

# Ways to Adapt Playtime to Meet Your Child's Needs

**Think about the environment.** Play is all about discovery and experimentation. Make sure your child has the chance to explore by bringing things within their reach to grasp, control, and manipulate. Use a cookie sheet and attach magnets to the toys or use velcro with a felt board. Be sure to appeal to their senses with new smells, tastes, sights, and sounds.



**Introduce new things appropriately.** Ask yourself how your child responds to new things? Some infants and toddlers are easily overstimulated, while others enjoy a lot of activity. Try starting playtime slowly, with one toy or object, and gradually add others. See what kind of response you get from your child. Help them moderate. Even very active, sensory-seeking children get overwhelmed. Teach them how to cope and you will have fewer “meltdowns.”

**Avoid sensory overload.** How does your child react to different sounds, textures, smells, and tastes? Some things will be enjoyable for your little one. Others may sound, feel, or smell “funny” to them. Read your child’s signals and modify the play experience accordingly. For example, if your child doesn’t like the feel of “messy play” you can put a little shaving cream or finger paint in a zip-loc bag and let them squish it around and draw shapes in it. If a toy is too loud disconnect the speaker or put tape over it to lower the volume.

**Invite friends.** One of the most important – and most difficult – aspects of play is helping your child establish relationships with peers. Arrange playdates and look for opportunities for your child to be around other children. Remember to include children of all ages and abilities. Facilitate the interactions by modeling for the children how they should treat each other. Remember what the Cat in the Hat said: “It’s fun to have fun but you have to know how!” Show them the way. Play turn-taking games. Ask each other questions. Having fun with peers is an important way that children learn social skills like sharing, negotiating, and having empathy all of which will prepare them for school and for being a part of a warm, inclusive community.

# Engage the Senses!

## Touching

“The Tactile Sense”

Squishing, Splashing, Smooshing, Smearing with Sand, Mud, Water, Finger Paints

## Balancing & Moving

“The Vestibular Sense”

Swinging, Sliding, Spinning, Dancing with Ropes, Slides, Ribbons, Rings

## Body Positioning

“The Proprioceptive Sense”

Pushing, Pulling, Climbing, Creeping with Boxes, Tunnels, Blankets, Balls

## Seeing

“The Visual Sense”

Sorting, Seeking, Looking, Peeking with Trinkets, Treasures, Spyglasses, and Goggles

## Hearing

“The Auditory Sense”

Whispering, Drumming, Yelling, Singing with Mouse Voices, Sticks, Megaphones, and Songs

## Smelling & Tasting

“The Olfactory and Gustatory Senses”

Sniffing, Slurping, Licking, Whiffing with Flowers, Drinks, Treats, and Stinky Little Feet

For more ideas check out:

[www.handtohold.org](http://www.handtohold.org)

“The Out-of-Sync Child has Fun” by Carol Kranowitz

“Power of Play: Learning Through Play from 0-3”

at [www.zerotothree.org/child-development/play/tips-and-tools.html](http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/play/tips-and-tools.html)



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