Activities and ideas for learning at home for children with Severe and Profound Needs



Routine / Timetables / Schedules:

Many schools use timetables / schedules to offer a routine for students. Routine is important for children and parents alike. A child is likely to do best when their day is structured. Try your best to build a routine and to help your child understand what that routine is. Creating a structure that involves different types of activities according to the day could be useful, for instance:

Monday = Art



Tuesday = Music



Wednesday = Sensory



Thursday = Story



Friday = Toys



Although, typically a child will be engaging in all of the above throughout each day, it can be useful to provide a focus within their day.

To help a child to engage and understand what will be happening during the day it is useful to use "Objects of Reference". Put the objects that would represent the task into a basket, e.g. a tub of paint for art, a story book for story time. Show the child this object, also using the word and allowing them to hold the object, before they engage in the task. This will help to build up familiarity and understanding of their day, activity and language. More information can be found through the NCSE website: https://www.sess.ie/categories/general-learning-disabilities/severe-/-profound-general-learning-disability/tips-learning

Building in activities where children can help in daily household tasks within their capabilities is a great way to enhance independence and responsibility as well as work on motor skills. Teachers and parents know their child's abilities best, so choose whatever chore / task will suit them best. Some ideas for this are listed below:

Learning through helping at home:

- **Helping with making meals -** washing vegetables, pressing buttons for mixers / smoothie makers, stirring and mixing etc.
- **Baking and cooking –** weighing, measuring, pouring, stirring etc. - some ideas can be found at this website below: www.accessiblechef.com
- **Watering plants –** filling and pouring water
- **Helping to load / unload** - dishwasher, washing machine and drier
- **Folding laundry –** sorting clothes by colour / family member
- **Taking care of pets –** feeding / walking / washing
- **General household tasks –** Sweeping, mopping**,** polishing, making their bed, matching socks etc.

Sensory Activities: A variety of sensory 'trays' or 'boxes' can be created encouraging different types of sensory exploration. Sensory fun can stimulate children to interact, initiate and respond to varying stimuli.

A useful resource for parents of older students can be found at TalkSense: https://talksense.weebly.com/self-control.html Other ideas could include:

- **Dried Pasta** – Any variety of pasta can be put in a bowl and your child encouraged to feel, hold and explore it. Pasta can also be put into bottles or jars to shake creating an aural sensory activity. Child can scoop and pour pasta and watch them fall back into the bowl
- **Cooked Pasta** – Spaghetti works very well for this activity. Food colouring can be added to create exciting visually attractive pasta. Follow this link: https://handsonaswegrow.com/sensory-activity-spaghetti-potion/
- **Flour** – Wet or dry – paint, food colouring, smells can be added to create a fun, messy activity
- **Cornflour** – When water is added to cornflour it creates a uniquely textured activity that some children will love to engage with
- **Treasure Box** – Using shredded paper or card to hide favourite toys / foods and encouraging the child to search through encourages interaction and excitement
- **Bubbles** – As well as blowing bubbles for your child to watch and see where they might land, children can be encouraged to develop their facial muscles by blowing bubbles themselves
- **Washing-Up-Liquid Foam –** Using a blender or whisk, washing-up-liquid and a small bit of water (add food colouring and/or smell if desired or tolerated) blend altogether until it is nice and thick. Have fun dipping hands / objects – feeling and smelling
- **Ice Cubes –** Again colour / smell-safe, small objects such as pompoms can be added to the water before it is frozen. Lots of great activities can be found here: https://www.learning4kids.net/2012/10/14/sensory-play-for-toddlers-kids-ice-world/
- **Varying Pureed Foods –** A safe activity to encourage different tastes and smells with children. Begin by offering familiar foods, including newer tastes and textures as the child allows

Music, Movement and Singing Activities: A fun way to develop language, rhyme & rhythm and number concepts. Great to help with motor activities if actions suitable to your individual child are incorporated. You can use homemade instruments like pots, pans or plastic tubs as a drum or instruments made during art sessions for music activities too.

A very useful website for songs for music time is: https://www.songsforteaching.com/specialneeds.htm

Go Noodle is another useful site where children can hear, watch and join in with activity songs: https://www.gonoodle.com/

- There are many YouTube channels with great content, for example: https://www.youtube.com/user/wearebusybeavers
  https://www.youtube.com/user/SesameStreet
  https://www.youtube.com/user/TheLearningStation

Some other ideas could include:

- **Action Songs** – reinforce language, learning and encourage co-ordination
- **Imagination Songs** – children can make up their own verses for favourite songs / rhymes – for instance "Old MacDonald" or "We're all going to the Zoo" children can choose all types of wonderful animals to include in this song – make up their own names, sounds, actions
- **Repetition Songs** – singing along with and copying a parent / sibling can aid with working memory and language development
- **Counting Songs** – E.g. "One, two, three four, five once I caught a fish alive" or "Five Little Speckled Frogs"
- **Sequencing Songs** – "There's a hole in my bucket"
- **Body Parts as Instruments** – Either the parent creates a sound on their own body or on child's body (if tolerated), for instance – clapping, tapping on leg using hand or fingers, or perhaps a spatula. Teachers of pupils with severe or profound needs often use a resource called TacPac (can be bought) but by having a look at some YouTube videos you will get an idea as to how this might be a useful activity for you and your child. One link can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xBhMd20vyE

Story Activities: A variety of story 'bags' can be created to encourage different types of learning exploration. Story bags can stimulate children to interact, initiate and respond to varying stimuli. Story telling / listening while using visuals / objects assists to encourage language and communication.

