

 Early Childhood Investigations Webinars

Inclusive Sensory-Rich Nature Play for Children's 7 Senses

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I'm Jena

- Landscape architect
- Nature play expert
- Professional artist
- Mom of twins




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I teach parents, educators and childcare professionals how to transform their children's outdoor spaces into sensory-rich natural play and learning places.




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Today's Discussion

WE'LL COVER

- * The KEY to inclusive play + learning spaces
- * Sensory-rich nature play & children's 7 senses
- * Top 5 multi-sensory features



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First, a story...



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the KEY to inclusive play + learning places



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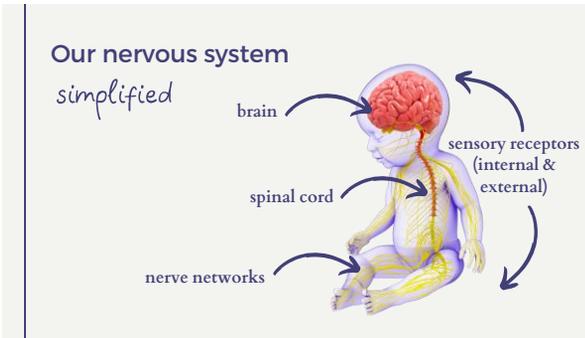
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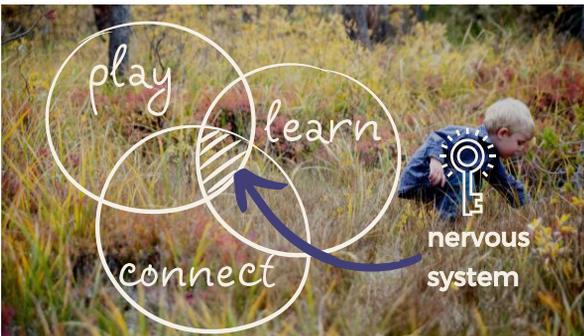
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Sensory-rich nature play spaces:

- * intentionally engage children's sensory systems
- * provide variety and range of intensity of sensory experience



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Value

of sensory-rich nature play

- Calms children's nervous system
- Improves brain development & complexity
- Boosts immune system
- Encourages problem solving & critical thinking
- Stretches imagination & creativity



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Value

of sensory-rich nature play

- Improves retention (experiential)
- Builds language & communication skills
- Sparks curiosity & exploration
- Self-regulation of emotions & behavior
- Supports sensory regulation
- and more!



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Neurodiversities

like autism, sensory processing disorders, ADHD...



Hypersensitive
(avoider)



Hyposensitive
(seeker)



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The 7 Senses

Sight Touch Taste
Smell Sound



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The 7 Senses

Sight Touch Taste
Smell Sound
Vestibular
Proprioception



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01. *Sight*

- A primary way we interpret the world (color, shapes, depth...)
- Draws children in and around
- Inspires imagination
- Offers beauty and delight
- Can soothe or excite
- Communicates natural processes (i.e. wind spinners makes a breeze more visual)

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Sight

Hypersensitive
(avoiders)

Hyposensitive
(seekers)

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Features for Sight

- Interesting entry / gate
- Structures – forts, cozy spaces, arbors
- Pathways
- Messaging / signage
- Colorful plantings
- Habitat areas / microfauna
- Garden art, statuary, and spinners
- Mirror / gazing ball
- Nature loom
- Murals
- Space to do art
- Outdoor chalkboard
- Tools like magnifying station, magnifying glass, binoculars, telescope

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02. Touch

- Touch receptors in our skin (3,000 per fingertip)
- Essential for development (physical, cognitive, communication)
- Environmental info (hot, cold, soft, hard, painful...)
- Feeds the exploration, discovery, learning, mastery drive



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Touch

 **Hypersensitive**
(avoiders)



Credit: Pinterest



Hyposensitive
(seekers) 

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Features for Touch

- Water play area
- Sand play area
- Mud kitchen
- Sensory bins / kiddie pool
- Sensory path (outdoor)
- Tactile panels
- Garden + digging area
- Sensory plantings (lamb's ear, purple coneflower, artemisia,
- Nature loom
- Log segments - climbing, balancing, 'dining table + chairs'
- Habitat features - roll-able boulders, mother log, etc.

