

25 PLAY & SENSORY ACTIVITIES

FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

BY QUENNIE LIM



Hi there Parents! I'm so grateful to meet you!

My name's Quennie Lim. They call me Teacher Quennie.



I'm here to share with you meaningful and enjoyable activities that you may want to do at home with your little ones!

Playing with Children With Autism (CWA) may increase their development in so many areas such as social interaction and communication, flexibility, gross and fine motor skills. It also develops creativity, imagination, perspective taking, and sensory integration.

Understanding Sensory Processing Difficulty In CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Sensory Processing is the ability of the brain to correctly integrate information brought by our senses. Sense of hearing, touching, smelling, seeing, movement, and tasting are combined with our prior experience, information, memories and knowledge to understand the world.

For Children With Autism (CWA), when sensory input is not integrated or organized appropriately in the brain they experience the world differently and struggle in adapting to this environment. Their response to these stimuli might be an impulsive motor action, darting away, or screaming or making noises.

Children learn best through direct experience with movement and senses. When we give them various play activities, their senses get activated and form connections to the brain that is stored in memory.

We would like them to accept variety of toys, activities, materials, movement or environment. When we give them these exposure, we are improving their Generalization skill. This skill is crucial in a developing child with autism due to their lack of flexibility.

More so, playing addresses motor skills which help them be more sensitive to some other systems and less sensitive to others.

It is important for the parents to be aware of sensory defenses during play because of their sensory overload or lack of it. You want to choose proper activities that match your child's skills and abilities. It will help improve those skills that are needed for social communication, interaction, and many more.

To determine what kind of activity to give, use your experience and personal knowledge in determining your child's unique abilities. However, parents can be creative by modifying activities such as changing the materials, environment, people, lowering the demand, or challenging them.

So here are the activities to play with them. I also place a few guidelines to remember before and during playtime. I hope you will have fun with your child!

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INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

General Guidelines in Playing

1. Keep It Short and Simple (KISS)
2. Motivate or encourage your child by praising or giving tokens
3. Support them by guiding them with rules
4. You can use visuals for them to understand the rule
5. Be clear and specific with your instruction
6. Focus on developing their skills
7. Repeat for familiarization
8. Give variety of materials for generalization
9. Expose them to different environment or people for generalization
10. Provide a Start-Do-Finish Line for your child to clearly know where to go.
11. Do not keep on repeating the activity.
12. Children with autism need to have the "Finished" concept.

1

Lycra Swing

This gives vestibular input (movement-balance of the body) for your child.

STEPS:

1. Have 2 adults to hold the Lycra swing on both ends to create a hammock.
2. Make sure the child is secure in the Lycra and gently swing child back and forth.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You may give this when your child needs to calm down from meltdown or when hyperactive.
2. For the child who is afraid, place the Lycra on the ground and have him sit on it. Two adults gently lift the ends, raising the child slightly higher from the ground.

Note: You may buy Lycra cloth from the fabric store. You can also permanently tie it securely on sturdy posts. Check with your OT.

2

Musical Pillows

Requires motor reaction to auditory cues. This also gives enough pressure to the body that they need for regulation.

STEPS:

1. You can play this with one child or a few. Place the couch cushion in a circle (at least 2 feet apart).
2. Have your child fall on the empty pillow when the music stops. Make sure that the child doesn't fall on a cushion that someone else has fallen on.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You may also use large pillows or adult-sized bean bag to replace couch cushion or to get another kind of deep pressure for sensory input of the body.
2. Do not play the music again if your child needs to have the concept of "finished". You can play another song for another round.

3

Hotdog In a Blanket

When your child is active you can give this deep pressure activity. He would love this!

STEPS:

1. Have your child lay down on one end of a heavy blanket (make sure that his head is off the blanket). Tell your child you are going to make a hotdog.
2. Start rolling him in the blanket (NO part of the face should be rolled in the blanket).

