

Learning Activities for March-April 2020



Sensory integration is the process by which we receive, interpret and organise information. It is the groundwork that occurs before more complex learning. Providing a multi-sensory environment supports this. Our body takes in information - through touch, positioning, movement, smell, sight, taste and sound - and translates it to make sense of our world.

The following are suggested learning activities that can be carried out at home with the support of a parent or caregiver.

All the activities outlined here are fun, inclusive and adaptive. They don't require anything new or expensive - you can find most of these items around the home. They also integrate different subject areas of the curriculum we use at school.

Usually, we work on a theme each month or so - at this time of year we would be focusing on Spring / Easter.

These activities are "a little bit of school, at home" for pupils - there is no onus on parents/caregivers to try and recreate an entire school day. They may simply help to establish a sense of routine during the challenging period of a prolonged school closure. There is a suggested timetable for one week included - you can adapt this as needed. I will write up a suggested timetable of activities for each week as the school closures continue.

If you need to get in touch please contact me at maryellengleeson@stjosephsprimaryvi.ie

All the best and stay safe.

Days of the Week Activities:

Why?

- Encourages social interaction
- Supports the developing concepts of daily routine and starting a new day
- Is an enjoyable and stimulating way for the learner's day to begin

For this activity it may be handy to create a Day of the Week box as you go along, with the items listed below inside. You could also make a Spotify or Youtube playlist with the accompanying songs.

Begin this activity by playing the Song of the Day quietly, saying the day of the week and then increasing the volume to listen. If you have any toy musical instruments (or home-made ones!) the child might like to shake, tap or play along.

After the song, you can introduce the scent - make it fun by smelling it yourself first and exclaiming "mmm...lovely!" Or "oh yucky!" - ask them what they think, gauge their response and make a little game out of both of you smelling the scent again and again.

Finally, the texture of the day: present the item, naming it and encouraging the learner to explore it through touching.

Day of week / items required	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Song	"You're So Cool"- Hans Zimmer	Chan Chan - traditional Cuban song	The Tales of Hoffman-Barcacolle (classical music)	Green Onions - Booker T	St Thomas - Sonny Rollins	Blackbird - The Beatles	El Condor Pasa
Scent	Mint (toothpaste)	Vanilla (extract, candle, body lotion)	Coffee	Cinnamon	Lavender	Lemon	Cloves
Texture	Metal (teaspoon)	Tissue Paper	Wool	Towel	Foil	Wood	Thread

These are just suggestions, You can change the items or you can add more elements like a nursery rhyme of the day, a flavour of the day, etc. to add to the multi-sensorial experience for the learner.

Play-Doh Activities

Why?

Helps to develop fine motor skills and muscle tone through fun, multi-sensory play



Homemade Play-Doh Recipe:

- 8 tbsp plain flour
- 2 tbsp salt
- 60ml warm water
- Food colouring (optional)
- 1 tbsp oil (vegetable oil or baby oil will work fine)

Mix together to make one ball of dough. It can be stored in the fridge to play with again!

Ideas for Working with Play-Doh:

- *Squeezing, rolling and squishing with support*
- *Adding fun (or strange!) new textures to the play-doh: glitter, sand, rice krispies, rock salt, beads - and exploring through touch*
- *Add a scent - vanilla essence, cinnamon, ground coffee - and find out which one is preferred*
- *Support the learner in rolling out a particular shape and encourage them to feel the shape with their hand*
- *Explore two different textured play-dohs and note the differences between them - bumpy/smooth? soft/hard? gritty/squishy? - which one is the favourite?*
- *Rolling a little ball of play-doh into a smooth flat circle and cutting out shapes with support - if you don't have dough cutters you can use jar lids or eggcups.*

After something messy like making play-doh, it can be nice to have a basin of warm soapy water and a fluffy towel waiting; as well as adding another sensory element, it calmly signifies the end of the activity.

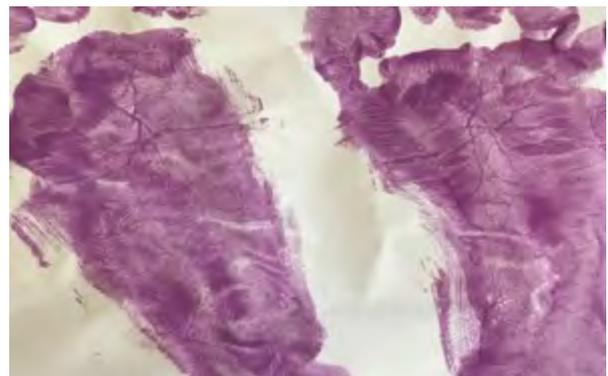
Painting Activities

Why?

