

Sensory Building Blocks home learning

Introduction

Sensory Building Blocks is a programme supporting children's visual access and visual stimulation. Children at home, in nurseries and in special schools may follow this programme. If you are unsure about if your child follows this programme or what their level of vision is, please contact your child's VI teacher. Your child's VI teacher would be more than happy to give you some specific activity ideas for your child. Contact details are below.

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Sensory Building blocks assess children on what they can do with their vision. The levels of vision used in this programme are:

Aware

Attends

Track

Transfer gaze

Scan

Recognise

Understand

Awareness

Pupils working within awareness are able to or beginning to show awareness of something in their field of vision. You can tell by a consistent change in behaviour like a pause, vocalisation or change in breathing. If your child is working at this level some ideas for activities are:

- Make the room as dark as you can and then turn the main light on. Look to see if your child notices this. Do not flash the lights for children with seizures.

- Use a torch or light up toy in a dark room, hold it in front of your child. Hold it in different positions and watch for their reaction. Try giving it a slight wobble to attract their attention.
- Allow your child time to look at any sensory lights you have, a dark room is better for this.
- Use any large shiny things you have in the house, let your child hold them or play with them if they are able. Add a torch to make it sparkle more. Items like shiny wrapping paper, tinsel, the bag from inside wine boxes, or holographic giftbags. Tin cans and tinfoil are also nice but beware of sharp edges and cover with Sellotape.
- Add sounds to the above e.g. rice to an empty can and taped up, water in a bottle wrapped in shiny paper, a bell or keys in a shiny gift bag. Your child may enjoy playing with these items and making noises themselves. The sounds may also encourage them to give their visual attention
- Very bright neon fabric makes a lovely tent for your child to sit inside and encourage visual stimulation, especially as it removes other stimuli for children who may struggle to focus. You could hold it round your child or hanging from a clothes airer

Attends

A more specific response where the child is able to distinguish between objects and people.

- Use any lights you have (torches, light up toys, electric candles) and in a dark room encourage your child to look at the light. A slight movement or wobble can help some children to focus
- Use any large shiny things you have in the house, let your child hold them or play with them if they are able. Add a torch to make it sparkle more. Items like shiny wrapping paper, tinsel, the bag from inside wine boxes, the backs of CDs or holographic giftbags. Tin cans and tinfoil are also nice but beware of sharp edges and cover with Sellotape.

- Add sounds to the above e.g. rice to an empty can and taped up, water in a bottle wrapped in shiny paper, a bell or keys in a shiny gift bag. Your child may enjoy playing with these items and making noises themselves. The sounds may also encourage them to give their visual attention
- Large brightly coloured toys/objects can also get your child's visual attention. The bigger and brighter the better e.g. beachball, balloon, teddy, plain coloured paper. Single colours may be better to focus on.
- Observe how long your child focuses on the above objects and aim to increase that time gradually. They might only be able to focus for 1 second at first, as it can be really hard work for them when they are learning to look.
- Try holding things in different places. Some children can see better to one side or in one corner of their vision, others right in the middle. Find the best position for your child for when you are trying something new.
- Try wearing a brightly coloured hat, wig or sunglasses to encourage your child to focus on your face. Be silly with them to get their interest

Localise

A child can locate an object accurately and can track, transfer gaze between 2 objects, and scan an area to find something

Track

- Using lights, large shiny items and large brightly coloured objects, encourage your child to focus on the items you are using then begin to move it slowly across. Some children may not follow it smoothly and look away then back as you move it.
- Once your child is able to follow a moving object across their vision try speeding it up or using a different direction like up and down, away and towards, diagonally or in a circle. Children will find these directions progressively harder.

- Try rolling balls that are bright or shiny for them to track
- Rolling pins or drinks bottles wrapped in shiny paper can have rice or pasta added inside to encourage children to follow them.
- colourful hats, wigs, sunglasses or clothes, may encourage children to follow you move around too. You can sing songs or whistle as you move to get them to follow you around.

Transfer gaze

- using two bright, shiny, lights or black and white objects, encourage your child to look from one to the other. This can be held side by side or one above the other. Try moving the object to encourage them to move their focus.
- Item that make noises or have a visual response e.g. flashing ball (do not use for children with seizures) to encourage your child to look between them
- Play games or sing songs where items come back or disappear e.g. 5 little ducks, encourage children to focus their attention between objects

Scan

- Try playing with a colourful or musical ball, as it rolls away from your child encourage them to find it with their eyes (if close enough to do so). You can help them by tapping it or shaking it
- Try placing a favourite toy on a tray in front of them in a different place and encourage them to move their eyes to find it.
- For younger children, playing peekaboo with a favourite toy or something visually attractive, hide it behind you or under their tray/a blanket. Then make it pop out in a different place each time.
- Try using a small sensory tray with a favourite toy inside it for them to scan and find visually. This can start off with very obvious things like white rice with a bright red ball. If your child is able to do this, make it more difficult by making the items more similar. For example a red ball hidden in baked beans.

Recognising and Understanding

To recognise, your child must give specific responses indicating that the stimulus is familiar to the child. There must be a clear distinction between the familiar and the unfamiliar. To understand, they need to make a very clear response to visual stimuli including understanding of its function or associated activity.

- Encourage your child to look at items before an activity. Hold them in their line of vision (or the place you know best gets a visual response) and tell them what you are holding. Say the name of the activity/function and then carry out the activity. Try picking one or two of their favourite things, or activities that happen often, to start with. You can let them feel or hold the objects in the beginning to help them link their senses. Examples could be their favourite toy when its playtime, the remote when its tv time, or a spoon/fork when its dinnertime.
- Play games with familiar objects like matching two the same or asking your child to find the named item (in their chosen communication method) when shown two or three.
- Let your child play with and explore every day items. It is easy for us to know an object by its similar features despite them looking quite different. Your child will find this difficult. Let them explore what makes a cup a cup, or a spoon a spoon and so on.

TOP TIPS AND OTHER IDEAS

- The bigger, brighter, sparklier or shinier the better
- Always make the room as dark as you can when using lights
- Use a plain black background when showing your child objects. You can cover their tray in black paper, use black clothes/bedding/towels, wear black clothes yourself or if you are crafty you could make something as a black background. Maybe you could stick black paper to a section of the wall, or paint the inside of a box black.

- Encourage your child to feel and hold objects they are looking at
- Try some other sensory activities for them to play in. They could explore different kinds of materials lying around the house e.g. water proof coat, newspaper, woolly jumper, fleece coat, swimming costume. You could also try other kinds of sensory play in a tray such as warm bubbly water, jelly, pasta, rice, cooked spaghetti. There are hundreds of recipes online to make different kinds of playdough.
- Encourage your child to reach and grasp objects they can see. This develops their hand-eye co-ordination. Try getting your child to drop the items into containers of varying sizes as well. If your child can do this, then encourage them to post balls in a small hole or squares of card in a slot.