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You may sing a song while rolling him (e.g. "Roll Over" song or "A hotdog in a bun (2x), Name (e.g. Joshua) is the hotdog in the bun)". Or create your own song!
2. You may include tickle or deep pressure when he reach the end of the blanket.
3. If he is anxious being rolled up, put his arms outside the blanket to reduce the feeling of tightness.

4

Moving Animal

This is a fun movement activity that develops body coordination for vestibular and proprioceptive skills.

STEPS:

1. Collect pictures of different distinct animals (on your phone) (e.g. monkey, bear, crab, kangaroo, and duck).
2. Ask your child to mimic how these animal move (model the movement first).

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. If your child needs clear structure, have a starting line and finished line or make a circuit.
2. To challenge your child, create a mini obstacle (e.g. climbing up a small wedge and then jump).

5

Basket Ball Shooting

This is a simple and easy game to play with your child that develops motor skill and eye-hand coordination.

STEPS:

1. Gather 10 balls in a basket/box.
2. Let your child decide how many to throw (or give him 5).
3. Model throwing or let him toss the ball.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Change balls to rolled socks, small stuffed toys, towels or beanbags.
2. Change basket to something interesting like hamper, hula hoop, or big bag
3. Turn take with your child by asking him "who's turn is it?"
4. Write how many you shoot and compare.

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Playdough Texture

It's good to incorporate this in your child's play routine as they love playdough (some may resist). Let them enjoy to develop their fine motor skill.

STEPS:

1. Grab their favorite coloured playdough.
2. Hide marbles, small counters, or safety clips in it.
3. Ask them to find the objects inside.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. To challenge, let them use one hand to develop finger strength.
2. Put 5 or 10 items (depending on their attention) and ask them to keep in a container.

7

Shaving Cream Explore

Children love touching shaving cream!

STEPS:

1. Squirt a blob of shaving cream in the sensory tub/tray in front of your child. You can let the child squirt it too for finger strength! Careful its gonna be messy!
2. Let your child dig and find their favourite toy inside (e.g. shapes, alphabets, animals).

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can incorporate communication by requesting too (e.g. "I want more!" or one-word speech "more").
2. Add your child's favourite color by putting a few drops of food coloring or paint. You can grab a sheet of paper and spread the cream on the sheet to make art.

8

Bubble Wrap Pop

Save the bubble wrap that comes with a package. Be with them for safety purpose. This is good for fine motor development.

STEPS:

1. Let your child enjoy popping the wraps.
2. Show your child how to roll up to pop the bubbles all at the same time.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Cut out small square bubble wraps. You can make an art work by dipping these small squares into paint and on paper.
2. You can also use feet to pop the bubbles! Spread the bubble wrap on the ground, let your child walk or stomp on it.

9

Fishing in the Tub

Children love water play! Give them fun to enjoy while bathing.

STEPS:

1. Gather sea creatures and put them on water in your tub or pail.
2. Let your child scoop them one by one using net, strainer or dipper.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Use other tools like sponges, or cut out sea creatures made of foam.
2. Use something that interest them (e.g. alphabet, number or shapes).
3. They may refuse the use of scoop but you can let them use their one hand.
4. You can make it more fun by hiding them with soap bubbles.
5. You can incorporate sorting too

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Blowing Bubbles

Almost all children love bubbles! It develops visual tracking to develop small eye muscles.

STEPS:

1. Get a container of bubbles.
2. Let your child blow bubbles. Or, you can blow for them!

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can incorporate communication by requesting (e.g. "Mommy, I want more bubbles!" or one word speech "bubbles").
2. Blow one big bubble and let your child follow, catch and pop it.
3. Add your child's favourite color by putting a few drops of food colouring or paint. You can grab a sheet of paper and catch bubbles too to make art.
4. To practice blowing, have your child blow in front of a mirror to see what his mouth needs to do to create the bubbles.

11

Matching Sock Game

This is to improve classification skills. Gather your clean socks and have fun!

STEPS:

1. Place a pile of clean socks in front of your child.
2. Encourage your child to sort socks by color, size or pattern.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Use basket or box for sorting if your child needs structure.
2. You may sort other items such as handkerchief, towel, mittens.
3. If visuals are needed, have some color on top of the box or basket or write the word where to sort them out!
4. Let them join you in the laundry! Sort clothes by color!

