


Welcome
to



BLUE BIRD DAY

**Home Sensory
Activity Handbook**

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Content compiled by Amanda Gauthier, MOT/S
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About Blue Bird Day

Blue Bird Day's mission is to champion children to reach their full potential by providing individualized therapeutic care in the most natural setting.

Blue Bird Day is designed to foster socialization, sensory regulation and pre-academic learning in children ages 2–7 years in therapeutic rotations that simulate a preschool and kindergarten setting.

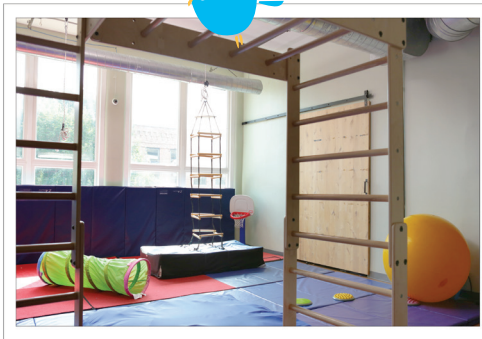
Blue Bird Day therapeutic programs are ideal for children with autism spectrum disorder, sensory processing disorders, articulation and phonological disorders, ADHD, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, feeding disorders and many other developmental disorders.



Dr. Laura Hawkesworth Mraz
Founder and CEO

Our Facility

Every detail of Blue Bird Day's facilities was designed with the child's needs in mind. The school-like environment promotes the child's participation and engagement in therapy outcomes.



- Themed Therapy Rooms
- Minimalist Classrooms
- Nut Free Kitchen Facilities
- Innovative Sensory Retreat Rooms
- Child Friendly Bathrooms
- Interactive Sensorimotor Gyms
- Quiet Rooms For Breaks
- Individual Cubbies

The Blue Bird Day Team



Blue Bird Day's therapists are among the most highly trained and experienced in Chicago. Our compassionate therapists practice a relationship-based and family centered approach, provide parent training, and work together on goals. They also collaborate with each other to create individualized intensive treatment plans and goals that matter to you and your child.

The team is comprised of

- Certified Early Childhood Development Specialists
- Speech-Language Pathologists
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Licensed Clinical Social Workers
- Registered Behavior Technicians
- Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA)
- Registered Dietician Nutritionists

Purpose of Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide a reference of sensory specific activities for parents and therapists to use while in a child's natural environment in order to promote typical sensory processing and increased independence in daily occupations and routines.

A child's natural environment includes settings, materials, people, and activities/ routines. When therapy is done in a child's natural environment, it is easier for the caregiver to carryover therapy at home since there is no need to buy special toys or equipment that is usually found in a therapy gym. Also, performing therapy in a child's natural environment increases generalization of skills to everyday play and routines.

Listed on the following pages are examples of sensory specific activities that can be incorporated into a child's daily routine or play. It's important to remember that we are all sensory beings; we each use our senses in a unique way to interpret the world around us. That's why it is very important to pay attention to how each child responds to specific sensory input. What can be calming for some kid can be alerting for others; therefore it is important to consult with your child's occupational therapist prior to implementing sensory activities. Once you have figured out how each type of sensory input affects your child's level of arousal (i.e. does it make your child more silly or increase his attention/engagement to task), you can start using specific activities to help regulate your child's mood and arousal and prepare his body for the day (i.e. alerting activities to wake up in the morning and calming activities before bedtime routine or tabletop tasks). Helping your child find the balance between calm and alert states will help maximize engagement, participation, independence, and learning new skills.

As always, please watch and attend to your child while performing these activities in order to ensure the safety of the child. If any unexpected negative behaviors occur, such as nausea, change in heart rate or breathing, etc., immediately stop activity and consult with an OT before trying activity again.

Tactile Activities



The tactile sense detects light touch, deep pressure, texture, temperature, vibration, and pain. Typically, light touch is alerting and deep pressure is calming. Most tactile activities are alerting and it is very important to follow the child's lead in tactile play. Never force any touch experiences onto a child.

Deep pressure activities are a great way to prepare a child's body for messy tactile play as well as a way to calm your child during or after tactile play. Therefore, prepare your child for tactile experiences by first engaging in deep pressure or heavy work activities.

