Oaklin Lane

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY · FAMILY HANDBOOK

Home programs

Playful activities to practice at home. Your therapist will point you to the ones that fit your child best.

INSIDE

- Tactile 2
- Proprioception 9
- Animal walks 17
- Primitive reflexes 22
- Vestibular 6
- Oral sensory 14
- Core strength 20

SENSORY HOME PROGRAM

Tactile

Touch does two jobs for your child. It keeps them safe, and it helps them learn about the world. Touch is especially important for calm behavior, attention, and fine motor skills.



Protect
Warns the body to defend itself from things that might be dangerous.

Discover
Tells which body part is touched, plus size, shape, texture, and temperature.

MESSY PLAY

1. **Un-paint**
   Spread shaving cream, peanut butter, marshmallow cream, or pudding on a tray. Press palms in and smash around, “polish” fingernails, and draw letters, numbers, or infinity signs.

2. **Car wash**
   Make a shaving-cream car wash for toy cars. Drive them through, then use the cars to draw.

3. **Spaghetti art**
   Play with cooked spaghetti. Make shapes, letters, and numbers, or use lots of strands to make whole pictures.

Textures feel like too much?
Let your child start with a spoon, straw, or pretzel rod, then work up to using their hands.

Tactile, continued

MESSY PLAY

4 **Play dough**
Roll fat sausages or skinny snakes. Pinch or cut the snakes from left to right, the same direction we read and write. Make shapes, letters, and numbers. Squeeze dough through a garlic press for spaghetti or hair, or press big eggs through an egg slicer. Make bird's nests and little eggs. Flatten with palms or a rolling pin, then press in cookie cutters.

5 **Hair-gel drawing bag**
Put colored hair gel in a zip-top bag, seal it, and draw on the bag with a finger.

HUNT AND FIND

6 **Texture bins**
Fill bins with sand, birdseed, beans, or rice and hide objects to find. A great time to practice letters, numbers, and fine motor play.

7 **Mystery bag**
Put small toys in a bag and take a picture of each. Show one picture at a time; your child finds that toy by touch only, without looking.

8 **Nature bracelet**
Wrap masking tape around the wrist, sticky side out. Walk around and stick on grass, feathers, leaves, and flowers.

9 **Sandbox**
Set up a sandbox outside to play in.

WHOLE-BODY TOUCH

10 **Tactile road**
Lay out “step-ons” to walk, leap, or jump between (forward, sideways, backward): carpet squares, bubble wrap, foam egg crate, fabric swatches, sheepskin, or pillowcases filled with foam.

11 **Dress-up bin**
Fill a bin with scarves, neckties, aprons, feather boas, hats, headbands, chunky jewelry, clip-on earrings, capes, old fur jackets, and silky slips. Add a variety of shoes.

12 **Mummy wrap**
Wrap your child up in elastic bandages or stretchy exercise bands.

13 **Hot dog roll**
Roll your child up in a sleeping bag on their tummy, head and feet out. Use a vibrator to “add” ketchup, mustard, or chili, or roll a large exercise ball over them with pressure. Press down in different places to “squish.” Switch it up with a taco, burrito, or sandwich.

14 **Secret hideaway**
Build a hideaway with textures to rub on skin, like textured fabric squares, a loofah sponge, and spaghetti balls.

15 **Cloth tunnel**
Sew 3–4 yards of soft, textured fabric along its length to make a long tube to crawl through.

Tactile, continued

KITCHEN AND MOUTH

16 **Cook together**
Invite your child to help make cookies, meatloaf, or bread dough, or rub oil on vegetables to roast.

17 **Vibrating toothbrush**
Keep a spare vibrating toothbrush in a zip-top bag to use any time of day, without toothpaste.

18 **Candy spray**
Keep sour and sweet candy sprays handy. The spray gives the mouth a unique touch experience.

19 **Snack variety**
Keep snacks with lots of textures and flavors: crunchy, chewy, sour, and salty.

20 **Pop Rocks**
This fizzing candy gives the mouth another unique touch experience.



SENSORY HOME PROGRAM

Vestibular

This system tells us where our head is compared to the ground. It senses movement and gravity, and it's key for coordination, balance, eye development, organizing our bodies, sequencing movements, and understanding space.



MOVEMENT GAMES

1. **Elephant**
   Swing head and arms by turning at the waist. When you stop, the arms keep swinging but the head stops.