12

Floating Balloon

This activity requires the eyes to track a moving object. It also needs trunk rotation to hit the balloon.

STEPS:

1. Bat a balloon back and forth a few times at first until your child gets the concept of the game.
2. Have at least 3 persons to participate in hitting the balloon to keep it afloat.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You may add another balloon for a little bit of challenge.
2. You may call out the name of the person who should hit the balloon next for a more challenging activity. They have to attentively listen to their name and be alert all the time.

13

Puzzle Tub

Here's a game to use your child's old puzzle.

STEPS:

1. Mix all the pieces of the puzzles in a sensory box (e.g. pasta, sand, cotton, or pebbles).
2. Let your child find each piece of puzzle in the tub.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Change puzzle to alphabet, shape, animals or numbers.
2. Be mindful of the number of pieces. You can give 5 or 20 pieces depending on their interest and attention.
3. You can challenge by giving them tweezers or tongs to pick up the pieces

14

What Is Hiding?

This is a guessing game. It can be played before sleeping or when resting.

STEPS:

1. Gather objects around your house.
2. Hide one object under a blanket.
3. Let your child feel the object.
4. Ask your child to guess what is hiding under the blanket.
5. If he does not guess, slowly move the blanket to reveal the object.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Instead of feeling the object, let your child think by telling your child the object description (e.g. "It is red, it is round, you can eat it, or you can juice it, what is hiding"? - Apple)

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Treasure Hunt

This game is easy to set up and fun too!

STEPS:

1. Stick something on the wall or floor (e.g. masking tape with arrow or sticky note) to show them the path to the Treasure (Mark X).
2. Put their favorite toy or a surprise gift at the end of the trail.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can use a yarn or thread to replace the arrow.
2. You can use numbers 1-10 or alphabet as they follow the path.
3. You can use a box at the end of the trail to surprise them of the reward.

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Puzzle Hunt

This encourages problem solving.

STEPS:

1. Use a puzzle that is familiar to them.
2. Place 1 piece on the table and paste or hide the rest of the pieces around the room or wall.
3. Bring your child into the room. Show him the single piece on the table and ask him to find the missing pieces around the room.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Change puzzle to alphabet, shape, animals or numbers.
2. Be mindful of the number of pieces. You can give 5 or 20 pieces depending on their interest and attention.
3. You can challenge your child by listening to your description (e.g. "it is under the chair")

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Popping Ball

This game develops cooperation.

STEPS:

1. Have a parachute (or blanket) and have the children hold onto the edge.
2. Drop one or more balls into the center
3. Have the children work together to get the ball/s to move. Can they make the ball roll back and forth? What do they need to do to pop the ball in the air?

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can start with a few number of people (3 to 4) if your child needs small group.
2. You can do hand over hand assistance if he needs strength to hold the parachute or blanket.
3. You can change balls to his favourite stuff toys.

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Bowling

This may seem simple but it develops his large motor skills.

STEPS:

1. Have soda bottles arranged like bowling pins. You may put some sand in the bottles to keep them from blowing over.
2. Show your child how to roll a ball to knock down the pins.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You may need to structure it. Have a zone line with arrows to indicate where the ball should roll.
2. You may also number the rolling pins and draw circles on the floor to indicate where the pins should be placed.
3. Once the child knocks all the pins, let him reset the pins.
4. You can turn it into a mini game with scoring.

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Feely Bag

This activity encourages sense of touch and making inferences.

STEPS:

1. Place 5-8 objects in the feely bag. Choose objects that are safe (no sharp points) and objects that interest your child (e.g. car, squishy ball, dinosaur).
2. Let your child take one object at a time.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Simple: After taking an object, your child may throw the item in a container with water (he would love to see the effect).
2. Hard: You can ask your child to describe what he touches before removing from the bag (e.g. it's round on top, it's medium sized, has wheels).
3. Take turns with your child.

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What's Playing?