Tactile Activities

Activities that address tactile sensory processing:

Calming/Less Alerting

- Squeezes/hugs
- Brushing skin with applied pressure (can use medical brush, towel, textured toys, etc.)
- Warm water play
- Wrapping child tightly in towels or blankets
- Very firm theraputty/playdoh (you can hide toys in there for child to find)
- Stress ball (either store bought or homemade-flour in a balloon)
- Legos
- Putting messy textured items in Ziploc bag and then playing with it (i.e. hair gel, silly putty, shaving cream)

Alerting

- Tickling
- Playing with toys in rice, sand, cooked spaghetti or beans.
- Shaving cream play (can mix with cornstarch to make less messy)
- Finger painting (with real paint or edible paint such as pudding)
- Making cookie dough (or any other food) and mix using hands
- Make a craft using glue and other various textured parts (i.e. tissue paper, pompoms, feathers)
- Oobleck (cornstarch, water, and food coloring)
- Playing catch with a different textured ball
- Playing with jell-o (can use molds to make different shapes)
- Rubbing lotion on child while identifying body parts
- Coloring on sandpaper
- Vibrating toys or toothbrush
- Papier-mâché
- Having child guess what an item/ toy is with eyes closed
- Plant something in a garden or pot

Vestibular Activities



The vestibular system is what detects head and body movements through space. The vestibular system affects balance, muscle tone, equilibrium responses, the ability to coordinate both sides of the body, coordination of the head, neck and eye movements, auditory language, and plays a role in arousal. Generally, slow linear movements are calming and fast, spinning, and arrhythmic movements are alerting. Pairing heavy work with vestibular movements is also very organizing to the sensory system.

Never force vestibular input on a child. Watch for negative side effects such as flushed face, dilated pupils, changes in breathing, and nausea and stop activity immediately if any of these symptoms occur. Begin with small, short repetitions of vestibular input and incorporate proprioceptive, heavy work, deep breaths or other calming strategies between vestibular activities. Work closely with your child's occupational therapist to select vestibular activities and to determine appropriate intensity, frequency and duration.

Vestibular Activities

Activities that address vestibular sensory processing:

Calming

- Swinging in a blanket (requires two people)
- Swinging back and forth on park swing
- Rocking on a rocking chair or horse
- Sitting on a yoga ball and moving it side to side or back and forth slowly
- Swimming
- Slow and smooth wagon rides
- Scooter board-slow and in one direction
- Riding a bike with some resistance/slowly
- Jumping up and down on small trampoline (small trampolines prevent some rotary movements)
- Walking up and down stairs
- Pulling child slowly in blanket across floor
- Swinging child in bean bag

Alerting

- Throwing child/crashing into bed or into pile of pillows
- Yoga poses that put a child's head in various positions
- Bouncing on a yoga ball while sitting or standing with adult support
- Jumping around on trampoline
- Spinning in office chair or swings
- Hanging upside down on playground equipment or when holding onto adult
- Doing somersaults, cartwheels, or head stands
- Slip n' slide
- Going down slides in different positions
- Play Ring Around the Rosie
- Fast dancing/freeze dancing
- Walking on uneven surfaces such as a pile of pillows
- Using scooter board in different positions
- Running/playing chase
- Spinning with eyes closed
- Jump ropes or other jumping activities
- Riding a bike fast/downhill
- Skipping
- Sledding
- Walking on balance beam
- Horseback/piggyback rides
- Creating obstacle course that puts head in different position

Proprioception Activities



The proprioceptive sense gives the nervous system input on the position of muscles, joints and tendons. This is important as it provides a person with information on body awareness, spatial orientation, and appropriate amount of force to use when completing a task. Proprioceptive activities are commonly referred to as “heavy work.” Proprioceptive input tends to be calming for a child. However, if paired with an excitatory vestibular component or environment, proprioceptive input can be alerting.

Please note that for children with loose or deformed joint, low tone, and/or poor reflex integration, talk to an occupational or physical therapist before performing any of these activities.

Proprioception Activities

Please note while proprioceptive activities are generally calming, the below tasks can be considered both alerting and/or calming based on your child's sensory profile. Please consult your child's occupational therapist if you would like more details on which may be best for your child.

