



9 Tips for Creating a Sensory Space at Home on a Budget

A sensory room or sensory space can really help with a child's development. A sensory gym in a setting such as a pediatric clinic may have various kinds of therapy swings, trampolines, ball pits, crash pads, barrels, tunnels, mats, rock walls, ladders, ramps... the list goes on. A sensory room (also known as Snoezelen rooms) can have high-tech lighting and fiber optics, projectors, water beds, bubble tubes and wall panels. The purpose of these rooms is to provide a relaxed atmosphere where the person is surrounded by pleasant sensations (unique tactile experiences, relaxing aromas, interesting light effects). While all these things are absolutely wonderful and incredibly therapeutic, providing an appropriate sensory space with sensory stimulation for your child right at home can also be possible.

Instead of worrying about finding a "space," I suggest focusing on the space you do have. If you don't have a large room, don't worry. Small spaces can be just as effective, and there are ways you can make it work. Simple and

cost-effective options are available and can help your child self-regulate, **de-stress** and provide necessary sensory stimulation for sensory seekers. Read below for some helpful ideas!

1. Instead of installing expensive swings, your child can get their vestibular stimulation from bouncing on an exercise ball, sitting in a rocking chair or jumping on a mini trampoline.

2. What about lighting? You don't need high-tech lighting equipment to do the trick. You can add a relaxing glow to your sensory space by using some Christmas lights, net lights, string lights, battery-powered candles, glow sticks or lava lamps. Lighting is such a powerful thing. It influences us in subtle ways and can change the way we feel. For example, fluorescent overhead lights that emit a cool tone can make us feel uncomfortable. Warm, soft lighting can make us feel relaxed. Don't be afraid to use lighting to create a relaxing atmosphere and comfy ambience.

3. Have a variety of tactile and sensory items. I would recommend dividing them up into little bins or individual storage containers. If you have too many items lying around, it can be visually over-stimulating, and then your child might become uninterested. Instead, I suggest keeping the unused toy bins out of sight and introducing select toys one at a time into your child's sensory

space. Rotate the bins as needed, this way your child won't get bored (or overstimulated by a mountain of items).

4. Sensory crash pad! Why not create your own? A very simple DIY solution is to take a large zip-up duvet cover and stuff it with pillows, blankets, large stuffed animals, etc. Zip it up and let your child safely jump and crash into it. *Note: Crashing into a crash pad, jumping, climbing, crawling, pushing, pulling, lifting objects or any sort of weight-bearing activity can be great for providing proprioceptive input. What's proprioception? The sensations from our joints and muscles that underly body awareness. When we give our body this type of sensory input, it can help improve body awareness and can be organizing and calming for the body.

5. Therapeutic scents. You don't need a fancy machine that sprays out various aromas. You can simply take some essential oils, dab it on a cotton ball and let your child smell it. Playing with scented play doughs is also a way to incorporate some "aromatherapy" into your sensory space! Lavender scent can be calming and help with relaxation.

6. A cost-effective option for building a private "snuggle space" for deep pressure is taking a play tent or even a blow up kiddie pool and filling it with

blankets and lots of stuffed animals. Make sure your child is burrowing into all the fluff safely and with supervision.

7. Tactile wall. You can create your own textured wall or board using household items. I've even seen a wall with old CDs glued to it (smooth, shiny side up) which makes for interesting visual stimulation. Check out [Pinterest for more DIY tactile wall ideas](#).

8. Instead of an expensive massage mat or vibrating equipment, a simple handheld massager can provide your child with vibration sensations. A vibration massage can be organizing and alerting, giving a child that extra sensory information to “wake up” their muscles. It can be therapeutic and calming for a child who is a “seeker” and gives them the sensory input they crave. You can give your child a vibration massage by turning it on and rolling it up and down your child’s back, arms and legs. If your child does not like the sensation of the vibrations, never force it. Instead, you can try keeping it powered “OFF” and just use it to give a gentle rolling massage. Homedics makes wonderful massager that I often use with my pediatric clients. If you’re a [Sensory TheraPLAY Box](#) subscriber, you’re covered because the Homedics massager was included in the January box. If not, you can find these massagers [here](#) and [here](#).

9. Music? You don't need a state-of-the-art sound system. A simple stereo or mini inexpensive sound dock to play music over is a wonderful option. Or, simply play some songs on your phone to have as background noise in your sensory space. Music can change the way we feel. Songs with a steady beat can be calming and effective in lowering anxiety for some people. Our bodies respond and “sync up” to the music. Native American, Celtic, stringed-instruments, drums, and flutes are excellent at relaxing the mind. Nature sounds, and sounds of rain, light jazz, classical and easy listening music are calming as well.

Best of luck to everyone incorporating sensory activities and items into their homes! As you introduce different sensory items, you will learn more about what your child's sensory preferences are by observing what they gravitate to and enjoy. Many times, seeing what helps a child self-regulate is a matter of trial and error and pure exploration.

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