

SENSORY SWIM®

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [SPEAKING](#) [ENROLL](#) [TOUR](#) [CONTACT](#)

Sensory Activities: The Essential Guide

By Sensory Swim

Whether a child or adult, we all need **activities** & exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

If a child has **sensory** issues that prevent them from doing typical "group" exercise classes or "team" sports, then what are they to do?

What is a parent suppose to do with their child who can't or won't participate in routine **activities** & exercise & who experiences things differently?

These **sensory** processing disorder symptoms can range from visual to tactile to movement.



For example, if a child gets overstimulated easily from visual things such as bright colors & lights, or even the movement of fans, they

will not have an enjoyable time learning a skill, even if the skill is as simple as a jumping jack.

If a child that is distracted or fascinated by fans is in a room trying to do this exercise with a fan within sight, they will not be able to concentrate on what their body is supposed to be doing.

The same is true for a child who abhors bright colors or loves them.

If you put this child in a room with a plethora of bright colors, they will be totally distracted & not able to perform any task to the best of their ability.

There are children in classrooms that simply cannot sit still that need the **sensory** stimulation of moving constantly.

If they could

- sit
- spin
- swing

they might be more likely to take an interest in the material they are supposed to learn.

Instead, they are focused on sitting still as told by their teachers, which is really hard for them to do.

If allowed to move & get comfortable, they would excel & thrive in this educational setting.

There are no cookie-cutter people, children or adults.

We are all individuals & some of us learn better in quiet settings & some learn better with a little noise in the background.

Whatever our preference, **sensory** issues will always be a factor in everything we do.

Some of us like certain noises & can't stand other noises.

There are people that absolutely hate a particular color & others will love that same color.

This could be a personal preference or it could be **sensory** related.

Can't Touch This: Uniforms, Clothes & Sensory Activities

What if a child has issues with different textures & either craves the input of touching certain fabrics & surfaces or those same ones completely turn them off?

Would this interfere or help with their daily **activities** & learning?

Suppose a child cannot stand to feel a tag on their clothes & they must wear a certain sports uniform shirt with tags?

Would this be so distracting for them that it could effect the way they play?

These are all areas to be considered when enrolling your child in **sensory activities**.

They should also be enjoyable for your child & bring about benefits that can spill over to other areas of their lives.

Any **sensory activity**, when handled with care & compassion can help children with special needs.

It can assist with improvement in their cognitive skills as well.

In addition, if a child has trouble with balance or coordination, they usually lack the self-confidence it takes to succeed in any kind of sport, whether individual or team.

They may have some gross motor delays that prevent them from doing any **activity** that requires synchronized movements, which includes sports.

So where is this child supposed to get their healthy daily dose of **activity**?

The answer is in **sensory activities** that are tailor-made to fit that individual child & their needs.

There are so many **activities** out there that involve team sports, or individual sports, that are of no interest to certain children &

adults.

However, there are specific **activities** that are of great benefit.

Some **sensory activities** can actually assist people that have **sensory** issues to overcome fears, build muscle, improve balance & coordination & help them conquer their **sensory** issues.

If a parent has a child who is extremely sensitive to noises & gets overstimulated easily, they must seek out **sensory activities** that are good for their child.

That is quite a task – to find an **activity** their child enjoys, can reach goals no matter how small, & develop a relationship of trust.

There are many **activities** & therapies that claim to accomplish this, but do they?

Can they address the individual's needs & allow the child to love that **activity**?

Hold Onto Your Horses

Horseback riding is one of the most popular **sensory activities**.

When a person has social problems or other physical issues or **sensory** challenges, this activity is beneficial.

For example, when a child who is autistic & is dealing with other issues, social & physical, they can develop a relationship with the horse – can feel like the horse is his friend.



During the horse-back riding lesson, the child learns to take care of

the horse, brush it, saddle it & relate to it.

For some children who have tactile issues, who don't like to touch animal fur or are apprehensive about animals in general, this can help them overcome such fears.

In addition, there is a trust that is built between the horse & rider.

Just getting up on a horse, using strength & coordination is great exercise & use of the muscles.

For a parent to see their autistic child who has a difficult time getting out of his world & making eye contact with others, even his parents, to get to a point where he is looking directly at the horse's face, is reassuring & provides hope.

