

Supporting every child to thrive

In partnership with



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To support every child to thrive,
Hope is all you need.



Introduction

Recent statistics show a rising number of children identified as having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Inclusion is not optional; creating inclusive, nurturing environments is at the heart of what we do. However, with limited funding and a shortage of specialist knowledge, we know how challenging it can be.

Here we have created a range of activities, linked to resources, with the aim of helping you support children with SEND. The activities have been carefully constructed to encourage sensory exploration, self-expression, develop physical skills and foster emotional growth.

We recognise the valuable role parents play and the benefit of supportive home-setting relationships in ensuring we truly 'know' our children. We have created an activity you can share with parents to carry out in the familiar space of home, using The Colour Monster as inspiration.

We use activity boards to help develop fine motor skills while introducing some mathematical language, such as number, comparatives, shape and pattern. We also introduce weighted resources to help children feel secure and focused.

Our activity for babies is designed to stimulate their senses, including the 'inner senses' that guide their body perception, spatial awareness and balance.

A child attempting to communicate their regulation through increasing or decreasing stimulation can lead to behaviour perceived as challenging. With this in mind, we have offered an activity that uses wooden massage tools and a cosy cushion, to encourage relaxation and physical connection, while respecting children's boundaries and responses.

Our final activity is a dynamic movement circuit with inflatable balls, textured sea-themed tiles and a spinning seat, offering opportunities to practise and enhance balancing, sensory-motor skills and coordination.

Our hope is that collectively, these activities provide you with engaging ideas to support children with SEND to develop, have fun and relax. Together, let's create an environment where every child is included, flourishes and thrives.



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Feelings in focus

Learning to name emotions is a significant step in supporting children to understand and manage their feelings and is a necessary skill for building emotional regulation and relationships. Learning to name, co-regulate and eventually self-regulate emotions is essential for all children, including those with SEND, as it lays the foundation for healthy emotional development, social skills and resilience.

1. Arrange a comfortable space and put the Bag of Buddies down with the expressive faces showing (happy, sad etc). Place the mirrors so that they are accessible and children can see their reflections. Have the weighted wraps ready for any children who may benefit from extra sensory input to help them feel grounded and secure
2. Hold up one of the bean bags and ask, "Can you make this face?" or "How do you think this Buddy is feeling?". Encourage the children to mimic the expressions and associate them with the name of the emotion, connecting the expressions with feelings. Support children to recognise the emotion depicted by the expression. For those children who can already name emotions, ask them how they're feeling today and to make an expression, or choose a bean bag, to show how they are feeling (you could model this first). Then ask, "What makes you feel happy? or sad?" Children could then go on to guess how their friends are feeling based on their expressions, using the Buddies as a reference
3. Introduce the weighted wrap as a 'comfort friend'. Demonstrate how you can either wear it around your shoulders, hold it on your lap or in your arms. Discuss how feeling calm and safe can be an emotion too, supporting children to name 'calm' and 'relaxed'
4. Reflection: End the activity by reviewing the faces on the bean bags, asking each child to choose one that shows how they feel. Repeat the names of each emotion to reinforce the language you've covered in the activity.



Resources:

Hope

HP00055645 - LED Handheld Shape Mirrors

HE1826953 - Learn Well Bag of Buddies

HP00056640 - Weighted Dog Wrap

Find these at hope-education.co.uk

NDNA

Face-to-face training: Self-Regulation

- Supporting Well-being

ndna.org.uk/Self-Regulation

Other ways to use this resource

For babies or children who are non-verbal: Start with exploring their own faces and expressions in the mirror. Then show the Buddies, reinforcing the emotions by naming and showing the Makaton sign.



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Movement and maths

Supporting children in developing fine motor skills builds the strength and coordination required for everyday tasks, such as feeding, dressing and self-care activities, fostering their independence and confidence. Using specifically designed motor skills boards, this activity encourages children to practise various grips and fine motor movements. The activity also introduces some basic mathematical language, helping children explore the language of comparison, shape and pattern. The weighted whale wrap can be used as a supportive tool for those who require sensory input in order to feel calm and focused.