Activities that address proprioception sensory processing:

Calming

- Use cushions or pillows to squeeze child with
- Heavy work in form of chores (carrying groceries, moving furniture around to clean, carrying laundry basket, vacuuming)
- Playing catch with a heavy ball
- Carrying around a "heavy" backpack (added weight shouldn't exceed more than 10% of bodyweight)
- Monkey bars and climbing equipment at park
- Tug of war
- Pushing someone on a swivel/rolling chair
- Row, row, row your boat – sit facing each other, holding hands, pull back and forth
- Push against the walls ("push the walls out to make the room bigger!")

Alerting

- Jump on bed/couch or into a pile of pillows
- Wheelbarrow walks
- Walking up stairs on all fours
- Animal walks (crab, bear, bunny hops, frog hops, etc.)
- Jump rope or hopscotch
- Playing twister
- Playing Simon says
- Yoga
- Pulling someone on a bed sheet ("magic carpet ride")
- Riding a scooter or bicycle
- Riding or pushing scooter board
- Wrap child in ace bandages and pretend to be mummies
- Bounce while sitting on a ball

Visual Activities



Vision is the primary way we perceive the world. There are many components that make up vision such as acuity, ocular motor function, visual motor coordination, and visual perception. These skills are best assessed by a developmental optometrist but there are many activities you can do at home that can promote typical visual sensory processing. You can visually change a child's environment to help support his or her sensory needs. For example, bright/ flashing lights and patterned carpet can be overwhelming for a child's visual system while dim lights, decreased clutter, neutral colored walls can be calming. Adapting a child's visual environment can support participation and sustained attention for daily routines and seated tasks.

Visual Activities

Activities that address visual sensory processing:

Calming

- Puzzles
- Mazes
- Hiding underneath a fort
- Matching/memory games
- Sensory bottles/lava lamps
- Any fine motor craft
- Hidden picture games ("find it" games similar to Where's Waldo)
- Sorting items by shape or size
- Complete the picture
- Copying shapes (can use more than just pen and paper- use straws, toothpicks, yarn, pipe cleaners, etc.)
- Word searches
- Board games like Connect 4, Light Bright, Cooties-These games require Hand-Eye coordination
- Stringing beads on string or lacing boards
- Blowing bubbles and trying to pop them
- Reading
- Play "don't touch the ground" with balloons
- Connect the dots
- Color/paint by number
- Word searches
- What's wrong with this picture/ What's different
- Replicating pattern with Legos or block

Alerting

- Playing eye-spy
- Bean bag toss/playing catch
- Play "don't touch the ground" with balloons
- Sprinkle beans or small toys in the yard and have the child hunt for them
- Have a child try and hit a target with a ball (for example, stacked up empty soda cans)

Auditory Activities



A child with atypical auditory processing does not have a hearing impairment. They have the ability to detect sounds but the way the brain interprets the information is different. Some children need more auditory input to register the sounds in their environment while others can become easily overwhelmed by sounds that we can barely hear. They may also have difficulties “tuning out” background noise or determining where a sound is coming from. Often times a child with auditory defensiveness will demonstrate subtle responses to sounds not apparent to you. They may be detecting and attending to a sound in the far outside environment, such as a dog barking in the distance or people chatting in the next room. Pay close attention to your child’s eyes and body language as they attempt to localize distant sounds or in response to sudden, loud noises. Typically, quiet and soft music is calming while loud and fast music is alerting.

Auditory Activities

Activities that address auditory sensory processing:

Calming

- Listening and labeling nature sounds either outside or on CD
- Reading books aloud
- Guess that sound (i.e. can hide an animal toy in your hands and have the child guess what it is based on the noise you make)
- Fill plastic eggs (or any opaque container) with matching objects and have the child match the eggs that make the same sound
- Teach a few yoga poses (or other body movements) and once the child has learned them, have him or her make each pose after you call them out
- Make a rain stick or other homemade musical instruments

Alerting

- Playing a game with verbal instructions such as Simon says, hokey pokey, bop-it, hot and cold, or green light/red light
- Playing musical instruments or banging on pots and pans
- Sing songs, especially those with rhymes
- Hide a noise-making toy in the room and have the child find it
- Go on a field trip to a noisy place (i.e. restaurant, fire station, park) - you can prepare your child before this activity by talking about what sounds you expect to hear and then label those sounds when you are actually there
- Freeze dance (can also change it up by having a child only color when the music is playing)
- Play Marco Polo in safe area (can use different words to make the game easier)
- Have the child pop bubble wrap (this gives them control over producing loud noises)

Gustatory Activities



The gustatory system includes taste and oral motor function. Like the other sensory systems, input to this system can be either calming or alerting to the nervous system. All oral play should be fun and in a stress-free environment to increase children drive to explore novel items with mouth.