- Encourages exploration of child's own environment through touch
- Using fingers and hands to make marks benefits muscle tone and promotes fine motor skills development

Ideas for Painting Fun

- Printing hands and feet can be a good way for children to initially explore paint and get used to the texture and smell. They can dip their fingers/hand/foot in a plate of paint or their caregiver can assist by painting it their hand or foot with a brush
- It can sometimes be helpful to forego paper altogether and just make a mess on the table (as long as the paint is washable) - this turns it into more of a sensory/messy play lesson rather than making a piece of artwork.
- If the learner is ambulant, they can be supported to step into a dinner tray with some non-toxic paint and then take some steps on a large sheet of paper, or a couple of sheets arranged in a line. Tape the sheets down so they don't stick to paint-y feet!
- The learner might find a slightly more interesting texture more enjoyable to paint with- you could try making "cloud paint", by mixing PVA glue and shaving foam to create a "paint" that puffs up to a lovely fluffy cloud texture when it dries.
- If you have been painting footprints, it can be nice to introduce a foot-spa at the end of the activity for the child to use. The bubbles and warm water add a lovely relaxing end to a fun sensory experience.



Music Activities

Why?

- Develops listening skills
- Encourages social interaction and call/response communication
- Provides opportunities for use of augmentative and alternative communication and making choices (Lámh signs, Big Mack, GoTalk etc.)

Sensory Songs

A sensory song is a piece of music accompanied by different multi-sensory items that help the learner to attend and respond to the music. The music provides the auditory stimulation, and the different items can appeal to the learner's sense of touch, smell, sight and taste.

Play the song and gently introduce the items at intervals.

You can even involve the elements of balance and movement by encouraging or assisting the learner to move to the music.

Suggested Sensory Songs: (all music available on Youtube/Spotify)

Singin' In The Rain - Gene Kelly

Umbrella (pop up and down)

Wellies (can also encourage stomping actions with feet)

Spray bottle with water (feel "raindrops" landing on skin, spray in time with music)

Here Comes the Sun - Beatles

Sunglasses (wear on face)

Suncream (smell, massage onto skin)

Warm towel or blanket (wrap around, feel with hands)

Ice Cream (smell/taste/touch)

Shake it Off - Taylor Swift

Plastic bottle filled with rice grains, secured tightly at top - use as a home-made percussion instrument to shake to the rhythm of the music

Body Awareness Songs

Body Awareness Songs involve instructions to tap or move a particular body part; you can provide encouragement and support to the learner to attend to the different actions in the song. Some suggested songs are:

Play with me, sing along - Patty Shukla

This is Me! - ELF Learning

One Little Finger - Super Simple Songs

If You're Happy and You Know It - Barefoot Books

- All are available to listen to on YouTube

Tac Pac



Why? Tac Pac is a wonderful way to support sensory integration and also provides a calm time for close interaction and non-verbal communication between the learner and caregiver. A Tac Pac set generally lasts 20 minutes or so.

Ideally, children should be lying comfortably, with cushions or blankets as needed. If it is not possible for the learner to lie down, you should sit close by them and ensure they are comfortable. The room should be calm and quiet. If the learner has sensory lighting they enjoy at home it can be nice to have this switched on for Tac Pac time also.

As Tac Pac is copyrighted, I've made a "DIY Tac Pac set" that can be conducted with items from around the house. All of the songs are available through a quick Youtube search, or search "DIY Tac Pac maryellen" and the entire playlist should come up.

1. Colours of the Wind Flute de Pan (from Disney Pocahontas)

- Relaxing pan-pipe music; use a little paintbrush dipped in warm water (a soft clean toothbrush or a sponge is fine too) to gently "paint" little strokes onto child's arms and hands in time to the music

2. The Carnival of the Animals - Aquarium

- Calming classical music; blowing and popping bubbles with child - increase the bubbles as the music grows louder, reduce as it becomes quieter.

3. Malaguena Flamenco Guitar - Ben Woods

- Exciting, vibrant guitar music; alternate between rolling a plastic ball (smooth or textured) and tapping with a clean wooden spatula on arms and legs - increase speed and move in time with the music

4. Fireflies Wind Quintet Cover

- Fun flute music; use a squeeze bottle (like a rinsed-out Fairy liquid bottle) to puff air on body in time to the music

5. Erik Satie - Gymnopedie No. 1

Very calm and quiet classical music; use a moisturising lotion or oil for gentle massage on hands and arms. This signifies the end of Tac Pac time.

