

SENSORY DEVELOPMENT TIPS FOR BABIES

Made for Previa Alliance Moms



A NOTE FROM COURTNEY:
When motherhood seems overwhelming, remember the most important thing you can do to support your child's development is to connect with them. There is nothing more important than a secure and safe nervous system. It will stick with them for their entire life. Give yourself grace and enjoy your moments of connection!



By: *Courtney
English*
OTR/L & Mom



SUPPORTING SENSORY DEVELOPMENT

0-12 MONTHS

In this section we'll talk about how to stimulate the visual system, how to use floor time, and how to co-regulate for children ages 0-3 months and the how to add on for ages 3-6 months, 6-9 months, and 9-12 months.

These will all be things to help support development in order to build brain connections through interacting with people and the environment around us.



THE VISUAL SYSTEM

Visual system: The primary way your child takes in the world is through their visual system. Our newborns aren't able to move independently at this time, but we can offer them visual experiences to build a good foundation for other skills to development.

Ways to stimulate the visual system:

- High contrast images
 - Holding them 12-14 inches away from baby's face
 - Using them during floor time; prone (on belly), supine (on back), side-lying (on side). Be sure to alternate sides. These high contrast images will increase tolerance to tummy time.
- Use a slow moving mobile over changing table or in crib for awake play time
- Shake rattles 12-14 inches away from baby face, make noises, sing, or talk face to face with baby



FLOOR TIME

Floor time is a VERY important to your child's sensory motor development. Aim for 60-90 minutes of tummy time a day. During other wake periods, optimize floor time with your child.

Here are some tummy time options:

- Lying on your chest
- On belly over legs
- On floor with high stimulating photo cards
- Yoga ball on belly rolling forward and back
- Mirror time on belly
- Rattle sound while on belly, shake it to music or rhythm



CO-REGULATION

Co-regulation is when you lend your nervous system to your baby. It allows them to feel safe because your body is calm. The nervous system impacts regulation. What we know is that the nervous system likes predictable, rhythmic, and linear movement to feel organized and calm.

Co-regulation activities to do with your baby:

- Baby wearing
- Blanket swaddle- roll them up in blanket gently and gently apply pressure to arms and legs while making silly noises
- Linear swinging and bouncing in arms while singing (linear means in a line- NOT spinning)
- Play nature sounds
- Skin to skin
- Talking to baby about the routine/plan for the day
- Bum pats to simulate heart beat baby felt in womb
- Use shushing noise to simulate whooshing sound from womb
- Baby massage



SENSORY ROUTINES FOR BABY & MOM

In this section we'll talk about how to build sensory development habits and routines into your daily life.

These items will be sorted by 0-3 months, 3-6 months, and 6-12 months.



SENSORY ROUTINES FOR BABY & MOM 0-6 MONTHS

Vestibular: Going for stroller walks for visual input. Your child will have a multi-sensory experience while their body moves in space. Carry your baby in different positions; facing out, facing in, over shoulders, inclined on your lap.

Visual: Visit places like the aquarium to really take in the visual experience and be exposed to sounds in environment. High contrast cards during floor time. Make visual bottles with plastic bottle, water, glitter, etc.

Tactile: Adding sponges/loofa to bath time to increase tactile experience with bubbles. Baby massage after bath time.

Proprioception: Floor time, especially tummy time, blanket burrito, Blanket burrito is where you gently roll baby up in blanket and take a pillow to go “boop” as you give gentle pressure to legs.

Auditory: Singing and nature sounds.



