



early childhood community development centre

Coaching & Mentoring CONNECTIONS

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Our goal is to provide you with practical, inspiring resources to support your work and professional growth in the early learning and child care field.

Welcome to the October edition of the ECCDC Coaching and Mentoring newsletter. **“The senses, being explorers of the world, open the way to knowledge. Our apparatus for educating the senses offers the child a key to guide his explorations of the world”** (Maria Montessori n.d.). In this edition of the coaching and mentoring connections newsletter we will be exploring how educators can support children’s sensory needs.



Spotlight on Sensory Needs

From the moment that children are born they use their senses to explore the world around them, and sensory play experiences play a vital role in supporting children's brain development. Many theorists including Maria Montessori, Friedrich Froebel, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Peter Gray, and Susan Linn highlight the importance of sensory play experiences for young children. Continue reading to learn how you can support and enhance sensory play experiences within your early learning and child care program.



Sensory Play in the Early Years – [click here](#) to watch

Sensory Experiences in Early Childhood Education

by Sara Abbata, Brock Student Intern with the ECCDC

Definition

Sensory experiences refer to activities that engage a child's senses, sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, as well as movement and balance. Sensory play helps children explore and understand the world around them while fostering cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development (Gascoyne, 2016).

Characteristics of Sensory Experiences

- Encourages curiosity and exploration
- Enhances fine and gross motor skills
- Supports language and communication development
- Promotes emotional regulation and mindfulness
- Strengthens problem-solving and critical thinking skills

Types of Sensory Play in Early Learning

- **Tactile Play** – engaging with different textures (e.g., sand, water, playdough)
- **Auditory Play** – exploring sounds through instruments or environmental noises
- **Visual Play** – identifying colors, patterns, and light effects
- **Olfactory Play** – smelling different scents to develop sensory recognition



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- **Gustatory Play** – safe food exploration to develop taste awareness
- **Vestibular Play** – activities that involve movement and balance (e.g., swings, rocking toys)
- **Proprioceptive Play** – heavy work activities that develop body awareness (e.g., pushing, jumping, squeezing)

The Role of Educators in Sensory Play

Educators Facilitate Sensory Experiences By:

- Creating safe and engaging environments with diverse sensory materials
- Observing and documenting children's interactions with sensory stimuli
- Encouraging open-ended exploration and problem-solving
- Supporting children with sensory processing challenges by adapting activities
- Integrating sensory play into daily routines to enhance learning outcomes.



Research and Theoretical Foundations

Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

- Sensory play is fundamental in the sensorimotor stage (birth to age 2), where children learn through direct sensory and motor experiences (Piaget, 1952).
- Hands-on exploration through sensory experiences supports logical thinking and creativity.

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Sensory experiences enhance learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children develop skills through guided interaction with educators and peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Ontario's Early Years Frameworks

- *How Does Learning Happen?* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) highlights sensory play as a means of fostering engagement, well-being, and expression.
- *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT) (2007) recognizes sensory exploration as a key component of physical and cognitive development.

Example of Sensory Play in Action

Activity: Sensory Exploration Bin (Multi-Sensory Engagement)		
Learning Areas: Fine Motor Skills, Language Development, Emotional Regulation		
Step 1: Set Up the Environment	Step 2: Inquiry & Exploration	Step 3: Reflection & Extension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a sensory bin filled with materials like rice, pasta, or kinetic sand. • Add objects with different textures, shapes, and colours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to explore the materials using their hands and tools. • Introduce descriptive words to enhance language development (e.g., rough, smooth, squishy). • Ask open-ended questions like “How does this feel?” or “What happens when you squeeze it?”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how different textures feel and compare sensory experiences. • Document learning through artwork, storytelling, or photos. • Extend play by introducing new materials (e.g., scented elements, water beads).

Resources for Sensory Play Books & Articles

- Gascoyne, S. (2016). *Sensory play: Exploring the world through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch*. Featherstone Education.
- Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. Norton.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Dunn, W. (2001). *The sensory profile: Assessing and addressing sensory processing in children*. Psychological Corporation.

Government Documents

- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *How does learning happen? Ontario's pedagogy for the early years*. Ontario Ministry of Education. Queen's Printers Press.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007). *Early learning for every child today* (ELECT).

References

- Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning (2007). *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings*. Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning.
- Gascoyne, S. (2016). *Sensory play: Exploring the world through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch*. Featherstone Education.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *How does learning happen? Ontario's pedagogy for the early years*. Queen's Printers Press.
- Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. Norton.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

ECCDC Blogs and Podcasts

If you would like to find out more about supporting sensory play needs, then check out these ECCDC resources and look out for future episodes of the ECCDC podcasts which will focus on sensory play.



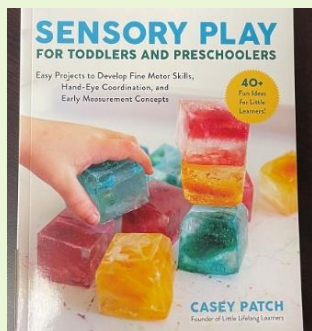
[Click here](#) to read ***Making Sense of Sensory Play!***



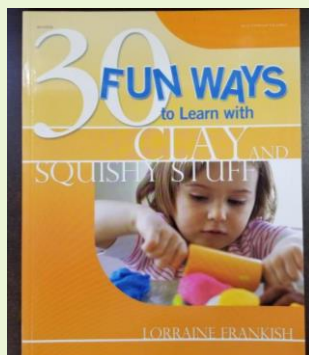
[Click here](#) to listen to ***Making the most of Your Professional Learning Experiences***

Supporting Sensory Experiences Books and Resources

The ECCDC has many books and resources available to borrow from the ECCDC resource lending library. [Click here](#) to search the catalogue for resources to borrow or to purchase from ECCDC's E-Store, [click here](#).