After Tac Pac has finished, you may like to have an extra blanket to hand to keep warm. It is advised that the caregiver stays close to the learner after Tac Pac has ended until they are ready to move.

Mathematical Activities

Sorting and Classifying

Why?

- Develops tactile discrimination skills
- Develops understanding of broad concepts like big/small, hard/soft

“What’s in the bag?”

This activity is simple to prepare and can be changed every day!

Using a pillowcase or soft bag, we tie the top closed and encourage the child to feel the outside while we say a rhyme:

(to the tune of “Farmer in the Dell”)

What’s in the bag?

What’s in the bag?

(child’s name) oh (child’s name), what’s in the bag?

Is it something square? Is it something round?

Is it something quiet or does it make a sound?

Inside the pillowcase, there are several items all with one distinct similarity, except for one: the bag might contain a small blanket, a cuddly toy and a piece of cotton wool (soft items) and a wooden spoon (hard item)

To add to the fun of this activity, we could encourage and support the learner to explore the soft items first, e.g. stroking soft blanket, hugging cuddly toy, stroking cotton wool against cheek - and then introduce the wooden spoon! - “That’s not very cuddly!”

Place the items in the bag with the child, one-by-one, and as they go in classify them as hard or soft. Support the child in exploring the bag independently.

Other items to use with this activity:

For exploring big/small:

- Plastic balls
- Books
- Shoes
- Cups

For exploring hard/soft:

- fluffy scarves and a piece of cardboard
- Tubs of play dough and 1 tub of dry pasta

Number Songs are another fun way to explore mathematical concepts of numbers and sequencing. Some suggested number songs are :

Feist - 1, 2, 3, 4 on Sesame Street - this is a fun song to play while counting on fingers.

One Two Buckle My Shoe (with signifiers) - use signifiers to aid sensory integration: you’ll need:

a shoe, something to knock on (door), some sticks, and a tactile cue or Lámh/Canaan-Barrie sign for “again”

Religious Education

In Religious Education this month, the focus is on Spring, Lent and Easter.

The following activities are some enjoyable ways to mark the significance of this special time.

- Weather permitting, a walk outdoors (adhering to HSE advice of course!) to explore the sounds and smells of springtime
- Exploring spring flowers that were picked on a walk outside - if you grow any herbs like rosemary or mint these are also lovely to explore and smell!
- Listening to some thematic Easter children's songs (all available on YouTube as a public playlist called Easter School Songs)
- Listening to a sensory story with the theme of re-birth/new life - The Very Hungry Caterpillar (The audiobook is available on YouTube with beautiful music. See "Sensory Story" guidelines for props/items)
- Listening to thematic classical music - Vivaldi's Spring from Four Seasons
- Messy play with melted chocolate and rice krispies or corn flakes to create chocolate "nests" as an Easter treat

Communication, Language and Literacy: Sensory Stories

Why?

Promotes close, positive interaction between learner and caregiver
Encourages learner responses through use of multi-sensory resources

Sensory stories offer learners a unique way to engage with a story through the use of items that stimulate the senses through touch, scent, sound and visuals. They can even include movement and positioning sensory input. Simply put, a sensory story can be any story that includes signifiers:

Here are some items I picked up around the house to prepare a sensory story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears



How to tell a Sensory Story:

- Keep the language concise, use exaggerated character voices and facial expressions
- Use the signifiers very explicitly - for example, handing a bowl to the learner as you say "bowl"
- Encourage the learner to explore the item for a moment before moving on with the story
- Support the learner in mimicking an action with the item, if relevant; for example, when telling the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the learner might enjoy "stirring" a bowl of porridge.

Goldilocks and the Three Bears - Sensory Story.

(Props used at different points are in bold)

Once upon a time

A little girl named Goldilocks (**doll**) was walking through the forest (**sticks**)

She came upon a little house in the forest ("**knocking**" **sound**)

There was no-one home.

This house belonged to a Daddy Bear, Mummy Bear and Baby Bear (**teddies**)

They had gone outside in their coats (**raincoat**) for a walk (**stomping sound**)

Goldilocks went inside and smelled some yummy porridge (**smell porridge**)

First she tried the big bowl, but it was too hot, then the medium sized bowl, but it was too cold, then the little bowl, and that was just right. Yummy! (**offer the 3 bowls and a spoon - encourage the learner to mimic stirring and tasting**)

Goldilocks went into the sitting room. She found some books.

She sat down to read the first book but it was too heavy. Then she tried the second book but it was too light. Then she tried the last little book and it was just right. (**offer 3 books to feel and explore**) She read until she felt very sleepy ("**yawn**" **sound**) and went upstairs.

