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# What, Why, Where, When & How



## What is *Tools for Tots: Sensory Strategies for Toddlers and Preschoolers*?

*Tools for Tots* is filled with user-friendly *over-the-counter* strategies to help your tot (toddler or preschooler) to engage, and feel ‘right’ in order to more fully participate in day-to-day activities.

We use the term *over-the-counter* in the following way:

- There are some medications that require a doctor’s prescription, and others that you can purchase *over-the-counter*. *Tools for Tots* offers *over-the-counter* sensory ‘tools’ based on sensory integration principles. These ‘tools’ can be used by therapists,

educators, EI specialists, childcare providers, parents, and other family members.

- On the other hand, like medications that require a prescription, the intervention, *occupational therapy with a sensory integration approach* (OT/SI)<sup>1</sup>, requires a therapist with expertise in practicing ‘fidelity in sensory integration intervention.’<sup>2</sup> Recent research shows that classic, intensive OT/SI intervention (*Ayres Sensory Integration*<sup>®</sup>) results in improved behavior and increased engagement.<sup>3</sup>

## Why you need *Tools for Tots: Sensory Strategies for Toddlers and Preschoolers*?

Those living and working with tots are fully aware of the need to provide nurturing and safe environments for toddlers and preschoolers. In addition, neuroscience research suggests that sensory experiences and sensory enriched environments result in changes in brain function and structure.<sup>4</sup>

We are also now urged to address *prevention* as mandated by the Individual with Disabilities Education Act reauthorization (IDEA 2004), the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Response to Intervention (RTI) initiatives.<sup>5</sup> *Tools for Tots* helps guide individuals and programs on how to effectively include sensory activities to meet these requirements.

*Tools for Tots* includes a variety of strategies that can help make environments ‘sensory safe’ for all. You will find ‘tools’ which

enrich sensory experiences, especially for those whose nervous systems are challenged. These ‘tools’ can even prevent some of these challenges from occurring. Using these strategies will encourage optimal development in all tots. They can also complement therapeutic intervention through collaboration with the interdisciplinary team. They will help you and your communities become ‘sensitive observers’ of individual differences in sensory preferences and tolerances. You will be able to effectively manage a variety of reactions to sensations and create sensory rich activities in naturally occurring environments and daily routines.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Miller, Anzalone, Lane, Cermak, Osten, 2007

<sup>2</sup>Parham, Cohn, Spitzer, Koomar, Miller, Burke, Brett-Green, Mailloux, May-Benson, Roley, Schaaf, Schoen, & Summers, 2007

<sup>3</sup>Roberts, King-Thomas, and Boccia, 2007

<sup>4</sup>Lieberman, et al., 2007

<sup>5</sup>Klotz, 2007

<sup>6</sup>Williamson & Anzalone, 2001

# The Sensory Buffet

## NUTRITION FOR YOUR TOT'S BODY & BRAIN

You are aware that there are basic food groups for your tot's *nutritional needs*, but did you know that your tot's body and brain also need a certain amount of sensory input? The brain takes in sensory information from *seven* senses.

We are all familiar with five of the senses: touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, and tasting. There are two others that we use unconsciously, because the information comes from within the body. One sensation is called *proprioception*, information which is received when pushing and pulling occurs in muscles, joints, tendons, and ligaments. The other is called *vestibular*, information which is received when the head changes position as the head and/or body move (Henry, Wheeler, and Sava, 2004).

In this book you are going to learn about *sensory tools* (see below) you can integrate into your tot's *sensory buffet* for each of these *seven* senses.

We use the words *sensory buffet* to emphasize the abundance of possible sensorimotor activities that can be offered to your tot, like the abundance of food choices available at a buffet. *Sensory buffet* is derived from the frequently used term 'sensory diet' coined by an occupational therapist, Patricia Wilbarger, referring to "how certain sensory experiences can be used to enhance occupational performance in any individual" (Bundy, Lane & Murray, 2002). In other words, for us to be at our best our bodies and brains need to receive a certain amount of sensory input through touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, using our muscles, and moving. A *sensory buffet* includes many different types of sensory input that can be used in various intensities and combinations.

