

IN-SYNC ACTIVITIES TO HELP KIDS COPE WITH BEING COOPED UP

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Being cooped up to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is so, so hard, especially for kids with autism and their grown-ups. An antidote for cabin fever is sensory-motor fun. This means stimulating the senses to get kids touching and moving, seeing and hearing in engaging ways. Here are five “In-Sync” activities to help families incorporate sensory-motor experiences into their endless indoor days.

“RUBBER BAND HARP”

(from *101 Activities for Kids in Tight Spaces*)

WHAT TO DO: Provide a cigar box (lid removed) and an assortment of rubber bands. The child can choose a few or a lot of rubber bands and stretch them over the box. Then, she can strum or pluck the harp to accompany her favorite songs.



Children with autism and SPD often have excellent—or even perfect—musical pitch, so “tuning” the harp may be fun to try. To make a plucked rubber band sound higher, pull it behind the box so it tightens in front. To make the band sound lower, pull it toward the front to loosen it. You can feel, hear and see how the bands behave differently, depending on how loose or tight they are.

This activity develops and enhances the tactile, visual and auditory senses.

“CRASH PAD”

(from *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*)

To the overly energetic child who likes to jump and bump and crash, now is the time to say, “Sure!” After this activity, he will feel better and calmer. If, on the other hand, your child lacks energy, after you introduce this activity, soon the child will go for it eagerly. Almost everybody loves this.

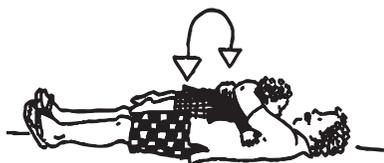
WHAT TO DO: Together, gather pillows, couch cushions, sleeping bags and comforters, and pile them up in the center of a room. Move furniture away so there is a clear space all around the mound. The child then dives into the heap.



This activity provides deep pressure to muscles and joints, providing proprioceptive and tactile input. The vestibular system gets a workout, too, as the child runs and leaps through space.

“HUG ROLL”

(from *Growing an In-Sync Child*)



Rolling is an excellent way to get in touch with one’s whole body. This activity is interactive, as it needs a second roller—that means you. It’s an on-the-spot remedy for your child, whether she needs to rev up, stay tuned, or calm down.

WHAT TO DO: Lie on your back on the carpet, with plenty of space around you. Have your child lie on your tummy. Hug each other tightly. Slowly roll over and over in a log roll. Protect your child’s head if necessary so she doesn’t hyperextend her neck. Holding her tight, roll in the opposite direction. Roll over a couch cushion. Roll over a partially filled air mattress, for a funny, bumpy ride.

This activity develops and enhances vestibular processing, as well as proprioceptive and tactile input.

“LISTEN AND DRAW”

(from *The In-Sync Activity Card Book*)

Here’s a way to get the kids up off the couch and standing tall. It’s good for their posture and upper-body strength. It helps them learn to pay attention and respond appropriately to environmental sounds.

WHAT TO DO: Set up an easel, or tape paper to the wall. Provide crayons. (With a crayon, the child can decide whether to make a light or dark line depending on how much pressure he applies. A marker is easier to use but boring, because the color intensity is always the same.) Play music and ask your child to draw the way the music inspires him. Have him draw with the other hand or while standing on a sturdy box, or lying on his back with the crayon between his toes. If drawing is not his thing, maybe moving to music is, so put away the crayons and just dance!



This activity strengthens auditory discrimination as well as proprioceptive, visual and tactile processing.

“HAMMER AND NAILS”

(from *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*)

What better way to vent one’s frustration from being stuck inside than by hitting nails? This activity lets children practice a valuable life skill in a safe environment.

WHAT TO DO: Get a tree stump, a can of penny nails, a real hammer (not a toy) and a protective face mask. Let the child hammer away.

If you think this activity is too challenging, your child can reap similar satisfaction and benefits by using a toy hammer to hit golf tees into a block of Styrofoam, an egg carton, or a pumpkin.



AUTISM IN LOCKDOWN

This activity improves visual skills (including binocularity, eye-hand coordination, depth perception and spatial awareness), as well as proprioceptive and tactile processing.

When the time comes that this novel coronavirus no longer rules our lives, children will still enjoy these sensory-motor experiences. Until then, stay safe, stay well, and have fun! ■

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Hammer and Nails: St. Columba's Nursery School kids, permission granted



CAROL STOCK KRANOWITZ, MA, is the author of *The Out-of-Sync Child*, *The Out-of-Sync Child Grows Up*, *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*, and a children's book, *The Goodenoughs Get In Sync: 5 Family Members Overcome their Special Sensory Issues*. She was a preschool teacher for 25 years and helped to develop an innovative program to screen young children for Sensory Processing Disorder. She speaks regularly about the subject in the United States and abroad. In her books and presentations, she offers a fun and functional approach that integrates sensory-motor activities into everyday life at home and school. A graduate of Barnard College, she has an MA in Education and Human Development from The George Washington University.