Resources:

Hope

HP00052834 - The Freckled Frog Learning with Senses Motor Skills Board

HP00053212 - BIGJIGS Toys Cogs Puzzle - 7 Piece

HP00056641 - Weighted Whale Wrap

Find these at hope-education.co.uk

NDNA

Online course: Making Maths Matter
ndna.org.uk/MathsMatters

1. Introduce the boards to the children, pointing out all the different parts. Explain that they are going to practise using their hands and fingers in many different ways
2. Encourage each child to explore the boards by opening, closing, locking, unlocking, drawing, twisting, turning, moving, pinching and spinning. If required, you could model the different actions required to move the part, giving a running commentary as you do so to reinforce the language
3. As children engage, you can introduce concepts such as, 'bigger than', 'smaller than' and shape names like circle, square, triangle and cross. Repetition of the language will also help to reinforce it. For example:
 - "Can you see a cog bigger than this one?" - pointing to one of the smaller cogs
 - "How many parts move round and round?" - gesturing the motion; you could count them together
 - "Look at this circle, what pattern can you see?" - model the language first, i.e. "I can see this circle has a triangle pattern on it" (touching the shape then pointing to the triangles)
4. For children needing extra sensory input, offer the weighted whale wrap to hold or place on their laps, explaining that it may help them feel calm and ready to explore the boards.

Other ways to use this resource

Ask children to find specific shapes or colours on the motor skills board, practising recognition, naming and sorting.

Resources can also be used independently by children who require some 'down-time' or time away from external sensory input.



Sensory sensation

"There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses" (Aristotle).

When we think of senses, we usually think of the five senses – sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste - but our 'inner senses' play an equally vital role. These include proprioception, which gives us awareness of our body's position in space; vestibular sense, which helps us balance; and kinaesthetic sense, which is understanding our body's movements. Through these senses, babies gain crucial knowledge about themselves and the world around them, forming the building blocks for later development. The following activity will help support babies in their quest for sensory exploration. During the activities, you can support by modelling actions, using descriptive language, and labelling sounds, colours, and textures.

1. Arrange the sensory blocks, sensory colour reflective balls, and the spinning drum, on a soft mat
2. Place the blocks within the babies' reach. Encourage the babies to handle, shake, push, or mouth the objects, which will engage touch, sight, taste, smell and hearing while also stimulating curiosity. The various textures and weights will prompt them to try out different grips, strengthening fine motor skills and proprioceptive awareness as they assess how much pressure to apply when grasping and lifting
3. Introduce the reflective coloured balls. As babies reach out, roll, or crawl after the balls, their vision and balance will be stimulated. The mirrored surfaces of the balls provide an exciting, visual experience, as babies perhaps catch a glimpse of their faces and movements. This aids self-recognition and visual tracking, which are essential skills for social interaction and hand-eye coordination
4. Place the spinning drum in front of the babies. Encourage them to explore the drum, colours and mirror as well as the sounds made on turning. The combination of sound and movement will motivate them to experiment, to vary their touch, and to create different sounds. This develops their visual, auditory and kinaesthetic awareness as they explore how their movements impact the colours and sounds.

Resources:

Hope
HP00053393 - BIGJIGS Toys Sensory
Blocks - Set of 8

HP00054996 - tickit Sensory Reflective Colour
Mystery Balls - Pack of 6

HP00054709 - Spinning Drum
Find these at hope-education.co.uk

NDNA
Online course: Exemplary Practice
with Babies
ndna.org.uk/ExemplaryBaby



Other ways to use this resource

Sensory blocks can be used as stacking cubes.
Reflective balls can be rolled on different textured surfaces.
Spinning drum can be used in tummy time, inviting babies to reach, pull, push, explore.





Mindful, massage moments

In a busy environment, offering moments of relaxation and sensory exploration can help children to feel secure. Using this wooden massage set and a soft vibrating cushion, we invite you to gently guide children to focus on their senses and bodies. Massage offers sensory input and is beneficial in helping children self-regulate; the pressure and rhythmic sensations increase the release of endorphins, decrease cortisol and help children feel connected to their bodies, reducing stress and promoting relaxation. This activity also reinforces respect for personal boundaries and early consent practices, essential for creating a safe environment and building healthy relationships.

1. Invite the children to a quiet area with soft lighting and calming music. Explain that they will be doing a 'calm' activity, where they can explore massage for relaxation
2. Model how to use each tool on your own arms and legs. Encourage each child to use a massage tool on themselves, focussing on the sensations they feel. Prompt children with questions such as, "How does it feel on your hand?" You could model the language by saying how it feels to you. This will support children to focus on the sensations, enhancing their body awareness
3. Let them know they can also use the tools on each other but it's important to ask for permission first and to listen carefully to their friend's response. Make it clear that if a friend says no, we always respect their choice
4. Show the children the vibrating cushion and explain that it makes a gentle buzzing sound. Let them explore how it feels to hold or place on different parts of their bodies such as their hands or knees. Remind them to ask before using it on others
5. Conclude the activity by asking children to share their favourite tool or, if appropriate, to describe how the massage made them feel. Observe the children throughout to ensure the sensory input is benefitting them.