2. **Flap jacks**
   Roll from back to tummy and back again without using elbows or feet. Repeat 10 times.

3. **Ring-around-the-rosie**
   Hold hands, circle, and fall down together.

4. **Sneaky Pete**
   Your child sits criss-cross applesauce. Kneel behind them, arms bent, hands at shoulder level. Your child turns at the waist and hooks their fingers over yours, then turns the other way.

Vestibular, continued

MOVEMENT GAMES

5 **Sally-go-round-the-sun**
Your child holds streamers, ribbons, or crepe paper and twirls, twists, and jumps to music. Set pillows on the floor to avoid while spinning.

6 **Swing, bat, pitch**
Your child lies on their tummy in a sling swing and tries to hit a plastic ball with a plastic bat while swinging.

7 **Airplane**
Lie on your back and hold your child's hands. Place your feet on their tummy and lift for a smooth takeoff. In the air, encourage straight legs.

8 **Rowboat**
Sit facing each other with legs in a V. Hold hands and "row" back and forth.

9 **Balance beam**
Walk forward, backward, and sideways. Play catch to make balancing harder.

10 **Balance games**
Walk on curbs or any safe beam, and on soft, squishy surfaces. Stand on one foot on the beam, hands on hips, looking forward.

11 **Astronaut windmills**
Stand with legs apart. Reach the right hand to the left toe, stand back up, then switch sides. Your therapist will teach spinning exercises if needed.

Vestibular, continued

EVERYDAY MOVEMENT IDEAS

- Teeter totter
- Bike riding
- Rolling
- Hopping on one foot
- Balance beam
- Dancing
- Somersaults
- Pogo stick
- See-saw
- Hippity hop
- Jogging
- Swinging on tummy
- Cartwheels
- Hammock swing
- Scooter
- Sliding
- Rocking horse
- Spinning board
- Obstacle course
- Jumping
- Swinging standing up
- Handstands
- Wobble board
- Sit-n-spin
- Tire swing

HELPFUL EQUIPMENT

Teeter totter
A 2×4 board about one yard long, plus a 3×4-foot sheet of plywood. Bolt or screw the 2×4 to the plywood.

Balance beam
A 2×2, 2×4, or 2×6 board. Your therapist may recommend a size.

Tire swing
A large truck tire tube.

Hammock
Easy to order online.

Spinning board
Ask your therapist for directions to build one.

SENSORY HOME PROGRAM

Proprioception

This sense tells us where our body parts are without looking, and it helps with motor planning: figuring out how to move to get a job done.



PUSH AND PULL

1. **Back-to-back stand up**
   Two kids about the same size sit back to back and link elbows. They try to stand up without unlinking, then sit back down the same way.

2. **Play wrestling**
   Push hand to hand, hip to hip, or back to back. Rules matter: both start pushing on “go,” and play stops when either player says “stop.”

3. **Push-ups**
   Wall push-ups, floor push-ups, or dips on a chair.

4. **Wheelbarrow walking**
   Hold your child by the ankles while they walk on their hands.

Proprioception, continued

PUSH AND PULL

5 **Carry heavy loads**
Milk jugs or 2-liter bottles filled with sand or beans, or grocery bags filled with things that won't break.

6 **Push or pull a load**
Push or pull a laundry basket or wagon filled with heavy objects, or take turns pulling a sibling or friend.

7 **Tug of war**
Try it sitting, standing, and tall kneeling.

8 **Resistance bands**
Pull a stretchy band diagonally, side to side, and up and down.

9 **Chores**
Move laundry from washer to dryer, vacuum, mow, rake leaves, mop, sweep, and spray and wipe appliances.

JUMP AND CRASH

10 **Pillow crash**
Pile pillows or comforters on the floor. Your child runs and jumps onto the pile, or crawls over and under it.

11 **Jumping on the bed**
Bounce safely on a mattress.

12 **Trampoline**
A mini or full-size trampoline. Find one at sporting goods stores or online.

13 **Ball pit crash**
Jump and crash into a ball pit.

Proprioception, continued

JUMP AND CRASH

14 **Hippity hop**
Bounce through the house or outside.

15 **Jump rope**
Jump rope or over a bar in rhythm to a song.

16 **Leap frog**
Take turns leaping over each other.

CLIMB, CRAWL, AND HANG

17 **Animal walks**
Crab, bear, frog, and bunny. See the Animal walks pages.

18 **Monkey bars**
Hang by the hands or the legs.

19 **Tumbling**
Tumble with friends or siblings.

