               |           |
|   | Evaluate the level of clutter and disorganisation in the indoor area.                              |               |           |
|   | Check if the wall colours are too bright or bold, potentially causing too much visual stimulation. |               |           |
|   | Check if there are any unnecessary items hanging from the wall or roof that could be distracting.  |               |           |
|   | Be aware of blinking or flashing lights                                                            |               |           |
|   | Ensure play areas are not overcrowded with too many toys and children.                             |               |           |
|   | Listen for high-pitched voices or noises that could be agitating.                                  |               |           |
|   | Identify any rough or abrasive materials in furniture or play equipment.                           |               |           |
|   | Assess if glaring sunlight through windows might be visually overwhelming.                         |               |           |
|   | Determine if the volume of music is too loud                                                       |               |           |
|   | Ensure the indoor temperature is comfortable and not extreme.                                      |               |           |

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

## Indoor checklist for a child who seeks sensory input

| ✓ | Check these sensory elements                                                                                                                | Action needed | Completed |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
|   | Check for adjustable lighting options that can provide added visual input, such as colourful mood lighting, light tables, etc.              |               |           |
|   | Identify loud noises or equipment that might be distressing to children.                                                                    |               |           |
|   | Ensure there are portable sensory items like scented sachets or herb gardens that children can use for calming scents when needed each day. |               |           |
|   | Consider adding sensory wall panels or interactive sensory art that children can engage with for tactile stimulation.                       |               |           |
|   | Create designated sensory corners with sensory bins filled with items like squishy stress balls or textured fidgets.                        |               |           |
|   | Offer sensory-friendly wall decals or removable sensory wall coverings that children can interact with.                                     |               |           |
|   | Designate areas with sensory swings, Bilibo chairs, or small climbing frames for children seeking movement.                                 |               |           |
|   | Provide children with portable white noise or calming music machines for auditory input.                                                    |               |           |
|   | Place portable textured mats or sensory cushions in seating/rug areas for tactile input.                                                    |               |           |
|   | Offer sensory kits with items like stress balls, textured fabrics, or putty that children can use when seeking tactile stimulation.         |               |           |

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

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## Designing for sensory seekers

As important as it is to create a quiet zone for children to relax. We also need to cater for children who are sensory seeking - often observed rolling across the floor, flitting from one sensory activity to another, climbing furniture, playing with water in the bathroom, calling out across the room, running from one end of the space to the other, etc.

Sensory-seeking children often:

- Roll on the floor, climb on furniture, and/or engage in spinning and running activities to stimulate their proprioceptive and vestibular senses - they need more proprioception and vestibular equipment (rocking chairs, soft crashmats, cushions to snuggle up in, standing play spaces, crawling tunnels, small forties to squeeze into)
- Constantly explore textures and tactile sensations by touching, squeezing, or rubbing objects - they need a range of different sensory tubs and activities - water, sand, seashells, shredded paper, rice, shaving cream, glue, pasta, lentils, pom poms, leaves and twigs, dried herbs, dried flowers, rubber bands, sponges, tinsel, cotton balls, fabric scraps, stones and jewels, buttons, feathers, etc.

Creating a sensory-friendly play space for sensory-seeking children requires thoughtfulness and creativity, and at times a mindset shift, as we're often nervous to add in more movement activities into an already busy indoor space. However, if we add in more movement for children every 30 to 45 minutes, then take the movement resources back out of the space, children will feel more regulated, focused, and settled. Compared to avoiding adding more movement into the space, and instead children climb the furniture, crash blocks, roll across the floor, etc.

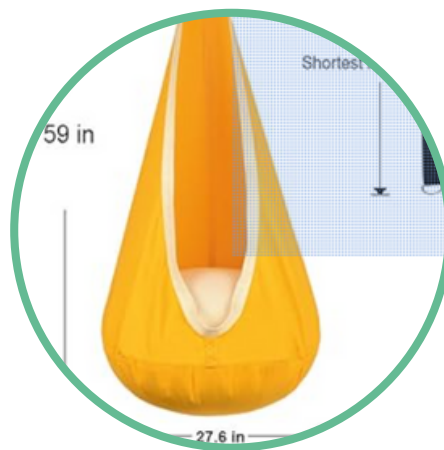
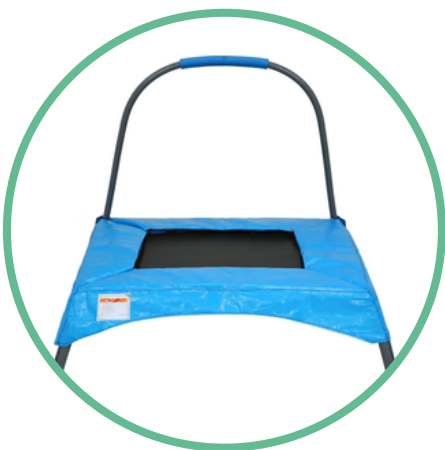
To make setting up sensory-seeking spaces easier:

- Designate different sensory zones within the play space using rugs, room dividers, or signs.
  - Have areas for tactile play (sensory bins with various textures), gross motor play (climbing structures, crash mats), and vestibular play (swings or spinning equipment). This ensures that sensory-seeking children can choose activities that meet their sensory needs.
- Use sensory-friendly flooring options such as foam mats or soft carpets in areas where children may engage in rolling or tumbling activities. This provides a safe and comfortable surface.
- Incorporate structured activities that offer sensory input, such as yoga or obstacle courses every 30 to 45 minutes (ideally outdoor activities, then come back into the indoor space after 15 to 30 minutes being outdoors), to channel sensory-seeking behaviors in a more constructive way.
- Install climbing frames, bilibo chairs, balance beams, lycra socks, and tunnels to encourage physical activity and sensory input throughout the day.
- Set up a water play area, such as a water table or splash pad, where children can engage in sensory-rich experiences while staying cool and having fun.
  - This will reduce the amount of water play currently happening in the bathroom
- Offer flexible seating options like stability balls, wobble stools, or sensory cushions at meal times for children who benefit from movement while sitting. Or provide children with a picnic rug to sit on while eating on the ground.

# Understanding the importance of **Play Spaces**

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## Indoor proprioception/vestibular resources

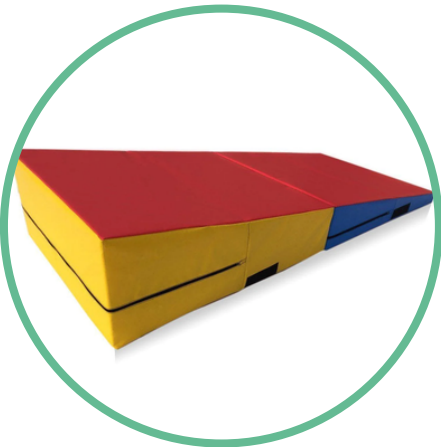
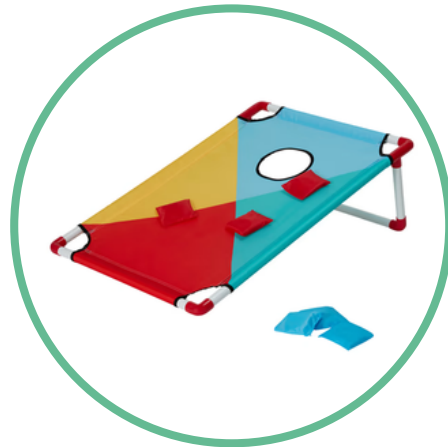


# Understanding the importance of **Play Spaces**

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## Outdoor proprioception/vestibular resources



# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

## Outdoor checklist for a child who is sensitive to sensory input

| ✓ | Check these sensory elements                                                       | Action needed | Completed |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
|   | Consider the intensity of sunlight and its effect on visual comfort.               |               |           |
|   | Listen for loud outdoor noises that may be overwhelming.                           |               |           |
|   | Assess the presence of natural scents, like flowers or trees, in the outdoor area. |               |           |
|   | Evaluate outdoor decorations or structures for visual overwhelm.                   |               |           |
|   | Check for excessive outdoor clutter or disorganisation.                            |               |           |
|   | Consider the visual impact of natural elements, like brightly coloured flowers.    |               |           |
|   | Be mindful of equipment that involves intense movement or sensory input.           |               |           |
|   | Consider temperature, wind, and other weather-related sensory factors.             |               |           |
|   | Evaluate the use of patterns in outdoor materials or surfaces.                     |               |           |
|   | Identify natural textures, like grass or sand, that may impact tactile comfort.    |               |           |
|   | Be aware of any outdoor smells, that can impact sensory experiences.               |               |           |