The parent prays for this kind of contact with their child at home, but every effort seems in vain.

Then, they take their child to horse-back riding lessons to discover that the child is developing a unique relationship with the horse.

That's why a good number of autistic children can bond with different animals, & love to participate in this type of **activity**.

Arnold Fears The Sensory Motor Gym

Another of the **sensory activities** that creates development in children & adults with special needs is gymnastics.

Some gyms who serve the special needs community are called **sensory** motor gyms & have groups & individual lessons that create an occupational therapy environment.

They deal with gross motor skills & motor planning (going from A to B to C in that order).

Children get to climb, jump on trampolines, roll down mats, run & tumble & learn how to get that extra energy out of their systems.

Children who are able to join small groups may get to do certain physical **activities** with others, experience waiting in line, taking their turn, relating to the other students & following directions.

Children who are not able to participate in groups, even small ones, do individual lessons at these gyms to improve their physical skills & overcome specific challenges.

Sometimes it's difficult to find a gym where the instructors have the natural ability to teach these children & relate to them, while

showing them how to have fun.

So this can be a good choice as far as **sensory activities** are concerned for a child who is very physical or for one who needs more movement.

Sometimes when parents find out that their son or daughter is autistic, they look to different therapies for assistance.

There are physical therapists who deal with certain issues & occupational therapists who deal with other issues.

Physical therapy is not a type of **sensory activity**, per se; however, occupational therapy deals more along these lines.

For instance, you may find a small motor gym in some occupational therapists office, where they can work with their patients & clients on achieving better balance, improving coordination, & improving gross motor skills.

They may also have a room or station that is set up to deal with a child who has fine motor skill difficulties.

If a child has fine motor skill delays, they may have a tough time trying to color, write, or even hold a pencil, crayon or pen.

In the occupational therapist's office, this child can work on building strength & coordination in their hands & fingers individually to be able to reach goals in this area.

So in this case, this **sensory activity** is not only worthwhile, but should be conducted in such a way where the child has fun learning.

Some autistic children have great hand/eye coordination & get enjoyment out of throwing a ball or catching a ball.

So parents enroll their child with special needs into tennis lessons, thinking this will give their child great exercise & be a good **sensory activity** for them.

For some children, this is a good **activity** & improves their coordination.

For others, they get bored or frustrated with the strict learning process & the plethora of levels of skills needed.

Parents think that if they enroll their child in small group **sensory activities**, their child will succeed & gain social skills in the process.

This is not always true.

If a child has their own battles with **sensory** issues & is in a group with a child with the opposite reaction to this **sensory** stimulation, it may not only inhibit your child's progress in this **activity** or sport, it may be harmful & cause your child to regress in areas where they have achieved some success already.

I have heard of parents whose son had some "stemming" issues with his hands.

He went into a small social group & did various **sensory activities** & other social exercises with various autistic children.

However, the parents were noticing that their son was picking up on the other child's stemming.

This was evident because he was not only doing constant same movements with his hands like before, but he started doing some stemming with his feet & motions that mimicked one of other boys in his group.

Along with this, he also started making strange noises, which apparently was what one of the little girls in his group would do to get attention.

Not all situations have results like this.

In some cases, not all that common, an autistic child may pick up cues & observe others in his group in a positive way, trying to speak more, etc.

Sensory Activity: Private Swimming Lessons

When it comes to **activities** specifically designed to focus on **sensory** issues, special needs swimming seems to be extremely popular.

There are so many reasons why this **sensory activity** ranks highest, if not the highest for special needs children & adults.



When a parent enrolls their child in a swim class, they are usually doing it because they want their child to be safe when near water & know how to swim if God forbid they fall into a body of water.

Some autistic children are just drawn to water.

Unfortunately, there are statistics that back up the fact that many autistic children have been drawn to water, fell or jumped in & drown.

There are also a large number of autistic children who are repulsed & frightened by water, even to the point where they don't want their heads or faces getting wet for any reason.

This is very much like having a **sensory** processing disorder

They have a **sensory** issue with water which prevents their parents from bathing in the normal fashion.