One story bag idea: The Three Little Pigs - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG9P-i2mqqg or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3d9gmjwG6DU for YouTube videos of different ideas for this. (A similar type of activity can be created using any favourite book / rhyme and items that may be found around the house)

- **In your bag you could have:**
    - 3 soft / farm animal pigs (I used my daughters Peppa Pig Family) or during art time 3 pig masks could be made
    - Stuffed dog teddy to represent the wolf
    - Straw / sticks / stones (or these houses could be made during art activities)

Show and allow the child to touch and interact with each object as it arises in the story. It is great to be really animated whilst reading and do different voices / actions etc. so as to engage the child in many different learning opportunities as possible.

Twinkl is currently free during this period and there are a wide variety of resources available to support learning and creating story bags: https://www.twinkl.ie/resource/t-t-5945-the-three-little-pigs-story-sack-resource-pack

Oxford Owl – have a range of eBooks developed for children aged 3 – 11. Lots of interactive and interesting stories to watch and listen to: https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/books/free-ebooks/

Art Activities: very helpful in the development of fine motor skills. Also proven to be very therapeutic and help to enhance language and communication.

- **Play-Doh / homemade dough** – rolling / pulling / squeezing / pinching – encourage your child to help you to make some homemade dough. A recipe for homemade dough can be found at: https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/playdough-recipe
  Adding a scent such as mint or lavender helps to create a very inviting sensory activity
- **Colouring –** using small thick crayons to colour on different materials e.g. paper or card over sandpaper/bubble wrap/corrugated card
- **Sponge Art –** dipping your sponges of different sizes / textures into paint and pressing onto card to create a picture - squeezing to wring out water and paint is great for strengthening hands and forearms
- **Finger / hand / foot painting –** as above but have sensory fun encouraging your child to use different body parts
- **Making musical instruments –** using anything that you may have that will encourage making noise by banging with hand or beater etc. For instance, biscuit tin covered in paper or decorated with feathers / buttons, rice in a carton to shake etc.
- **Marble Art –** using a tray (I find a biscuit tin works well) lined with paper – allow your child to dip marbles into different colour paints drop into the tray / tin and roll around to create fun, colourful finished pieces of art. Slightly bigger balls can be used also if easier to manipulate
- **Egg carton and fruit / vegetable stamping** – using different sizes and textures of objects or food that can be easily grasped and held to dip in paint and stamp with is a fun way to develop fine motor skills

Art Activities *(continued)*:

- **Shaving cream art** – a very sensory fun activity that allows for arm / hand gross motor development. Squirt foam on appropriate surface, using hands and arms to mix in paint / food colour if desired, and enjoy feeling and watching what happens to the foam. Can be used to make handprints on paper too.
- **Baking and decorating** – what could be more fun than a yummy finished product for all to enjoy!
- **Cutting and using scissors –** often using card instead of paper helps with practising this skill

Lots more good ideas can be found through the Bright Hub Education website: https://www.brighthubeducation.com/special-ed-inclusion-strategies/125732-guide-to-modified-art-activities-and-lesson-plans/

Learning through play and toys: Piaget (1962) states that the manipulation of objects is a condition for cognitive development and stresses the play activity per se as the child's way of exploring the world. According to Vygotsky, play is knowledge intermediary, learning orientated and its aim is to fulfil unsatisfied desires. Winnicott on the other hand stresses the importance of play for establishing social relations. However, play is a dominant activity during childhood and appears essential to child development (Linder, 1993; Schaeffer, 1993).

Basically play is a great learning tool for all children.

Cause and Effect Toys: promote visual motor and grasping skills, encourage hand-eye coordination and allows children to experience a reaction to their action – e.g. pressing a button creates a visual or aural response**.**

- Shape sorters, pop-up toys, water squirters, light up toys

Learning through play and toys *(continued)*:

Puzzles: offers cognition development and improves reasoning skills. Gives children the opportunity to work on fine motor control.

- Peg puzzles (those with pegs to grasp and insert into correct shape) and connecting or jigsaw puzzles can be used. Strong, big shape wooden puzzles are great.

Fidget Toys: a good option for busy hands. These toys can help with self-regulation, assists concentration and can support during periods of anxiety.

- Koosh or squeezable tactile balls
- Noise making toys like bells, clackers or clappers
- Play Doh or homemade Doug

Oral Motor Stimulators: designed to either engage or go into a child's mouth. A great activity for those that crave or need to develop oral motor activity – chewing, swallowing etc. Chewy Tubes, chewable jewellery, whistles, bubbles

Sensory Toys: can support children's responses to sensory stimuli in a safe and non-threatening way. Sensory toys offer experiences that can calm children and focus their attention. Allow the child to show you, through their actions and verbalisations, what sensory toys and experiences that they like best - see sensory activities above. Some more activities might include:

- Light up toys
- Water / Sand Tables
- Finger Painting
- Mini trampolines
- Swings