SENSORY ROUTINES FOR BABY & MOM 6-12 MONTHS

Vestibular: Blanket pull in tummy time (place baby on tummy on blanket and gentle pull across floor), Blanket swinging (needs 2 people- place baby in middle of blanket, someone grabs blanket on each side, then pick up and gently swing side to side while singing), Laundry basket ride

Tactile: Touchy feely books, Water play with balls, soapy water, playing with puree food (depending on feeding skills)

Visual: Balloons on ankles, Bubbles, lights on/off, rotating light machine, suction spinners

Proprioception: Filling up baskets with toys, crawling over couch pillows, filling up laundry basket and pushing around house

Auditory: Music time with large maracas (or can add rice to Tupperware container and shake), make animal noises, hum or sing with baby

Daily outings: blanket at park to observe others, exploring grass/tree/leaves, swinging at park outside

These experiences are really all your child needs. The #1 priority is for this child to feel connected to you and the world.



SUPPORTING PLAY & CONNECTION

0-6 months We get so busy we are often rushing through routines- focus on special time with baby during routines such as feedings, bath time, bed time routine. So you don't have to be exhausted from trying to "get all these activities in". It is OK to let your baby experience floor time (on back) while you drink your coffee. Dangle toys in front of baby during tummy time, sidelying, and on back to promote reaching and rolling. Closer to 5-6 months- work on vertical play with baby to help with stabilization when sitting. An example of this would be using painters tape to put large balls on wall for baby to pull off.

6-12 months Have them be present while you are folding clothes. You can play peek a boo each time you fold a clothing item. Have them feel the textures of the clothes and explore it when you are doing this. Include baby into your daily routines. Even if you just have them observe you vacuuming. Do a funny dance for your baby when vacuuming to include them in the task.

Tips for play: ALL CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH MODELING. Babies learn about emotions, communication, and how to play by watching others. A lot of this is going to be supported if you verbally guide your child through play. Play is not complex. It is exploring and learning through our senses. Taking a towel and shaking it in the air, covering your face with it, etc. This is social play and is the most important way to connect and help your child build those foundational skills needed for other areas of learning. Sometimes we focus too much on academics or meeting milestones when the bottom up approach is connecting through sensory experiences during play.



NERVOUS SYSTEM & CO-REGULATION

The most difficult part of co-regulation is remaining regulated ourselves! It helps to know that remaining calm will help your child shift their nervous system back to a safe pathway!



Here are some easy ways to improve co-regulation when your child is upset:

- Take deep breaths for yourself. Pro tip, it helps to take double breaths in and out. This means you take max deep breath in, then try to get a little more. When you exhale you will exhale all air out of your lungs then try to get a little more out afterwards.
- Decrease sensory input load by modifying environment (lights low, less sound (turn off electronics), offering a safe corner.
- Pair deep breathing with sensory experience. For example breathing in when rocking baby to one side and breathing out when rocking them back to the other side.



REGULATION FOR PARENTS

HOW TO GET OUT OF A CHRONIC STATE OF STRESS

Start with understanding what signals your body gives you. I sometimes feel heart palpitations when im stressed or worried thinking about things that could happen in the future. I try to be conscious of what my nervous system is telling me. For example, my heart is racing, sweating, feel thirsty can sometimes make me feel like I'm having a heart attack which can sometimes make my nervous system spiral into more dysregulation.

Something to know: Sensory processing is automatic. We don't have control over how we process sensory input, but we do have a choice in how to engage in sensory activities that our nervous system processes as safe and happy. Steven Porges polyvagal theory translator Deb Dana suggests finding "glimmers" in your day. This means finding a few minutes of feeling safe and calm. For me, that is listening to calming music with a weighted blanket with a crunchy snack. Sometimes I use graded motor imagery to help my brain experience senses that have calmed me before such as sitting on the beach.

Here are some ways I recommend calming nervous system:

- Double breath in, double breath out
- Lying on floor with feet up against wall
- Ear buds to reduce overwhelming auditory sensory input
- Adult fidgets (see links for my favorite)
- Shape breathing on your leg - breathing in tracing triangle up, breathe down tracing down, breathe out one more time closing the triangle
- Low lights to decrease sensory input
- Drinking cold water through straw
- Chewing gum
- Taking a walk
- Yoga/stretching on floor
- Any type of movement
- Ice face roller
- Instrumental music with no words
- Decrease caffeine intake