Sensory Play For
Toddlers and
Preschoolers by Casey
Patch



30 Fun Ways to
Learning with Clay and
Squishy Stuff by
Lorraine Frankish



Getting Along with
Others: Mini Light
Panel Exploration with
Translucent Letters and
Gems

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Bag of Fidget Toys #9



Sensory Resources:
Preschoolers Explore
Mixing & Pouring
through Making
Lemonade



Infant Activity
Equipment: Natural
Treasure Basket
Materials for Infants
and Toddlers

Resource Delivery Service

If you're an ECCDC member located in Niagara, you can take advantage of our free resource delivery service. We'll bring materials right to your program! To learn more or to arrange a delivery, please contact the ECCDC at 905.646.7311 ext. 304 or [email](#) us.



Useful Blogs and Videos to Support Children's Sensory Play



Sensory play in the early years – [click here](#) to watch



Inclusion Matters podcast: Supporting the sensory needs of young children – [click here](#) to listen on Youtube

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The Lillio Early Learning blog: Sensory Play Benefits for Preschoolers – [click here](#) to read



Active for Life article: 20 Outdoor sensory play activities for young children – [click here](#) to read

Professional Development and Networking Opportunities

We are excited to announce that Esteem has been released with sessions, series, and communities of practice being offered from fall 2025 to fall 2026! [Click here](#) to view esteem. To visit ECCDC's registration page, [click here](#). Below are some sessions being offered by ECCDC's Coaching & Mentoring team.

Everyday Moments That Matter: Building Foundations for Connection and Intentional Practice, 5-Part Series

Session 1: **Inviting Spaces & Tools for Thinking: Designing Environments and Using Materials to Spark Play, Learning, Inquiry and Connection** on Thursday October 23, 2025. Session 2: **In the Moment: Capturing Children's Thinking Through Documentation** on Thursday November 20, 2025. Sessions 3-5 will be taking place in Winter 2026.

Hanen Sharing Sensitive News, 2-Part Training taking place on Monday December 1 and 15, 2025.

Niagara Communities of Practice

If you are an educator working in Niagara, save the date for the following network meetings taking in October: **Early Learning and Child Care Educator Community of Practice Network** Wednesday October 15, 2025 and **Menu Planning and Nutrition Community of Practice Network** Wednesday October 29, 2025.

Of Interest



- Navigating Transition and Change during Back-to-school Season. Devereux Center for Resilient Children Blog post: [click here](#)
- The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund; Legacy Schools Program Free Toolkit: [click here](#)
- Take Me Outside for Learning Challenge; Sign up and Commit to take your learners outside for at least 1 hour per week: [click here](#)
- **New College of Early Childhood Educators Guidance** - Practice Note Preventing Professional Dishonesty: [click here](#)

Coming Soon

The September ECCDC podcast conversation is with Rusty Keeler with discussion about risk taking in children's play. You can listen to Rusty's podcast episode by [clicking here](#).

For the October ECCDC podcast, we will be in conversation with Melanie Dixon, who is the director for Professional Development with Ontario's College of Early Childhood Educators, to discuss how educators can document their professional early learning journey. Keep an eye on your inbox during the middle of October for the release date and link.

The ECCDC podcast is available on [Spotify](#) and [Apple](#) Podcasts! Stay tuned - you won't want to miss these insightful conversations. [Click here](#) to listen to other ECCDC Podcasts

Educator Well Being through Creative Expression

This month's Mindful experience to support educator well-being is to engage in creative expression. This involves indulging in any form of creative activity that allows you to express yourself, whether it is painting, writing, crafting, playing music, or even cooking. Creative expression is a wonderful outlet for emotions and a powerful way to explore your imagination and inner world.

Exploring the Benefits of Creativity

Engaging in creative activities has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, and enhance cognitive function. It provides a productive way to process emotions, foster a sense of achievement, and can even lead to a state of flow, where you lose track of time as you are fully immersed in the activity.

How to Get Started

Choose Your Medium: Pick an activity or medium that appeals to you. Do not worry about skill level; it is about the process, not perfection.

Set Aside Dedicated Time: Just like with any other practice, setting aside time for your creative pursuits can help turn them into a habit.

Choose a Creative Space: Designate a space in your home where you can engage in your creative activities without interruptions.

Experiment and Explore: Do not be afraid to try new things or mix different mediums. Creativity is about exploration and play.



Incorporating Mindfulness into Creativity

While engaging in your creative activity, practice mindfulness by focusing on the present moment. Notice the colours you are using, the texture of the materials, and how the activity makes you feel.

Documenting Your Creative Journey

Consider keeping a journal or portfolio of your creative work. Reflect on your progress, the emotions you felt during the process, and any ideas or inspiration that emerged.

Sharing Your Work

If you are comfortable, share your creations with a broader audience through social media or local community groups. Sharing can be a way to connect with others and celebrate your expression.

Creative expression is a deeply fulfilling way to be Mindful and in turn support one's well-being. It allows you to tap into your inner resources, provides a sense of freedom, and can transform the way you view yourself and the world. Whether you are an experienced artist or a beginner, embracing creativity can be an enlightening part of your personal mindfulness journey.