20 **Tunnel crawl**
Crawl through cloth tunnels over pillows.

21 **Climbing**
Climb up a tube slide or a rock wall.

22 **Blanket roll**
Roll up tightly in a blanket.

YOGA

23 **Yoga poses**
Search online for pictures of these poses: child's pose, cat stretch, downward dog, triangle pose, and side plank.

Proprioception, continued

SQUEEZE AND CALM

24 **People sandwich**
Your child lies face down on a mattress, head past the edge. Rub arms, legs, and torso with firm strokes using “spreaders” like a big sponge, vegetable brush, washcloth, or basting brush. Cover them with couch pillows for the top of the sandwich and “squish, squish.” Then roll or crawl over your child. Don’t worry, the pillows spread out your weight.

25 **Pouring**
Pour sand, beans, or rice over themselves, or from one container to another.

26 **Firm massage**
A firm massage helps the body feel organized.

27 **Weighted vest or lap pad**
Use during homework. Wear a weighted vest for only 30–45 minutes at a time.

CATCH

28 **Weighted ball catch**
Use a weighted ball right for your child’s age and strength, usually 1–4 pounds. Throw chest passes or roll it back and forth. Find them at sporting goods stores.

29 **Tennis ball catch**
Stand 10 feet apart and toss underhand. Catch with both hands, then with the preferred hand only. Encourage catching with hands, not trapping the ball against the body.

Proprioception, continued

MOUTH

30 **Chew, suck, and blow**

Chewy foods like bubble gum or beef jerky. Drink through a straw, and try thick milkshakes or yogurt through a straw. Blow bubbles, blow up balloons, or blow a cotton ball across the floor with a straw. Blow toys are great too. See the Oral sensory pages for more.



SENSORY HOME PROGRAM

Oral sensory

Mouth activities are a powerful way to calm and organize the nervous system. The nerves of the head and neck connect straight to the brain instead of through the spinal cord, so input to the mouth goes right where it's needed.



BLOW

1. **Straw bubbles**
   Blow bubbles in a cup of water with a straw.

2. **Pom-pom race**
   Blow a pom-pom across the table with a straw. Add crawling by blowing it from one room to another.

3. **Bubbles and balloons**
   Blow bubbles, blow up balloons, or puff out cheeks.

4. **Whistles and more**
   Blow a whistle, harmonica, or pinwheel.

5. **Blow-toy bag**
   Keep blow toys in a bag. Find them at therapy supply stores, Amazon, and other places.

Oral sensory, continued

SUCK

6 **Pom-pom hold**
Suck a pom-pom onto the end of a straw and time how long your child can hold it.

7 **Thick drinks**
Drink milkshakes or slushes through a straw.

8 **Tricky straws**
Drink through a narrow or twisty straw.

9 **Hard candy**
Suck on hard candy or lollipops.

CHEW AND TASTE

10 **Chewing**
Chew gum or a chewy tube.

11 **Edible necklace**
String cereal or candy into a necklace to snack on.

12 **Cold foods**
Eat popsicles or ice cream.

13 **Big flavors**
Eat foods that are crunchy, chewy, or have strong flavors like spicy or sour.

14 **Vibrating toothbrush**
Keep one just for play, outside the hygiene routine and without toothpaste.

Tips for chewers

TIPS FOR CHEWERS

Don’t force them to stop
It’s not that they want to chew. They need to chew.

Offer safe options
Wearable chewy items keep something safe always within reach. It can take some practice, so don’t give up.

Notice when they chew
Are there times they need more? This can point to other sensory triggers to work on.

Keep up the home program
Follow your other sensory diet and home program activities too.

Try gum massage
Massaging the gums gives the mouth input another way and can lower the need to chew. It’s simple, works well, and can be done anywhere. Try deep pressure on the cheeks and jaw from the outside, too. If your child won’t allow it inside the mouth, start over the cheeks along the gum line.

Add harder-to-chew foods
If tolerated, add carrots, crackers, or apples at meals and snacks for extra jaw input.

SENSORY HOME PROGRAM

Animal walks

Moving like animals builds strength, balance, and body awareness, and it's fun to do together.



1 Bear walk

Start with a classic! Walk on hands and feet, tummy facing the ground and bottom up in the air. Chat as you go: are they a black bear, a grizzly, or a polar bear?

2 Crab walk

Sit down, hands by the sides, fingers pointing toward the feet. Push up on hands and feet so the body is like a table. Keep hips high for core strength. Ready for more? Touch right hand to left foot, then switch.

