

# 10 Terrific Tips to Build Strong Fine Motor Skills For STEAM Activities

Presented by:

*Cecília Cruse, MS, OTR/L*

# Sensory Integration/Sensory Processing

A young child is standing in the snow, wearing a bright red winter jacket, a blue and white striped knit hat, and blue and white striped mittens. The child is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a plain, light-colored surface, likely snow or a light-colored ground.

- the organization of sensation for use
- visual, tactile, auditory gustatory
- the hidden senses:  
proprioceptive, vestibular,  
interoceptive
- the adaptive response



A photograph of a classroom with several children sitting at desks. The children are focused on their work, with some looking at papers and others writing. The room is filled with educational materials, including a 'Geography terms' poster and various papers on the walls. The text is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font, centered on the image.

**"All Learning has its  
basics in sensory  
development"  
- Sensory Secrets**



# The Senses: Visual & Auditory Systems

- Visual System: acuity & perception
- Auditory System: acuity & perception
- Most commonly used systems for teaching

# The Senses: Tactile System

- Light touch, pressure, vibration, temperature, pain
- Types of touch: protective & discriminative





# The Senses: Vestibular System


A person in a pink shirt and black pants is performing a handstand on a beach at sunset. The person is in the center of the frame, with their arms extended upwards and one leg bent. The background shows a sunset over the ocean with a silhouette of a person in the distance.

- Movement, gravity & changing head position
- Impacts: vision, posture, balance, movement & helps regulate behavior

# The Senses: Proprioceptive Input

- Information from muscles & joints: receptors located in muscles, tendons, joints and deep in skin
- Awareness of body position/helps create body scheme
- Certain types of prop. input help regulate the alert state



A young child with short black hair is swinging happily on a swing set. The child is wearing a blue t-shirt and white shorts, and is smiling broadly with their eyes closed. Their feet, wearing brown shoes, are raised in the air. The swing set has a red metal frame and a tan fabric seat. The background shows a park setting with green trees, a white building, and a blue car parked on a paved area.

**We need all our senses to help with fine motor skills!**



# 1. Allow for Tummy Time!

- More of this!



- Less of this!



- 1994 Back to Sleep/SIDS campaign side effects
- Helps build good head control and neck muscles: important for upright seat work later!
- Helps build body awareness

# 1. Allow for Tummy Time!



- Some children may need extra support to maintain this position
- You can also try using a rolled towel under the chest for extra support.





# 1. Allow for Tummy Time!

- Even older students benefit from Tummy Time!



## 2. Encourage Crawling Activities



- Crawling= heavy work input to the body which =improved body awareness skills
- Helps with handwriting later on!





### 3. Add Other Upper Body Weight Bearing Activities:

- Proprioceptive input to the muscles and joints helps build body awareness/body scheme:



- Wheelbarrow walks
- Prone on a ball
- Chair push-ups

### 3. Add Other Upper Body Weight Bearing Activities:

- Downward Dog Stretch

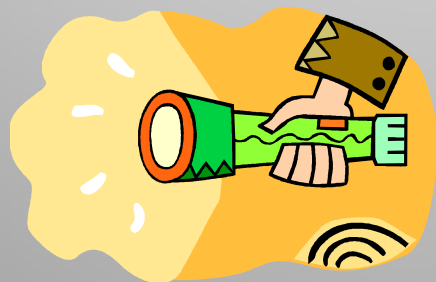
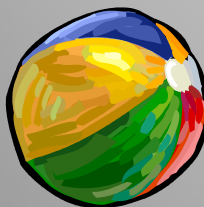


- Other Benefits of Yoga





## 4. Add Visual Tracking Games



- Tracking Bubbles
- Hitting Balloons
- Flashlight Games
- Tossing a Beach Ball
  
- Good for work on large eye movements
- Help with visual plane changes

## 4. Add Visual Tracking Games

- Other great visual tracking ideas





## 5. Vary Use of Media for Drawing & Coloring

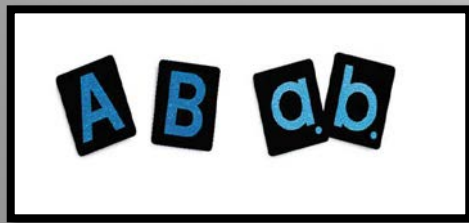


- Shaving/Whip Cream
- Soap Foam Paint Bottles
- Add Dry Jell-O Mix to Paints
- Sidewalk Chalk
- Kwik Stix Tempra Paint
- Wikki Stix
- Bubber!
- Lisa Murphy:
- [www.ooeygooey.com](http://www.ooeygooey.com)

## 5. Vary Use of Media for Drawing & Coloring/Tracing



- Other Great Ideas:
  - Textured/Tactile Letters
  - Blocks/shapes to form alphabet
  - Boogie Boards
  - Apps like Kids Doodle, Doodle Buddy etc.





## 6. Build Strong Hand/Finger Muscles



- Jacks
- Clothespins and bucket
- GumFun!
- Hide n Go Fish
- Tongs
- Fish Sticks
- Play-doh or clay
- Egg Cartons or Muffin Tins

## 6. Build Strong Hand/Finger Muscles

- TheraPutty
  - Like PlayDoh only better!
  - Comes in 3 strengths:
    - Red=soft
    - Green=medium
    - Blue=firm
  - Gluten and Casein Free





## 7. Encourage Correct Grasp



- Whole hand Grasp
- Digital Pronate Grasp
- Dynamic Tripod Grasp



# 7. Encourage Correct Grasp

- Tools to Help Promote Tripod Grasp



## 8. Allow Movement Activity First!



- Vestibular Input helps the sensory system organize and stay on task
- Play first then work!
- Set a timer if transitions are a problem





## 9. Work on Vertical Surfaces

- Helps with shoulder stability and wrist positioning for writing
- Slantboards may also be a good option



# 9a. Work in Alternate Positions!



- Flexible Seating:
  - Ball Chairs
  - Runtz Stool
  - Vidget Seat
- Seat Cushions
  - Core Disks/Bitty Bottoms
- Stand to Work!



# 10. Praise the Work Uniquely!

## Instead of This

- Great work!
- Nice job!
- Good boy/girl
- Thank you!
- I love it when...
  
- Be mindful about what you say!



## Try This:

- It's beautiful the way you used your red and yellow colors for the trees to make it look like fall.
  
- I can tell you put a lot of effort into your drawing.
  
- Thank you for setting the table with all the correct silverware today.



# References

- Miller, Lucy Jane, PhD, OTR: **Sensational Kids**. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons 2006
- Kranowitz, Carol Stock, M.A. **The Out of Sync Child**. New York: Perigee Books, 1998.
- Murphy, Lisa. **Ooey Goey Handbook**. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2001.
- Schiller, Pam. **Start Smart! Building Brain Power in the Early Years- Revised Edition** Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, 2012
- Schneider, Catherine Chemin, OTR: **Sensory Secrets**. Siloam Springs, AR: Concerned Communications, 2001
- Henry, Diana, MS, OTR/L. **SI Tool Kit and Tools for Tots:** [www.ateachabout.com](http://www.ateachabout.com)
- Products: [www.abilitations.com](http://www.abilitations.com) [www.childcraft.com](http://www.childcraft.com)