While a child should always be under watch of an adult during sensory based activities, it is extremely important to closely monitor child during gustatory activities to prevent choking or swallowing harmful substances. Note that most children will have difficulties with sequencing the steps of blowing and sucking. Make sure to teach the steps before introducing the activity to prevent swallowing of bubbles or other liquids.

Gustatory Activities

Activities that address gustatory sensory processing:

Calming

- Eating sweet, smooth, or warm foods
- Blowing bubbles
- Playing with whistles, harmonicas, or kazoos
- Blowing up balloons
- Using curly or thick straws to drink liquids or pureed foods like applesauce
- Play games like straw soccer (i.e., use a straw to blow cotton balls, bunched up paper, or ice cubes into a goal).
- Make a bubble volcano (add soap, food coloring, and water into a cup and blow through straw into cup)
- Drinking from bottle with bite valve
- Suck up food (like M&Ms, Smarties, raisins) with straw and put into a cup
- Use Blow pens
- Place big drops of watered down paint on a paper and blow it around with straw
- Fogging up a window and then drawing in it

Alerting

- Eating salty, sour, spicy, bitter, chewy, or cold foods
- Chewing gum
- Make an edible necklace (i.e. out of ring shaped cereal or gummies)
- Licking lollipops, stickers, or stamps
- Brushing cheeks with washcloth or other soft textured item
- Play Simon says with different noises (i.e., humming, buzzing, clicking tongue, blowing raspberries) or by making funny faces (ie, mouth open wide, sticking tongue out, filling cheeks up with air)
- Lick peanut butter off of lips

Olfactory Activities



The olfactory system is our sense of smell. Smells are processed in the limbic system. This is the same part of the brain that is responsible for emotional memory and storing long term memory; therefore certain smells can evoke strong memories. Some children may be sensitive to even typically pleasant or normal smells, causing them to engage in atypical stress responses. Scents can also be alerting and calming. Try pairing calming scent with calming activities and alerting scents with alerting activities. Introduce new smells slowly, grading their exposure as they become comfortable with the new sensation. The child may need extra time to process and respond to the scents, so you could try using containers with lids to briefly release a scent, teach the child how to 'waft' and then build up to bringing a smell up to the nose. Allow the child to have control over the sensory input. Since each child's sensory system is different, you'll need to experiment to see which smells are calming vs. alerting. The scents listed below are categorized bases on the general public preferences.

Please note that there is some evidence stating that lavender oils affect hormone production in boys and therefore should be avoided.

Olfactory Activities

Activities that address olfactory sensory processing:

Calming/Less Alerting

- Rose, rosemary, jasmine, vanilla, scents
- Familiar scents (i.e., food, people places)

Other

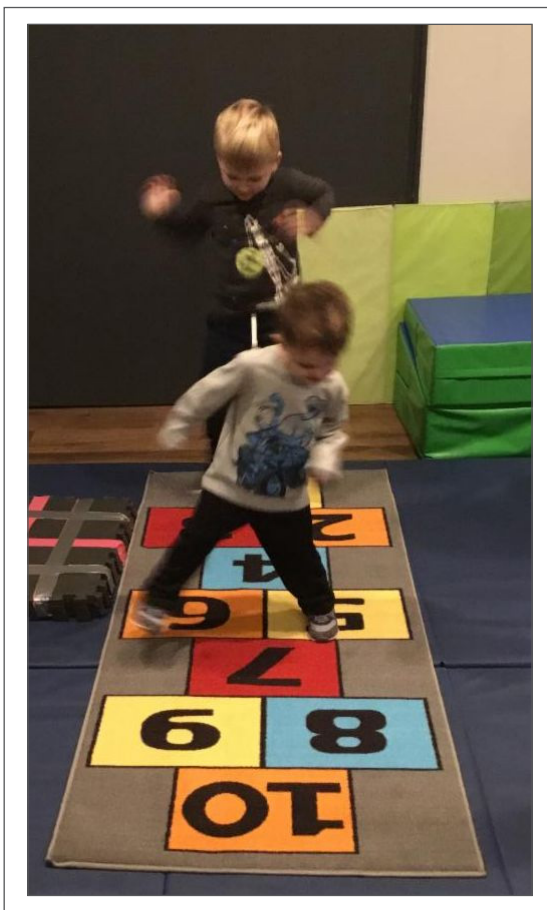
You can add scents to various activities. Depending on the scent used, it can be alerting or calming.

