



COOKING WITH A SHARED VISION

Sensory recipes for families of
children with visual impairment





INTRODUCTION

The idea for this collection of sensory recipes came from one of our teachers. It was the fall of 2018. She and one of her families made homemade play dough with pumpkin puree, corn starch, and pumpkin pie spice. The experience was great fun for everyone.

During a team meeting, we decided to make the recipe together. We brought enough ingredients and aprons for everyone. The conference room smelled like a bakery, and we had so much fun mixing, kneading, rolling, and even poking the play dough! It was such a wonderful sensory experience that we knew this recipe would be a big hit with all the families we support.

Our teachers excel at helping parents engage with their child with a visual impairment. The kitchen is the perfect environment for teaching children many concepts that will help them develop important skills that can be used both in and out of the kitchen. Cooking involves all five senses – touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight – providing a variety of multi-sensory learning experiences for even our littlest ones.

From pizza to sugar cookies to pumpkin pie play dough, our recipes are simple and family friendly. Most

of them have five ingredients or less. With each step in the recipe, we provide sensory suggestions for parents to try with their child.

The recipes include important strategies for parents to practice when cooking with their child, including the technique of hand under hand, narration, and wait time. Following a recipe helps children understand that things happen in a sequence from beginning to middle to end. Learning occurs best when children have hands-on experiences in which they can anticipate what will happen next. Predictable routines help to build trust and allow for mastery of skills through repetition.

Finally, cooking together is a shared experience that offers many communication opportunities between a parent and a child.

We hope you'll enjoy the recipes in this first edition. You'll think about cooking in a whole new way once you try using all your senses. And you'll get a "taste" of our teachers' toolbox – what A Shared Vision's teachers do with their families in more than 200 homes across Colorado.

IMPORTANT TIPS

Cooking together can be fun, especially when it's done safely. Stoves and ovens are hot. Knives have sharp edges. While many kitchen utensils and appliances are for adults' use only, it is especially important to talk with your child about kitchen safety.

There are many opportunities to introduce concepts to your child such as "hot" and "cold," and why a sharp knife will cut your finger and a rubber spatula won't. Depending on your comfort level and your child's interest, you can still show your child what it feels like to zest an orange, for example, even though the grater has sharp edges. By inviting your child to place their hands on top of yours, your child can feel how your hands move up and down over the grater.

While you cook cranberries over a hot stove, you can allow your child to watch. Explain what you're doing so your child doesn't miss out on any steps in the process. "The saucepan with the cranberries goes on the stovetop." "I turned the stove on – it needs to be HOT to cook the cranberries." "I'm stirring the cranberries so they don't burn!" Describe to your child what's happening as the hard berries magically turn into a thick sauce.

Consider using an assortment of glass, stainless steel, or wooden bowls for mixing as their characteristics offer many pleasing sensory qualities – glass bowls are heavy and stainless steel makes a fun sound when tapped with a spoon. If plastic bowls are more practical for you to use, try stirring with a metal or wooden spoon for a varied tactile experience. Measuring cups and spoons offer wonderful opportunities for scooping, filling, and pouring. Squirted liquids out of squeeze bottles is also fun! Talk about each utensils' qualities and what they are being used for. A spoon has a "bowl" and a "handle" for scooping and stirring; a spatula is flat for scraping. Introduce new things slowly and pay attention to your child's cues.

Don't force your child to touch any of the utensils or the ingredients in a recipe. Foods can be mixed in a plastic bag to help your child feel more comfortable squishing the ingredients together. You may not complete a whole recipe together but there's value in your child spending time with you in the kitchen – even just banging a pot with a spoon!

Finally, have fun! It's OK to get messy. That's what aprons and drop cloths are for.



BASIC STRATEGIES

While there are many important strategies to use when engaging with a very young child with a visual impairment, the following were most applicable to the development of our sensory recipes. We've demonstrated these strategies in many of the recipes.

Hand under Hand

For children with a visual impairment, their hands are their eyes. Hand under hand is an invitation from a caregiver to a child to explore and learn together. It is the most respectful way to engage because it provides a sense of safety while giving the child the opportunity to choose whether or not to join the activity. In hand under hand, the adult puts their hand under the child's hand and gently guides them through an activity such as touching a new object or using a tool like a spoon.

Feet First

Children with a visual impairment may prefer to explore toys with their feet first because it often feels safer to engage with objects that are further away from their hands and face – especially if it is something new or unfamiliar. This strategy works well for children when in your arms or lap, laying down, or sitting as long as they can lift or move their legs and feet away. Position the item so it's just touching the child and allow time to kick, touch, and explore with feet and toes.

Wait Time

Infants and toddlers have limited control over what happens during their daily routines. Creating opportunities for active participation in play and other activities is essential for encouraging communication and promoting self-initiation. Wait time is about waiting for a child to make a move rather than relying on an adult for prompts and guidance.

Verbal Descriptions

Children who are visually impaired cannot rely on visual information alone to understand the world around them. Verbal descriptions from an adult or peer are an important tool to give meaning and context to the experience a child is having in the moment. For young children, simply labeling what they are doing gives valuable information. Emphasizing words to identify sensory information is also helpful. Pair words with objects or activities happening in the moment to make descriptions meaningful.





Opportunities for Communication

Parents and caregivers create opportunities for their child to communicate, but they must also pay attention to how their child communicates with them! There are many ways to facilitate this communication: Allow for pauses (wait time) during activities to give children an opportunity to vocalize, gesture, or indicate they want more. Respond to a child's attempts to communicate (e.g., "I hear you!"). Be respectful of a child's choice. Even if a parent cannot honor their child's request, they can acknowledge that they heard their child (e.g., "I know you want to sing, but we have to eat now.") Communication isn't always vocal; many times, parents must learn to watch for their child's body language or gestures.



Reading a Child's Cues

For children with a visual impairment, their actions are often worth a thousand words. Cues vary widely from child to child, as well as situation to situation. Here are some common cues: ear pointing, stilling, head tilting, looking away to play or explore, raising an eyebrow, opening hands, kicking feet, changes in breathing, and falling asleep (or pretending to!). When a child turns away from their caregiver, it often means they don't want what the caregiver is offering. If the child pulls their hands away, it may mean they're all done with the activity.



Routines and Repetitions

Consistent everyday routines help build trust and optimize learning for a child with a visual impairment. Learning occurs best when a child feels safe and can anticipate "what happens next" within the context of familiar routines and activities. Predictable beginning, middle, and end sequences within routines also encourage active engagement, rather than passive participation. Specific communication skills can tie the experience to larger concepts.



SENSORY LEARNING

Children with visual impairments need to **learn to use ALL their senses** – vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, including movement, vibration, temperature, and weight. This is the most important strategy in this collection of recipes.

When introducing something new to a child, try stimulating one sense at a time to minimize sensory input so as not to overwhelm the child. Vary your approach the next time you do the activity. For example, if you're playing with pumpkin pie play dough, maybe the first time your child might just smell it. The next time they might touch the dough with their fingers or their feet. The third time you might introduce a spoon so your child can pound the dough and listen to the sound it makes.

Five sensory symbols appear in every recipe to indicate which sense you can engage when cooking with your little one.