Every tot has individual sensory preferences for calming, waking up, concentrating, etc. The key is to discover which strategies work for your tot and how you can integrate them into daily activities. Below are some examples:



**Movement Tools:** Rocking or swinging slowly and rhythmically in a blanket: *Beddie Bye Bliss*



**Muscle Tools:** Pushing a filled tot sized grocery cart: *Busy Bees*



**Touch Tools:** Putting a weighted blanket on your tot when clipping nails: *Nail Nippers*



**Ear Tools:** Singing a familiar song during transitions: *Challenging Changes*



**Eye Tools:** Dimming the bathroom lights during tubby time: *Tubby Time Tips*



**Nose Tools:** Offering calming scents, such as lavender or vanilla: *Spirited Tots*



**Mouth Tools:** Sucking foods like apple sauce through a straw: *Picky Eater Tidbits*

SEE 'MY TOT'S TOOL CHEST' IN APPENDIX (REPRODUCIBLE)

# Tubby Time Tips



**CHALLENGES:** *My tot screams and cries when he has to take a bath.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

'Tubby time' activities provide a variety of sensory experiences that can be fun. In addition, they can develop body awareness, improve the ability to figure out how to do things, develop cognitive concepts, help with eye hand coordination, and help to calm before bed time. However, 'tubby time' can be very emotional for some tots. Tots with **postural disorders, dyspraxia, and/or sensory perception/discrimination disorders** may be fearful because they do not feel secure sitting or comfortable moving around in the bathtub. Those with **over-responsivity** may not like the feel or sound of the water, interpreting these sensations as alarming or even threatening. **Sensory seeking** tots may have such a high need for movement that they find it difficult to sit in the confined bathtub.

## SAFETY FIRST!

Monitor water temperature carefully and never leave your tot unattended in the bathtub!

**CONSIDER THIS...** *It is always helpful to schedule predictable routines with your tot. Making 'tubby time' part of a night time ritual and routine (quick, but not rushed) can help to prepare your tot for the sensations associated with it. Using distractions and motivators can also help improve your tot's tolerance for 'tubby time.'*



## Movement Tools

- Allow your *sensory seeking* tot to jump or run around to get out the 'wiggles' prior to tubby time.
- If your tot is *over-responsive* or has a *postural disorder*, try washing him in a sink or using a smaller baby tub or dish pan filled with tub water inside the tub.
- Help your tot with *over-responsivity*, a *postural disorder*, or a *sensory perception/discrimination disorder* to feel secure in the bathtub by sitting on a non-skid foam mat, towel, or special bathtub seat.



## Muscle Tools

- Offer a variety of containers for pouring different volumes of water.



## Touch Tools

- Consider your tot's water temperature preferences.
- Give firm, maintained touch pressure downward on the shoulders during 'tubby time.'

- Massage your tot with a washcloth, bath mitt, or your hands, using firm, maintained touch pressure prior to and during baths as tolerated.
- Place a warm, wet, heavy towel over your tot's shoulders while he is taking a bath. Keep pouring warm water over him to help feel warm and safe.
- If your tot is not prone to urinary tract infections, use bubble bath.
- Hide bath toys in bubbles for your tot to find.
- Offer play with foam soap, bath paints, or bath crayons as tolerated.
- Use the hand held shower sprayer or squirt bottle for rinsing, allowing your tot to rinse himself.
- Allow your tot to take a bath with you.
- Use heavy cotton washcloths and towels for washing and drying.
- Offer a shower versus a bath, or allow your tot to sit on a small tub chair so he does not have to get all the way down in the water.
- Allow your tot to touch a variety of tot safe, nontoxic 'hand fidgets' (e.g. bath toys, squeeze toys, sponges, and vinyl bath clings) while taking a bath, using caution to offer those that do not pose a choking hazard.
- Wrap your tot in a large terry cloth bath towel after his bath, and pretend that it is a 'hot dog bun' and he is a 'hot dog.' Offer and maintain firm pressure with your hands to give him 'ketchup' and 'mustard.'



### Ear Tools

- Read story books about bath time to help get him used to what is going to happen.
- If the noise of running water bothers your tot with *over-responsivity*, fill the tub with the door closed, and wait to bring him in until the tub is full.
- Tell your tot where you are going to wash to help him prepare for your actions.
- Use earplugs to minimize bath noises and water in the ears.
- Play slow, rhythmic, calming music during tubby time.
- Sing 'tubby time' related songs.



### Eye Tools

- Allow your tot to look in a mirror while taking a bath to increase predictability.
- Dim the bathroom lights during tubby time.
- Use soap designed to leave a fake ink stain on your tot until rinsing is complete.
- Use a visual timer so that he knows how long before he can be 'all done.'



### Nose Tools

- Use calming scents or unscented soaps.
- Allow your tot to choose bubble bath, soap, and shampoo by sniffing before buying.



### Mouth Tools

- Have your tot use straws to blow bubbles in the bathtub, supervising carefully so he does not swallow the water.