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Benefits of Sensory Bins

Have you ever used a fidget toy or stress ball? Do you find yourself bouncing your legs, biting your nails, tapping your fingers or clicking a pen when you feel restless or on edge? If so, then you understand the need for sensory stimulation. For many adults, sensory stimulation is about regulating one's emotional state or providing an outlet for excess energy. But did you know that sensory play can also be a great way to learn? Everyone—adults included—learns best when they are able to explore with their eyes, hands, noses, and ears. Sensory bins provide simple, hands-on learning and self-regulation activities that can be used for both children, and yes, adults too! These bins can be a bit messy at times. But, the benefits far outweigh the few minutes of clean up time that is needed.

Benefits of Sensory Bin Learning:

- Cognitive Development (sorting objects, letters, shapes, counting, spelling, measuring, guesstimating, cause & effect, capacity, volume, measurement, creativity, imagination, trial & error, spatial awareness, enhancing memory)
- Oral Language Development (talking about items in the bins, describing the playtime)
- Fine Motor Development (increase in hand strength, development of grasping skills, pouring, scooping, manipulating objects, hand-eye coordination)
- Socialization (taking turns, communicating with others, cooperation, sharing, teamwork)
- Self-Regulation (following rules, self-calming, sensory stimulation, independent play and engagement)

What Sensory Bins look like...

• At Home

- Give clear instructions – all items stay in the box (no eating/throwing); you can be messy, but you must help to clean up; use only one bin at a time.
- Use during “rainy” days when your child cannot get outside to play.
- Have a “bin time” every day. (HINT - using bins after school or work is a great way to calm, re-focus, and re-center after a long day.)
- Have different types of bins for the different ages of your children. Or, allow your child to create their own original bin that is unique and special to them.
- Use as a calm down or “I need a break” tool.
- Create a “quiet” bin with soft bases and soft toys that can be used when you're out and about (shopping, grocery store, church, sporting event, family gathering, waiting room, car ride, etc.).

- Go on a nature walk and create a nature themed bin. You can make one for every season.

• At School

- Give clear instructions – all items stay in the box (no eating/throwing); you can be messy, but you must help to clean up; use only one bin at a time.
- Use as one part of a Learning Center rotation.
- Use during “morning free time” or as a reward for “completed work.”
- Use with small groups to reinforce language, reading, or math skills (hide cards with math problems, cvc words, beginning letter sounds, matching uppercase and lowercase letters, ordering numbers, etc.).
- Use as a calm down or “I need a break” tool.
- Provide as an activity for children during parent-teacher conferences.
- Go on a nature walk as a class and create nature themed bins. You can do one for every season.
- Remember, sensory bins aren’t just for the younger crowd. How could you adapt your bins for older children?

• In the Workplace/Community

- Create an adult sensory bin with fidgets and textured items to be used by staff members when they need to de-stress.
- Adult sensory mazes (whether purchased or home-made) are an additional tool that can be used for emotional regulation and can be used anywhere.
- Provide sensory bins as an activity for children during community outreach or socialization events.
- Host a “make it-take it” sensory bin activity so parents and children can work together to create something they can use at home.
- Share sensory bin ideas with families for home visits or as an option for parent-child engagement during virtual visits.
- Sensory bins are also especially helpful for people dealing with Dementia, Alzheimer, or Autism (as well as other medical and neurological conditions). Sensory stimulation may help to decrease agitation and restlessness and improve quality of sleep.

Take care and thank you for all you do!

PBIS Leadership Team