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

## Outdoor checklist for a child who seeks sensory input

| ✓ | Check these sensory elements                                                                                                                                                                | Action needed | Completed |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
|   | Include musical chimes, sensory wind chimes, or outdoor musical instruments for auditory stimulation.                                                                                       |               |           |
|   | Plant sensory gardens with scented flowers and herbs that children can explore and care for each day.                                                                                       |               |           |
|   | Add portable sensory art installations or interactive sensory outdoor panels and pipes for STEM play.                                                                                       |               |           |
|   | Create sensory vegetable gardens with a variety of textured plants and herbs that children can touch, smell, and taste to engage their senses while learning about gardening and nutrition. |               |           |
|   | Offer sensory-seeking equipment like swings, climbing walls, crash mats, or balance beams.                                                                                                  |               |           |
|   | Provide sensory items for various weather conditions, such as sensory-friendly umbrellas, wind chimes, or windsocks.                                                                        |               |           |
|   | Use sensory-friendly outdoor materials like natural wood, smooth stones, or soft grass/sand areas.                                                                                          |               |           |
|   | Install nature sound stations with recorded sounds of birds, insects, and gentle rustling leaves to provide calming auditory stimulation.                                                   |               |           |
|   | Create tactile nature trails with various textures like bark, sand, smooth stones, and gravel for children to explore through touch as they walk or crawl.                                  |               |           |
|   | Include sensory-friendly seating options like rocking benches or hammocks for children to enjoy gentle movement and sensory input while relaxing outdoors.                                  |               |           |
|   | Set up sensory water play stations with features like bubbling fountains, textured water tables, and waterfalls that children can explore through touch and sound.                          |               |           |



# How to reduce the echo

Echo occurs when sound waves bounce off hard surfaces, such as walls, ceilings, and floors, without being absorbed. Acoustic panels and absorbing materials are designed to reduce sound reflections.

The way furniture is arranged in a space can influence sound reflections. Spacing furniture, such as bookshelves, tables, and cabinets, can break up sound waves and prevent them from traveling in a straight path, reducing echo. Additionally, incorporating soft furnishings, like couches and cushions, can absorb sound.



## Use of Absorbent Materials:

- Placing bookshelves with books, or room dividers with toys can help absorb sound and disperse echoes, creating a more acoustically balanced environment
- Cork placemats for table play stations, or felt placements for the craft area, can help to absorb sound and reduce echo



## Strategic Placement of Soft Furnishings:

- Positioning soft items such as foam mats, area rugs, and tapestries on parallel walls or the floor can disrupt the reflection of sound waves, thus reducing echo
- Introducing soft furnishings like curtains, cushions, and felt tiles can help absorb sound and minimise echo in the space



## Consideration of Room Layout and Surfaces:

- Evenly scattering high-frequency absorption materials throughout the room can contribute to reducing echo and creating a more balanced acoustic environment
- Arrange furniture to create alcoves and corners that break up sound reflections.

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

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## Rotation of Sensory Stations

Sensory play is a cornerstone of learning and development and often overlooked.

Children engage with their senses to explore, discover, and make sense of the world around them. Since the introduction of 2D, sedentary screens, children need sensory play now more than ever before.

One effective strategy to enhance sensory play experiences is the rotation of sensory stations. This approach not only keeps things fresh and exciting for children but also allows educators to cater to various sensory needs.

The frequency of these rotations can vary depending on the sensory needs and interests of your group, but a common recommendation is to refresh the stations every 2 to 3 weeks as most children attend your service part-time each week.

This practice of rotating sensory stations ensures that children encounter new sensory experiences regularly, but also children are given the opportunity to practice each sensory activity more than just once or twice.

While introducing new activities is important for engaging children and keeping things fresh, it's equally important not to change things too soon. Repetition plays a significant role in a child's learning and sensory development. Children don't master a skill or concept with just one exposure; it takes time and practice. Sensory play is no different.

Revisiting sensory activities allows them to deepen their understanding and develop vital skills. It builds their confidence, refines motor skills, expands vocabulary, and solidifies sensory preferences.

A sensory station rotation strategy often used is to maintain a core set of 6 to 7 sensory stations consistently each week while introducing/swapping 2 or 3 new stations during each rotation (every 2 to 3 weeks).

This rotation of activities ensures that there is a balance between familiar activities that children enjoy and new, stimulating challenges.

# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

## Rotation of Sensory Stations

Here are some examples of sensory stations to help get you started:

- **Sensory Bin with Rice and Hidden Objects:** Children can dig through a bin filled with uncooked rice to discover hidden treasures like small toys, beads, or buttons.
- **Water Sensory Table:** Provide a water table with floating toys, sponges, and containers for pouring and splashing fun.
- **Playdough Creations:** Set up a playdough station with different colors and tools for sculpting and moulding.
- **Texture Wall:** Create a tactile wall with fabrics of various textures stuck to cardboard, then blu-taked to the wall, allowing children to touch and explore different materials.
- **Nature Exploration:** Offer a nature-themed station with leaves, pinecones, and twigs for tactile and visual exploration.
- **Scented Sensory Jars:** Fill clear jars with scented materials like dried lavender, cinnamon sticks, or citrus peels for olfactory stimulation.
- **Sensory Art:** Provide a station for finger painting, using different textures like sand or rice mixed into the paint.
- **Sound Station:** Include musical instruments or items that make sounds when shaken, tapped, or rubbed for auditory exploration.

In 2 to 3 weeks, here are 3 new sensory stations to swap in:

- **Kinetic Sand:** Introduce kinetic sand, offering children a tactile and mouldable experience. Include small toys like shovels and buckets for added exploration.
- **Bubble Wrap:** Lay out a large piece of bubble wrap for kids to stomp on, pop, and roll across, providing both tactile and auditory sensations.
- **Sensory Rainbow Rice:** Replace the regular rice bin with rainbow-colored rice made by dyeing rice grains with different food colors. Children can sift, pour, and explore the vibrant colors and varied textures.



# Understanding the importance of Play Spaces

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## Emotional wellbeing

The emotional atmosphere of an early childhood environment is crucial for all of our well-being.

You can feel it yourself when you walk into a room whether the environment is welcoming and nurturing or not.

Imagine a warm and nurturing environment with caring adults and positive relationships.

Your friend, colleagues or manager welcomes you into the room with a big warm smile, maybe a hug or high 5, and gestures for you to come and join them to sit down, play, read a book, or share a meal.

Through your non-verbal cues and gestures you are creating a sense of security and attachment for children and adults.

These small moments instantly make adults and children feel safe, visible, and loved. It's in these small moments that you are more likely to develop healthy self-esteem, emotional regulation, and resilience.

What your environment feels like for a child, is quite similar to what we need to feel connected in an environment. For example, now imagine a child entering the room, feeling anxious and unsure. The teacher, administration staff, or educator warmly welcomes the child, offers a comforting hug or high 5, and reassures them that it's okay to be nervous. Over time, the child builds trust and forms a secure attachment with the adult, leading to increased confidence and a sense of emotional security throughout the day.



# Emotional Wellbeing Checklist

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## Are there welcoming and nurturing adults present in the environment?

- **Achieved:** Adults consistently greet children warmly, maintain eye contact, and use positive body language to create a welcoming atmosphere.
  - **Not Achieved Yet:** Adults appear disengaged from children's emotional needs, creating a less welcoming environment.
- 



## Is there a designated quiet space for children who need a break?

- **Achieved:** A clearly marked, comfortable, and quiet area is available for children to retreat when they need a break from sensory stimulation or social interactions.
- **Not Achieved Yet:** No designated quiet space is available, and children may struggle to find a peaceful retreat.



## Are there comforting sensory elements like soft cushions, blankets, or weighted items available?

- **Achieved:** Sensory elements such as soft textures, cozy blankets, or weighted lap pads are accessible for children to self-regulate and find comfort.
  - **Not Achieved Yet:** The environment lacks comforting sensory items, limiting opportunities for children to seek comfort when needed.
- 



## Are children encouraged to express their emotions, and are their feelings acknowledged and validated?

- **Achieved:** Educators actively encourage children to express their emotions, and they respond with empathy, validating children's feelings.
- **Not Achieved Yet:** Children's emotional expressions may be ignored or dismissed, leading to unmet emotional needs.





# Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to explore this article on sensory-friendly environments and strategies in early childhood education.

I hope you found the information valuable.

Creating sensory-friendly spaces for children is a vital aspect of promoting their well-being, self-regulation, and development.

I appreciate your dedication to creating inclusive and enriching environments for children of all abilities, and I'm always here if you have any questions or require further support,

## Contact Information :



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