

Games and Play for Students with Complex Needs.



Games and play are great way to learn and practise cooperative skills such as: **sharing, turn-taking, communication and flexibility** as well as academic areas like **numeracy and literacy**. Games and play in general also help to support **fine and gross motor skills**.

All children begin to **learn and make sense of their world through play** and it offers them the **opportunity to practise skills** that will be needed as they grow and develop, therefore incorporating play and games into their daily lives is a great way to support their **social and behaviour development**.

Adaptations and support **provided to children will differ** depending on their own **individual stage of development and readiness** to learn through play. Students that do not seem interested in playing games or playing with will **require more support**. They may not understand what to do with the toy or how to play the game. They may not yet know how to explore toys, to engage in trial and error exploration or they may have poor task persistence. These skills with **support from the adult** will need to be developed, **role-modelling** is an effective strategy.

When **introducing a new toy or game** we can take the following steps so as to support the student to become independent as they can:

- To begin with where necessary provide gentle **hand-over-hand or physical support**.
- Continue to do this with **verbal prompts** like, “push like this” or “big jump” etc, **gradually reducing** the amount of physical support required as the child builds confidence and ability within the new skill.
- As with gradually **reducing physical support** we can also reduce when the student is ready the verbal prompts.
- With this support and **opportunity to practise** and persist the skill can be mastered.

Cause and Effect toys are a very good starting point for students learning to play, as they offer an **immediate response** in direct relation to an action from the student. For instance, **toys that light up or play music** when a button is pressed.



Combining **turn taking** with these types of activities helps to develop the idea of game-playing.

Multi-sensory appeal and approach can be very beneficial for all students but especially for those with Complex Needs. All children are **attracted by toys that engage their senses**. Choosing and offering toys that have **different textures, effects** – sound and visual, even different smells and water play can help to maintain a **child's interest and persistence** with any given toy or game.




** Be aware of blinking or flashing toys that may trigger seizures in students prone to seizures.

Offering choice - Where you can offer your child choice of activities – probably **2 or 3 is plenty**. Offering choice allows your child a sense of responsibility and control over their activities / learning. Using objects or pictures can be useful here – “**Would you like _____ or _____?**” Offering choice can also **assist with persistence development**, as if the child has chosen the toy or game they are more likely to want to persist.

We must ensure that toys are made from **non-toxic materials and are **suitable for the age and stage** of development of the child. Be **careful of choking hazards** – particularly for those children that love to mouth and bite objects. Toys should be **easily cleaned**.

The benefits of learning through play and games for students with Complex Needs:



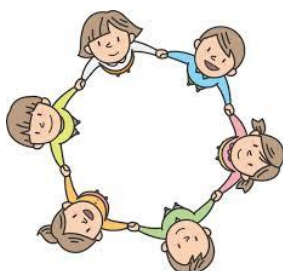
Language and Communication: Games can be chosen to provide practise in relevant vocabulary or communication, for instance shopping games can practise food vocabulary, hide and seek can practise house / room vocabulary. Games can practise vocabulary like “now / next / then – all important words for those students that are beginning to use visual schedules.

When engaging in pretend play, children are given the opportunity to role play language or to play out a scenario or situation. Children, can also be taught and can develop their request language, such as asking questions relevant to the situation, or coming up with different play ideas.



Cognitive: Playing and games provides a safe setting where students can explore ideas in new and different ways. Students can learn and practise to be flexible in their thinking through imaginative and creative role-play activities. Using dressing up games or puppet games can work very well with this type of play.

Physical: When children are exposed to a variety of toys or games they will have the opportunity to learn how to manipulate different types of equipment, as well as practising manipulating their own bodies - twisting, pushing, pulling, squeezing, throwing, catching, jumping, hopping etc. All of these motor behaviours support fine and gross motor development.



Social and Emotional: Through games and playing children can learn social rules. They can practise following rules, taking turns, sharing and communicating with their peers. Children can also learn to express and cope with their feelings – learning through the fun that games can be as well as perhaps the competitive winning and losing element of games.