Animal walks, continued

3 Frog hop

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Squat low, hands on the ground, and leap forward as far as you can. Rest, then leap again. For fun, measure the distance and compare it to your child's height.

4 Flamingo hop

Stand on one foot and do a small jump. Switch legs to practice balance.

5 Snake slither

Lie on the tummy and move forward, staying as close to the floor as possible, like an army crawl.

6 Seal slide

Lie on the tummy and push up until arms are straight. Move across the room dragging the legs.

7 Bunny hop

Jump forward with feet together, pushing off and landing the same way. Start small and hop bigger. Hands in front of the chest make a perfect bunny!

8 Penguin walk

Keep arms straight by the sides and take short, quick steps. Try walking on heels to waddle.

9 Elephant swing

Put arms together in front of the body and swing side to side like an elephant's trunk.

WAYS TO PLAY

Chalk course
Use sidewalk chalk to make a course, with a few feet of space for each animal.

Spin or roll
Make a spinner or die with an animal on each side. Take turns spinning or rolling.

Animal grab bag
Put toy animals in a bag and draw one at random.

Theme days
Try themes for different days or times, like a penguin walk to get ice cream, or a rainforest theme with frogs, snakes, and crabs.



STRENGTHENING HOME PROGRAM

Core strength

Your “core” is the set of muscles that gives strength and control to the torso. These muscles steady the body so arms and legs can work well. That affects moving, reaching milestones, and joining in daily activities.



EXERCISES

1. **Sit-ups**
   Your child lies on their back, knees up. Hold their feet; knees together and hips on the floor. Arms stay straight by the sides, just above the floor. Keep the neck neutral and sit all the way up to the knees. Goal: _____ sit-ups.

2. **Crunches**
   Same starting position as sit-ups: hold the feet, knees together, hips down, arms straight by the sides. Keep the neck neutral and sit halfway up. Goal: _____ crunches.

Core strength, continued

EXERCISES

3 **Cat-cow**

On hands and knees, head neutral and looking at the floor. Pull the belly up so the back is flat and straight. Arch the back like a cat, letting the head drop, then let the back "drop" like a cow, head rising. Hold each position for 15 seconds.

4 **Play positions**

During favorite activities, place your child on their tummy (tummy time), on hands and knees, or on their tummy propped on elbows.

5 **Yoga ball**

Seat your child on a yoga ball while you hold their hips. Bounce gently, then move them left, right, back, and forward. Watch for them to bring themselves back to the middle.

6 **Superman**

Lying flat on the tummy, arms straight out in front and legs straight out behind, lift arms and legs off the floor. Hold for _____ seconds.



7 **Silly bug**

Lying on the back, legs bent up off the floor and arms crossed over the chest, lift the head and hold. Hold for _____ seconds.



Build from the ground up

The sensory systems underneath are key to core strength. Along with these exercises, keep doing activities from your tactile, vestibular, and proprioception programs.

REFLEX INTEGRATION PROGRAM

Primitive reflexes

All children are born with reflexes that protect them and help with early milestones. As the nervous system matures, the brain “integrates” them. Sometimes, such as with prematurity or immature neurological processing, these reflexes stay active and get in the way of movement, learning, muscle tone, posture, daily self-care, and walking. If one reflex shows up in testing, others often do too. Stimulating the lower parts of the brain through the cranial nerves can help.

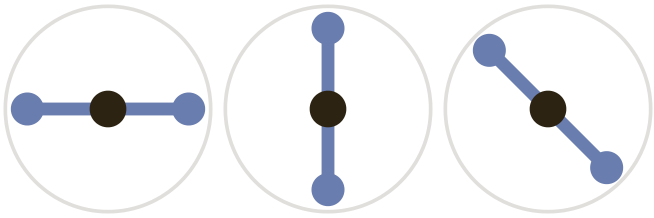
Visual tracking

5–6 times a day

1. **Pick a tool**
   Choose something that makes noise, lights up, vibrates, spins, or smells. These stimulate the cranial nerves.

2. **Track it**
   Move the object side to side, up and down, and on the diagonals. Your child follows it with their eyes without moving their head. 4 times each direction.

3. **Head moving?**
   Gently help hold their head still. If that isn’t tolerated, allow head movement.



Side to side **Up and down** **Diagonal**





Tool ideas: light-up spinners and animal flashlights.