Some of these children actually have meltdowns when confronted with any **activity** or possibility of getting wet.

Still, there are other children & adults who are frightened of water & the possibility that they will not be able to learn how to swim.

If a child is enrolled in a group swimming class where the instructor is not experienced & familiar with **sensory** issues, that child may have to repeat certain levels, or may get frustrated & quit altogether.

If that same child is then put into a semi-private or private instruction for swimming, they stand a better chance of picking up on the method of swimming.

However, again, if that teacher does not have a clear understanding of certain issues & fears that some have with water, again, that child may frustrate the instructor or coach, as well as have meltdowns & fits of anger.

It's always a two-way street.

Don't let anybody convince you that your kid can't learn to swim even if they autism or another special need.

When working with special needs children, a teacher must have patience & compassion every step of the way.

In addition, that teacher must also have an innate sense of when the child is just being manipulative to get out of doing a particular task, or when that child is having problems that require special attention.

If a swimming coach tries to get a child who has fear of the water or intense fear about getting his face wet, to put his head under the water, it may scare that child & keep him from ever getting in the pool again.

But if that instructor takes their time with this child & plays games & creates different ways for the child to put his face and then head in the water, there will be a greater chance for success.

The most beneficial way for a child or adult to reach goals at swimming or any of the **sensory activities**, is to make sure there is trust built between the instructor & the student.

If a strong report is developed & the student can relax & learn to trust their teacher, they stand a much better chance at learning how to swim, or do any **activity**.

If the teacher or coach gets frustrated with the students & is "out of their league" as far as teaching this type of student, they may get angry & raise their voice or display other signs of their frustration.

This reaction will never help that student make progress.

All of us have **sensory** issues; have fears of some type or another, & need a little understanding to face them & work through them.

So much more is the case when we are trying to learn any new skills,

especially a life-saving skill like swimming.

It's so important that we can trust our instructor; that they have an understanding of our fears or apprehensiveness.

That way, if things move too quickly & we are pushed way beyond our comfort level, we won't damage the progress we have already made or hinder any progress yet to come.

The same is true for someone who may not be able to communicate as we do, for example, a child who cannot hear or see or be around other comfortably.

They are battling with several major things already & then trying to learn something new in addition.

This at times can be overwhelming when attempting new challenges.

The appropriate **sensory activities** can provide a whole new world for a child or adult, if the teacher is experienced, not just certified & qualified on paper.

That teacher needs to have the "out-of-the-box" type attitude & compassion & patience that will bring about success.

The instructor must have a relationship with the student based on trust.

It may take some time to build, but is imperative that it exists.

When that perfect fit comes about, the student gains confidence in each goal they accomplish.

If the child wouldn't put their face in the water & then through great instruction & patience, learns to do so, they are filled with pride.

This pride in their accomplishment shows in other areas of their life as well.

If a child learns to pet a horse & not be afraid, chances are they will have a more enjoyable time with other animals and feel bigger than life when facing other things that are scary to them.

There is no stopping a child or adult who overcomes their fears & accomplishes things they perceived as impossible.

There is also no better way to make this happen than to find an instructor who is worth their weight in gold or silver (whichever holds the most value these days).

If you are investing in your child's future, really aiming to see them safe & healthy, you will do your research not just on the **sensory activities** for which you enroll them, but the teachers who will be with them.

Make sure that your child or dependent adult with special needs desires to be there and are not only being taught, but having a good time.

That way, their world will expand & they will be encouraged to do & experience more things that will make life sweeter for them.

Never take for granted that because a certain **activity** is reported to have worked for a child with autism or a child with cerebral palsy, etc., that the results will be the same for your child.

Find out where their interests lie & if it is a skill that will help them in their daily life, make sure it is approached as something fun & exciting, not just another "therapy".

Therapy is helpful in so many ways, but a child who does something for the fun of it, without realizing the therapeutic benefits they are also receiving, will make progress by leaps & bounds

Remember, there are many **sensory activities** available & of great benefit.

Sensory Swim International
7519 Lawrence Road
Baltimore, MD 21222
(443)-500-6894

Choose wise & always make sure the **activity** is wrapped up in "fun".

Things will go smoother for all concerned, the parent, the instructor, & the student.