Some games, toys and activity suggestions for students with Complex Needs:

Sensory / Messy play: No better way to start than with **messy play**, most (but definitely not all) students love to learn through messy play. We can help **to improve fine and gross motor skills as well as cooperative and collaborative play**.

Some examples include:

Homemade edible finger paint:

You will need: 4 Tablespoons of corn flour (corn starch)

Cold water

1 Cup of boiling water

Liquid food colouring

What to do:

1. In a saucepan, mix the cornflour with enough cold water to make a paste. (Not too runny).
2. Pour in 1 cup of boiling water and stir thoroughly so there are no lumps.
3. Turn on medium heat on the stove and mix. The mixture will start to thicken and turn into a custard-like consistency.
4. Spoon equal amounts into empty jars, cups or containers and add food colouring. Mixing until completely combined. For each colour, add 3 drops of the food colouring. To make orange add 1 drop of red and 2 yellow. To make purple, add 1 drop of blue and 2 red.
5. Store in the fridge covered with cling wrap for up to 2 weeks. This paint recipe does not have any preservative in it, so it is important to check that the paint has not expired before giving it to children.



More sensory play activities can be found here:

<https://www.learning4kids.net/list-of-sensory-play-ideas/>

<https://childhood101.com/sensory-play-ideas/>

Sensory Bags or Bins: can provide opportunities for students to learn through some or all of our senses: **taste, touch, visual, auditory or smell.**

We can make sensory bags or bins with a lot of materials that we may have around the house. They can be **themed** according to student preference, new learning skill development or even gently **building up tolerances** to varying sensory stimuli.

Some sensory bag / bin ideas include:

- Rice
- Dried beans
- Popcorn kernels
- Cornflour
- Porridge
- Leaves
- Shaving foam

Children can explore through their senses, touching, smelling (where appropriate) taste ****beware choking hazards****.

They can use their hands as well as other objects to put into and explore through the sensory material. Driving through their favourite truck or dinosaur, developing imaginative play. Adults can support here, by role-playing some play ideas.








Some more ideas can be found here: <https://www.pre-kpages.com/what-is-a-sensory-bin/>
<https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/all-about-sensory-bins-5-things-need-know/>

A useful YouTube video to help with creating sensory bins at home:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VBzB-dfh1I>

Outdoor Play Time: is stimulating and beneficial for children of all abilities. Outdoor play supports gross and fine motor skills as well as social interaction skills.

Some examples include:

<p>Rainbow soap Foam Bubbles</p> 	<p>Using soap, water, food colouring – mix together and allow the children to see what colours they can create. Objects can be placed into the basin of bubbles to play with. Using a bubble wand children can be encouraged to blow bubbles. Taking turns can be included with this activity.</p>
<p>Chalk</p> 	<p>A great way to practise colour recognition as well as fine and gross motor skills. Can get quite messy so old clothes and a towel are a good idea! Chalk can be hard to hold, so small chunky chinks are best! Support with hand-over-hand if needed. Chalks can also be used on the walls if standing is easier for the student. Communication re colours and preferences can be incorporated with this activity.</p>
<p>Sand Box</p> 	<p>Really just a large sensory bin that is great for imaginative play! Rolling cars, making mud pies, building sand castles, digging and burying are all great activities to support social skills such as taking turns, as well as social communication.</p>
<p>Picnics</p> 	<p>The student can help to prepare and pack the food, helping to develop choice, communication and social interactions.</p>
<p>Yoga or relaxation time</p> 	<p>Create a quiet space in the shade, a pillow and blanket or whatever is comfortable for the child. Hanging wind chimes, bird feeders in the area are a great way to incorporate sensory stimuli. Introducing reading to or making up stories with the child can help with relaxation and language development.</p>

Sensory Umbrellas



Flo Longhorn – developed the idea of using umbrellas to create sensory toys / activities – to develop choice and anticipation within sensory play activities with students with more Complex Needs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCUC0SvC97c>

A lovely and very informative clip from Flo Longhorn on the benefits of play and ideas and activities that adults can engage in with a student with Complex Needs:

Penny's from Heaven clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WswFvvnANA>

When working with students with very Complex Needs information and books created by Flo Longhorn are a very useful reference point.