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03. Taste

- Tied to physical health and self-reliance
- Learn where their food comes from
- Explore taste buds - ripe vs unripe
- Fun! Kids can graze while they play
- Make sure all plants/parts are non-toxic



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Taste



Hypersensitive
(avoiders)



Hyposensitive
(seekers)



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Features for Taste

- Herb garden
- Raised gardens / veggies
- Edible flowers - nasturtium, dandelion, calendula, marigold, pansy, Johnny Jump-up, honeysuckle, dahlia, hibiscus, sunflower, hollyhock, peony, pinks, lilac
- Fruit trees
- Use edibles in lieu of ornamentals in the landscape - aronia, honeyberry, lingonberry, ferns, hardy kiwi vine
- Mud kitchen
- Shady space for outdoor eating / picnicking

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04. Smell

- Tied to memory and emotions in our brain
- Physiological triggers
- Tells us what's pleasant and what may be unsafe
- Nature connection - ex: leaves of certain plants have stronger fragrance when rubbed between fingers
- Builds communication / social skills



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Smell

Hypersensitive
(avoiders)



Hyposensitive
(seekers)

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Features for Smell

- Herbs - thyme, oregano, basil, rosemary, parsley, cilantro, chives
- Annuals - chocolate cosmos
- Perennials - lavender, scented geranium, peony
- Shrubs - lilac, mockorange, almond, sandcherry, viburnum
- Trees - linden, crape myrtle, apple, cherry, magnolia, pine, cedar
- Water / sand play
- Digging area
- Compost area
- Animals
- Messaging / signage to communicate purpose

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05. Sound

- Brain responds to different "ingredients" of sound (pitch, timing, timbre)
- Our fastest sense!
- Types: Nature, Social, Music, Vibration
- Noisy, active areas should be separate from quiet, cozy areas
- May need to buffer noise pollution



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Sound



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Features for

Sound

- Sensory plantings - ornamental grasses, pods, calabash / gourds, bamboo, aspen
- Social gathering spaces - whispering, talking, singing, talk tubes
- Musical instruments - drums / percussion, xylophone, chimes...
- Pathways - different surfacing
- Loose parts play area
- Water play area
- Sand play area area
- Natural processes - chimes, bamboo, rain on overhead coverings

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06. Vestibular

- Located in our inner ear.
- Communicates where our head is in motion relative to gravity
- Equilibrium, movement, balance, postural control, muscle tone, bilateral coordination / 'crossing the midline'
- Helps children feel more secure and confident in their bodies



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Vestibular



Hypersensitive
(avoiders)



Hyposensitive
(seekers)



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Features for

Vestibular

- Pathways
- Swings - traditional, hammock, chair swing, hanging pod / tent
- Berms for rolling, crawling, climbing, walking, running
- Bouncy balls
- Spinners
- Rockers
- Jump rope
- Space for yoga
- Features for climbing and balancing
- Bikes / trikes

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07. Proprioception

- Body awareness system and use of force/pressure to do activities
- Coordination, posture, body awareness, self-regulation, ability to focus, speech
- System is driven by movement and tied to sense of touch / pressure
- Provide lots of opportunity for movement, gross / fine



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Proprioception



Hypersensitive
(avoiders)



Hyposensitive
(seekers)



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Features for

Proprioception

- Pathways
- Climbing and balance features
- Berms for crawling, climbing, walking, running
- Gardening activities
- Loose parts play area
- Digging
- Raking
- Space for arts and crafts
- Wagons, wheelbarrows
- Bikes / trikes
- Tools: watering can, garden tools

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Top 5 multi-sensory features

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#2

loose parts

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#3

edible garden + digging area

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#4

sensory path

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In Summary

- * All childhood activity is rooted in the senses
- * Nature play for the 7 senses builds the body, brain, and nervous system
- * Environments are easily created/adapted to support ALL children's sensory needs
inclusivity! ↙



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Thank you!

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