



FIRST WORDS Project Infant Toddler Play Group

Session 5: Learning through the Senses

Our senses play a very important role in the learning process. Through our senses we gain new information and learn about our environment. This includes hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling to explore. In addition, there are two other ways our body gains information, through proprioception and vestibular input. Proprioception is the sensation we get from the movement of our joints and muscles. Vestibular input tells where our body is in space and how it is moving.

We rarely use one sense to learn. Our senses are constantly working together to help us form a total picture of an experience. Children learn about their world and begin to understand it by hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling and moving in it. When presented with a new toy, your child might touch it, smell it, squeeze it, look at it, and shake it to see if it makes a noise.

Because children are active learners, it is very important that they are **ACTIVELY** involved in the learning process. This means that children need to try things for themselves, using their hands and their senses to learn and experiment. Language added to these experiences help children to understand what they are doing and helps them to organize the sensory information.

When adding language, try to use words that would describe to your child what each sense might be experiencing.

For example:

What do you see? big or little, colors, bright or dark, pretty or ugly

What do you hear? loud or soft, singing, bells, sirens

How does it smell? nice or smelly

How does it taste? sweet or salty or sour, good or bad

How does it feel? wet or dry, soft or hard, hot or cold, rough or smooth, heavy or light

Your child will learn more if he or she is **ACTIVELY** involved in the experience. Providing these opportunities for your child can teach him or her important developmental skills (such as in and out, dump and fill) and language concepts (such as requesting and commenting). As you try different sensory play activities use words to help your child to learn about the activity. **It's important to get messy!** Your child needs to **FEEL** for himself or herself, taste it (if appropriate), squeeze it and maybe even throw it to see what it does. It is also important to let your child **STAY** messy for as long as he or she is involved with the activity (or until he or she requests to be cleaned off). As your child is involved in getting messy you can comment on the mess or talk about what body parts are messy. It is best if you are also **ACTIVELY** involved so that you and your child share the same sensory experience and can use words to describe it.

Adapted from Wortman, R. (1988). Using all the senses to learn. In M. Schrader (Ed.), Parent articles 1. Tuscon, AZ: Communication Skill Builders.

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FIRST WORDS Project 625 B North Adams Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301 - <http://firstwords.fsu.edu> (850) 488-5780
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