Resources:

Hope

HE1840257 - LDA Sensory Bean Cushion

HE1840064 - LDA Sensory Massage Set
- Set of 6

Find these at hope-education.co.uk

NDNA

Online course: Supporting Children
with SEND

ndna.org.uk/SEND

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Other ways to use this resource

Invite parents to a mindfulness session and let the children share the resources with them.



Resources:

Hope

HP00052280 - ticket Odd Ball Set

HP00055830 - Under The Sea Floor Tiles

from Hope Education - Pack of 4

HP00052756 - GONGE Carousel

Find these at hope-education.co.uk

NDNA

Qualification: Physical Activity and

Nutrition Coordinator

ndna.org.uk/PANCo

Physical Friday

Engaging children with special educational needs in sensory-motor activities can support both their physical and cognitive development. Sensory circuits are designed to stimulate the senses while promoting motor skills, body awareness and balance in a fun, supportive and interactive way. The following physical tasks help build gross motor skills while the variety of sensations children feel can improve focus, self-regulation and confidence.

- In a suitable space, either indoors or outdoors, lay out the resources to create a circuit, using the floor tiles as stepping stones to link the inflatable balls and the spinning seat. You could add in any existing resources such as crates, wooden planks etc. to extend the circuit. For children using a wheelchair or rollator, invite them to roll over suitable parts of the circuit, such as the tiles or wooden planks
- Encourage the children to explore the resources that make up the circuit as they progress:
 - Inflatable balls** - rolling, throwing, pushing or gently kicking
 - Sea floor tiles** - encourage children to find different ways of travelling from one tile to the next. For example jumping, hopping, rolling, crawling, feeling the textures under their hands, knees, feet, whole body or wheels. For children with conditions that affect balance, such as cerebral palsy, you can support children's movements by holding their hands
 - Spinning seat** - the slight angle of the seat allows children to propel themselves by shifting their centre of gravity. Other children may prefer to spin the seat by moving their feet on the ground.
- End with some gentle stretches to encourage relaxation. Invite children to lie down after all the movement they've done. You could incorporate some calming deep breaths to help children achieve a relaxed state
- Observe the children closely, especially on the spinning seat, to ensure they feel safe and supported. Adjust the intensity of each activity based on individual children's responses and comfort levels.

Other ways to use this resource

The spinning seat can be used as a sensory tool when required. Use the sea tiles in a barefoot walk. Squeeze or roll the textured inflatable balls on their bodies to self-soothe and induce calm.



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Emotion colours



At home



Supporting young children to identify, name and express emotions is key to the development of emotional intelligence. Here's a fun, hands-on activity you can try at home, inspired by *The Colour Monster* by Anna Llenas. This delightful book helps children understand and name their emotions with colours, offering a gentle and approachable way to talk about big feelings.

1. Share *The Colour Monster* story together. As you read, talk with your child about each emotion the monster experiences – happiness, sadness, anger, fear, calm and love. Use the corresponding Makaton sign if appropriate and support them to create links with the colours used in the story
2. Collect one item in each of the colours from around the house and/or outside, for example:
 - **Yellow for happiness** – sock
 - **Blue for sadness** – glove
 - **Red for anger** – crayon
 - **Grey for fear** – hat
 - **Green for calm** – block
 - **Pink for love** – cuddly toy.
3. Encourage your child to choose the object/colour which represents their emotion and, if required, help them to name the emotion to support your child to identify, think and practise putting their feelings into words
4. The physical act of touching the colourful objects makes the learning experience tactile and memorable which can support children who are non-verbal or developing language skills. Once your child has expressed how they feel, show empathy and name their emotions. For example “you touched the yellow crayon, you’re feeling happy today” or “you touched the blue block, you’re feeling sad and that’s okay”
5. Demonstrate some strategies to help your child regulate their big feelings. For example, if they have expressed that they feel happy/excited, you could suggest that they move their bodies, jump on the trampoline or race around the garden. If they have expressed sadness, you might suggest that they use their weighted blanket or cushion.

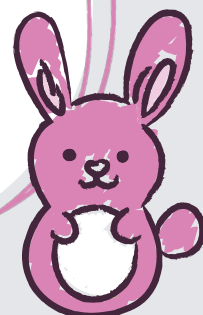


Resources:

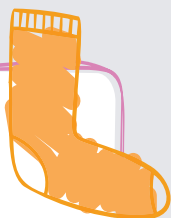
Hope
HE1780549 - *The Colour Monster*
Find this at hope-education.co.uk

NDNA
Quiz: SEND and Working With
Parents in Nurseries
ndna.org.uk/SENDQuiz

Other
A variety of everyday objects in
the colours from the book.



Other ways to use this resource



The book can be used to create a daily emotion 'check-in' where everyone in the family shares which colour matches how they feel that day.



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