Goldilocks found 3 beds upstairs. First she tried the big bed, but it was too hard, then the medium sized bed but it was too soft, then the little bed and it was just right! She fell asleep ("**snore**" **sound**)

The 3 Bears came home. Daddy Bear, Mummy Bear (**teddies**) were cross (**GRR sound**)

Baby Bear (**teddy**) was sad (**crying sound**) Someone had eaten all their porridge and been reading their books. Who was in their house?

They went upstairs and found Goldilocks asleep in Baby Bear's bed. Daddy Bear (**teddy**) let out a big GRR!!! (**grr sound**) and Goldilocks jumped out of bed and ran all the way home.

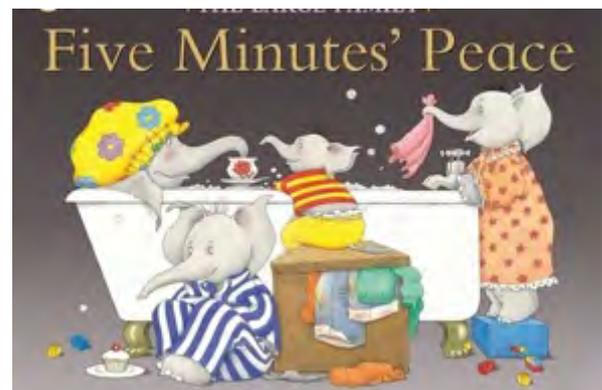
Mummy Bear made more porridge (**bowl of porridge and spoon, eating sound / "yummy"**) and the three Bears were happy again.

Five Minute's Peace - sensory story

Five Minute's Peace is available to listen to on Youtube by searching "CBeebies Bedtime Story - Five Minute's Peace" - it is read aloud by an actress voicing the different characters and there are some sound effects which add to the storytelling.

Items required:

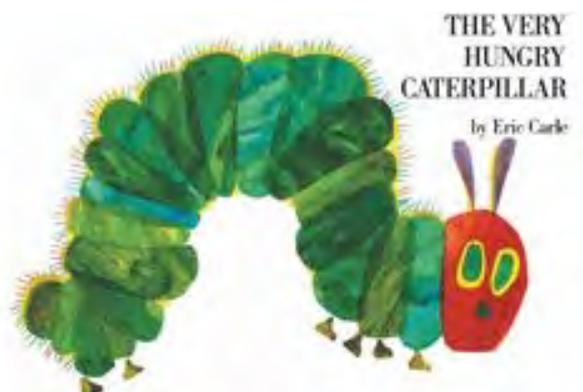
Cornflakes
Tray
Teacup and saucer
Milk jug
Plate
Bun
Toast
Marmalade
Newspaper
Dressing gown
Bottle of bubble bath
Small basin or bowl of warm water
Bath hat or swimming cap
Recorder or tin whistle
Small book
Bath toy
Towel



The Very Hungry Caterpillar - sensory story

Items required:

Tissue paper, scrunched into a little ball (use as egg)
Playdough - 2 pieces: 1 rolled to resemble a little caterpillar shape, the other to resemble a big caterpillar
Toy food (or real if preferred) - whatever you can easily source, some suggestions are apples or other fruits, bread, lollipops, cheese, etc.
A scarf (use for cocoon)
Craft paper cut into the shape of a Butterfly



Adapted version of the story: (items appear in bold as they are used)

*In the light of the moon, a little **egg** lay on a leaf*

*On Sunday morning, the sun came up and "pop!" Out of the egg came a very hungry little **caterpillar***

He looked for something to eat.

On Monday, he ate through one **apple**, but he was still hungry
On Tuesday, he ate through 2 _____, but he was still hungry
On Wednesday, he ate through 3 _____, but he was still hungry
On Thursday he ate through 4 _____, but he was still hungry
On Friday he ate through 5 _____, but he was still hungry
On Saturday he ate through (**list out lots of food!**) and that night he had a pain in his tummy!

The next day was Sunday again. He ate a nice green leaf and felt all better.