This game develops auditory discrimination.

STEPS:

1. Collect instrumental music (e.g. from youtube) prior to the game. Play one at a time.
2. Let your child identify what instrument is played. Start with easy ones (e.g. drum, tuba, piano).

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can change musical instrument to animal sounds.
2. If your child needs structure, use cards and place 3 to 5 pictures on the table for choices. Let him point or say the answer.

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Stop Dance

This game develops listening skill, self-control and improves body movement.

STEPS:

1. Play music and encourage your child to dance.
2. Randomly stop the music and ask your child to freeze a pose.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can ask your child to hold the pose for longer periods of time.
2. If your child needs structure, place a hula hoop on the floor, mat or put an X on the floor to let your child know where to stand.
3. You can print or show poses for imitation too.

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Buzzing Bee

This helps children with separation anxiety.

STEPS:

1. You sit or stand on one place as if you are the flower.
2. Your child is a bee who can buzz all around you and return to pollen!

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can have a variation of the game such as moon and spaceship, car and home, train and terminal, flower and butterfly.
2. Your child may need help with the structure. You can draw lines or arrow to show him the path to his destination.

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Duck Duck Goose

This game requires social interaction.

STEPS:

1. You can start with small group (e.g. 3-5 children/adult) or larger group (e.g. 5-10) and have them sit in a small circle.
2. Choose a child to be "it". He walks around the outside of the circle and gently tapping each child on the shoulder while calling out "Duck".
3. At a random point, "It" selects a child and calls out "Goose!"
4. The goose must stand up and chase the "It" around the circle.
5. "It" tries to run and sit in the vacant spot before the goose tags him. That goose becomes the next "it".

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You can adapt it for any theme or occasion (e.g. green, green, yellow or bunny, bunny, chick)

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All About Me

This develops self-awareness.

STEPS:

1. Tape a large paper on the floor. Have your child lay flat on his back on the paper.
2. Trace an outline around his body.
3. Ask your child the different body parts on the outline.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. Your child may write down the word of the body parts on paper for spelling.
2. He may also colour the outline with different colouring tools (e.g. crayons, paints, chalk).
3. Parents or siblings may also lay flat on the ground and do the same. Ask him (e.g.) "Where is Mommy's hands?" or "Draw mommy's nose?"

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Animal Safari

This encourages imagination and pretend play.

STEPS:

1. Hide a variety of his favourite animals around the room when your child is away.
2. Have your child return and search for the "wild" animals.

FOR MODIFICATION:

1. You may add jungle sound to make the game more fun.
2. Your child may need to know how many animals to find. You can provide a visual prompt by writing the names of the animals on board or paper and let your child cross it out once found.
3. To make it simple, you may write a number on the animals and let your child find 5 animals and drop them in a box when found.

I hope you learn tons of playing activities for your child.

I know how it feels to start an unfamiliar activity with your child. But, if you do one activity at a time and familiarize with it. you will learn that these will help your child develop different skills he needs to learn.

When introducing one activity, plan and have a practice first so that when your child is ready, you know how to handle and manage.

When there is meltdown, do not enforce. There is always another day to do it. Have fun, enjoy it with your child. Incorporate eye contact, requesting, communication in between his play!

Children with autism also need structure. They may not understand the social rules when not explicitly taught to them, so be sure to let him understand what you want him to do by modelling or showing pictures or materials.

You may check out my [7 Things You Need To Learn Before Teaching Your Child With Autism](#). This will help you understand what you should do to help them cope.

Most importantly, learn and enjoy with him. He will feel your genuine love and care.

References:

101 Games and Activities for Children with Autism, Asperger's and Sensory Processing Disorders. Tara Delaney, M.S. OTR. 2009. McGraw-Hill eBooks.

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Another Awesome Guide That Will Help You Even More

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE IN
**UNDERSTANDING
AUTISM**
BY **QUENNIE LIM**



If you want to understand autism more than what is being taught to you, this will help you get that deeper but specific knowledge you need. Visit my website (quennielim.com) to learn more.

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TALK TO ME.



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