- Scented Playdough
- Burning candles
- Scented finger paints
- Scented rice bins
- Scented markers

Alerting

- Smelling salts
- Strong smells like lemon/citrus, cinnamon and peppermint
- Closing eyes and trying to identify or match smells (can use candles, lotions, cooking spices)
- Have the child help you cook something with a strong smell
- Go for a walk and smell flowers
- Scented chalk/outdoor paint (50/50 cornstarch and water and then add Jell-O or Kool-Aid packet)
- Make your own scent bottles (place a drop or two of oils/extracts on a cotton ball and place in a closable container - you can either have the child identify the scent or match scents)

Motor Planning



Motor planning is the ability to conceive of, organize, and carry out a sequence of motor actions. Motor planning is not a sensory system, but rather the ability to integrate multiple senses in order to perform an action sequence. Motor planning involves the following components/steps: ideation, initiation, sequencing, timing, and execution. In order for motor planning to be effective, a child must have an integrated sensory system, including proprioceptive, vestibular and tactile processing, as we rely on our sensory systems for feedback during motor activities.

Motor Planning

Please note, motor planning skills should only be addressed once the child is in a calm, ready to learn state.

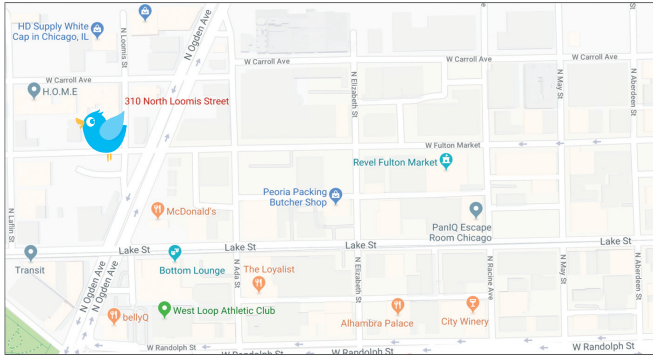
Activities that address motor planning:

- Obstacle courses
- Simon says
- Activities that require use of both sides of body such as wheelbarrow walks and riding bikes
- Following a “recipe” (either for food or making a craft)
- Imitation songs like hockey pokey and chicken dance
- Read stories that involve motor imitation
- Throwing or kicking a ball
- Climbing such as rock walls or jungle gyms at park
- Hopscotch
- Get creative with red light/green light and add different colors with different movements
- Play twister
- Follow the leader
- Clapping games (i.e. patty cake)
- Imitate jumping patterns on trampoline/bed/ or ground
- Jump rope
- Scooter board races (can either think of new ways to ride on scooter or maneuver around objects)
- Imitating yoga poses

Our Locations

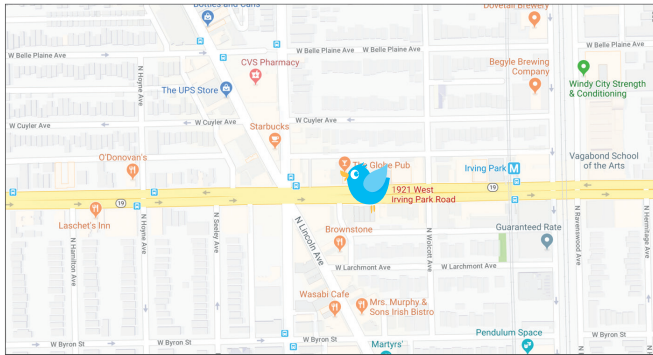
West Loop

310 N Loomis St, Chicago, IL 60607



Northcenter

1921 W Irving Park Rd, Chicago, IL 60613



Wheaton

Coming Soon!

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