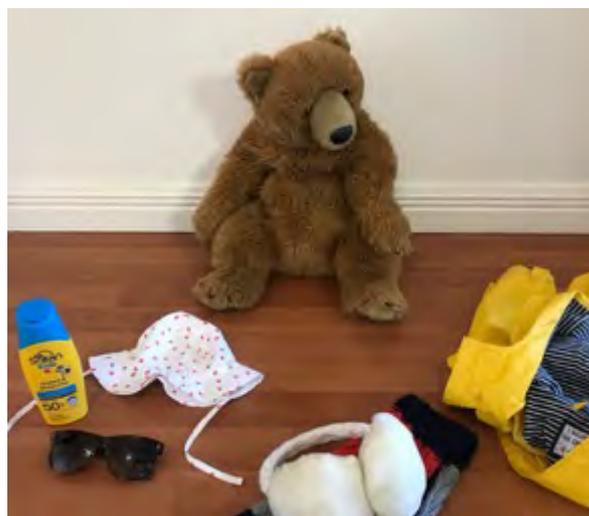
He wasn't a **little caterpillar** now, he was a **big caterpillar!** He wrapped himself in a **cocoon**. After a long rest, he poked a little hole in the cocoon, pushed his way out, and he was a beautiful **butterfly!**

Dressing Teddy

This is a fun little activity that can be worked into the day at home. I've used a teddy bear from the sensory story earlier and the activity involves dressing the teddy appropriately for the weather. There are lots of textures and shapes to explore:

- Raincoat
 - Umbrella
 - Sunglasses
 - Suncream
 - Sun Hat
 - Woolly Scarf
- ...and so on.

Before going outside for a little fresh air (if it is okay to do so), the child and caregiver can dress Teddy for the weather. The different items can be explored through touch and smell, the child can be encouraged to hold them or even try some on.



Exploring through Messy Play

Why?

- Fun way to attend to new textures and become comfortable with different sensations (wet/dry/sticky/gloopy/gritty)
- Promotes development of tactile discrimination skills
- Provides an opportunity for fun interaction with caregiver
- Provides opportunities to communicate response of like/dislike

Ensure the work surface is accessible for the learner. Put on aprons or old clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. Cover the work surface with something to protect it and present the messy play material. Encourage the learner to look, touch and smell. Start small if preferred - for example, a tiny dab of foam on the table or in your hand for the learner to explore, and build up to using lots on the table-top. Have warm soapy water ready to use for clean-up. If preferred, messy play materials can be explored with feet by placing in a basin or on a tray.

Suggestions for messy play materials:

- Shaving Foam
- Play Sand
- Porridge Oats
- Rice Pudding
- Custard
- Finger Paints
- Rice Krispies
- Dry Pasta
- Rice



Sometimes it can be fun to mix two messy play materials to make a new texture. Food colouring or glitter can also be added to make it extra messy and extra fun!

Sample Timetable

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	Days of the Week box and Monday Music How's the Weather Today? Dressing Teddy	Days of the Week box and Tuesday Music Sensory Song - Singin' in the Rain	Days of the Week Box and Wednesday Music How's the Weather Today? Dressing Teddy	Days of the Week Box and Thursday Music Sensory Story Five Minute's Peace	Days of the Week Box and Friday Music Messy Play: Making sensory play-dough with vanilla scent, rolling, squeezing and pressing with support
Mid-Morning	Sensory Story Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Seasonal Activity (Spring) search outside for flowers and bring them inside to explore	What's in the bag? Differentiating between hard and soft items	Sensory Song (Singin' in the Rain)	Seasonal Activity (Easter) - Song "Hop Little Bunnies"
Afternoon	Messy Play - Porridge Oats	Painting - use fingertips to create dots, lines and squiggles with paint	Messy Play - rice: decanting dried rice into plastic bottles to make homemade shakers Sensory Song - Shake it Off	Painting - making footprints with paint, footspa or warm water basin to follow	Body Awareness Songs
Afternoon	Tac Pac	Tac Pac	Tac Pac	Tac Pac	Tac Pac

This timetable is just a suggestion. Feel free to adapt it as required.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

If your child uses AAC in any form, it would be brilliant to work the use of AAC into your child's timetable.

- **Big Mack Communicators** can be used to support your child in choice-making in almost any activity suggested here. They can also be used to record the music for sensory songs or body awareness songs, days of the week or simply music they enjoy listening to at home.
- **Lámh signs, Cnaan-Barrie signs or tactile cues** that your child has worked on in their Speech and Language Therapy Programme can also be worked into activities.
- **Objects of Reference** are great way to help a child anticipate the upcoming activity. Please find a list of Objects of Reference that may be useful. All items can usually be found around the house.

Objects of reference:

1. Days of the Week morning activity - Jam Jar lid (we use this to reference "Circle Time" at school, which is the time of day where we explore the Day of the Week items)
2. Snack / Food - Spoon
3. Drink - Cup
4. Sensory Story time - small book or bath book
5. Music Time - plastic whistle (can use recorder or tin whistle)
6. Art Time - Paintbrush
7. Messy Play - small piece of play dough in a tub
8. Nature Walk / Outside - Small Shoe
9. Tac Pac - sponge/pot scourer