

Stir Up the Discovery!

Becker's Guide to Intentional Sensory Invitations

Meaningful sensory play begins with noticing. Use this guide to support purposeful observation, thoughtful reflection, and planning that deepens children's exploration and development.

Table of Contents

- Before We Begin
- Learning Connections
- Tips for Using this Guide
- Materials Inventory
- Planning Guide



Before We Begin

Let's pause and consider what children are already showing us.

Use these prompts to slow down, notice patterns, and reflect on what's emerging in your classroom.

- **Who keeps returning to the same type of sensory experience? What might they be working on?**
- **What actions are most common right now: pouring, squeezing, dumping, sorting, transporting, building?**
- **When frustration appears, what tends to happen just before it?**
- **What seems to regulate the group? What seems to increase energy or overwhelm?**
- **Who seeks collaboration? Who prefers solitary exploration?**
- **What materials or tools hold attention the longest?**
- **What conversations are emerging naturally during sensory play?**
- **Where are children experimenting, testing ideas, or revisiting the same problem?**
- **Are materials accessible long enough for meaningful exploration?**
- **What has surprised you recently about what children can do?**
- **If you changed only one variable (fewer tools, smaller group, different filler) what might shift?**
- **What feels manageable and sustainable right now?**

Trust what you're seeing.

Small, intentional adjustments often make the biggest difference.

Learning Connections

When learning becomes visible, planning becomes purposeful.

Use this section to reflect on the growth you're observing, then let your observations guide how you refine, extend, or simplify your next sensory invitation.

Language & Early Literacy

- What new vocabulary do you notice?
- Are children telling stories, assigning roles, or engaging in symbolic play?
- Where do you see early literacy behaviors, like labeling, mark-making, or print awareness?

Where might children be ready for just one new word, idea, or connection?

Math & Scientific Thinking

- Where are children comparing, measuring, estimating, or counting?
- Are children classifying, sorting, or noticing patterns?
- How are children exploring cause-and-effect, testing ideas, or revisiting experiments?
- What spatial reasoning (filling, emptying, balancing, building) is visible?

What simple adjustment could deepen investigation or problem-solving?

Social-Emotional Development

- How are children negotiating space and materials?
- What examples of cooperation or turn-taking are emerging?
- How are children expressing frustration, excitement, or pride?
- Where do you see persistence or flexible thinking?

What might shift to support stronger collaboration or emotional regulation?

Physical & Motor Development

- What fine motor skills are being strengthened (pinching, scooping, pouring, twisting)?
- How are children using their bodies to balance, transport, or manipulate materials?
- Are materials and experiences accessible for children with different motor needs?

What adjustments might create opportunities for more support or more challenge?

Name the learning. Nurture it with intention..



Sensory Materials Inventory

Play Surfaces or Platforms

(sand & water table, play tray, lighted play tray, outdoor surface)

Sensory Fillers

(sand, water, dough, moldable sand, lightweight sand, instant snow)

Exploration Tools

(mirrors, scoops, funnels, pitchers, sieves, tweezers/tongs, measuring tools)

Creative Extensions

(rollers, stamps, shape cutters, print makers, brushes, texture combs, paint tools)

Small World & Building Materials

(play mat inserts, animals, people, vehicles, blocks, connectors)



Sensory Materials Inventory, continued

Loose Parts & Natural Materials (stones, shells, pinecones, wood pieces, fabric, found or recycled items)

Literacy & Language Extensions (clipboards & paper, letter stones & stamps, storytelling props)

Math & Investigation Tools (counters, number stones & stamps, balance, measuring tools, sorting trays)

Regulation & Accessibility Supports (towels, floor mats, timers, aprons, step stools or low-height options)

Sensory Play Planning Guide

Objectives

The Core Setup

Platform:

Filler:

Initial Tools:

How will you introduce expectations and model procedures?

What routines will you practice first?

Layering the Experience

Once routines are established and children are successfully engaging, consider gradually adding thoughtful materials, such as additional tools, small world figures, loose parts, literacy supports, or creative materials.

What might you add next, and why?

What might you remove to make space for an extension?

Access & Environment

How will you support both confidence and challenge? Consider adjustments such as group size, seated/standing options, or differentiated tools.