



Baby Sensory Play and Physical Development Part 2

About the AUTHOR

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In 2024, Helen served as movement consultant for the children's television series *Awesome Animals* and *Mini Me*, now airing on Sky and NOW TV.

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A rich sensory environment helps nurture the adaptive and developmental potential of the infant brain.
(Goddard-Blythe, 2005; Duncombe and Preedy, 2020)

In Part 1 of *Baby Sensory Play and Physical Development*, we looked at how movement supports babies' vestibular development, body awareness, and core strength. These shared experiences also encourage co-regulation, helping babies connect with your emotional cues and build early social and emotional skills.

Building on this foundation, Part 2 takes us deeper into the world of sensory-motor play and how it supports babies' early development. We'll explore the importance of rich, engaging environments that stimulate all the senses and share top tips for creating a multi-sensory space that encourages exploration, movement, and connection. Whether you're working in a setting or at home, these ideas will help you create meaningful, developmentally supportive experiences for the babies in your care.

Sensory Motor Play

Sensory motor play merges movement with sensory input, forming the cornerstone of healthy infant development. Activities like grasping toys, feeling different textures, and visually tracking movement support:

- ★ Motor coordination
- ★ Muscle development
- ★ Sensory processing
- ★ Cognitive engagement

(Battelley, 2019)

This type of play encourages curiosity, exploration, and problem-solving. It also strengthens emotional bonds as caregivers respond to a baby's movements and expressions—an early form of communication that nurtures secure attachments and social development.



Top Tips for Creating a Multi-Sensory Environment for Babies

- **Soft Lighting & Visuals**

Use natural lighting and high-contrast visuals like black-and-white patterns or colourful mobiles to support visual development and sustained attention.

- **Offer Varied Textures**

Provide materials and objects with differing textures—soft, rough, crinkly, smooth. Heuristic baskets filled with safe, everyday items (lemons, pinecones, natural sponges, cloths, wooden spoons, etc.) can offer rich tactile experiences.

- **Use Music & Sounds**

Expose babies to a wide range of musical genres (lullabies, jazz, funk, classical) and natural sounds. Simple percussion instruments can support auditory discrimination, rhythm, and listening skills.

- **Introduce Safe Scents**

Gentle, natural scents like lavender or chamomile can create a calming environment. Use sparingly and always ensure safety by keeping scents away from direct contact with the baby.

- **Encourage Movement**

Rocking, swaying, rolling, swinging and bouncing—whether in arms or using supportive baby equipment—help stimulate the vestibular system and soothe the nervous system.



- **Incorporate Water Play**

Supervised water activities like foot/hand splashing in a shallow bowl or squeezing a damp cloth provide sensory input that fosters body awareness and fine motor development.

- **Enrich Tummy Time with Sensory Mats**

Use mats with varied textures, colours, and attached toys to create an engaging tummy time environment that stimulates touch, sight, and sound.

- **Rotate Sensory Materials**

Keep the environment stimulating by regularly rotating toys and materials. This supports curiosity and exposes babies to a broader range of sensory and motor experiences.

Creating a safe, multi-sensory space allows babies to explore, learn, and connect with their environment—supporting every aspect of their early growth and development.





Reflective Question:

- What multi-sensory tips can I implement in my setting or at home?



Further Reading:

To further enhance your practice, explore the [Education Endowment Foundation's Evidence Store](#)—a valuable resource for accessing evidence-informed strategies that foster children's physical development and active play. This tool supports early years professionals in creating nurturing, developmentally rich environments that prioritise movement, exploration, and well-being.

Resources:

- Battelley, H.J (2019) What impact does integrating a motor sensory programme with reception aged children, have on teachers practice and future provision? BCU/CREC EDU7398. Unpublished
- Department for Education (2017) Development Matters. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2>
- Department for Education (2023) Early Years Child Development Training. Available at: <https://child-development-training.education.gov.uk>
- Duncombe, R., Preedy, P., Gorely, T (2020) Physical development in the early years: the impact of a daily movement programme on young children's physical development, Education 3-13.
- Goddard-Blythe, S (2005) The Well-Balanced Child. Hawthorn Press
- Manners, L (2019) The Early Years Movement Handbook. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

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