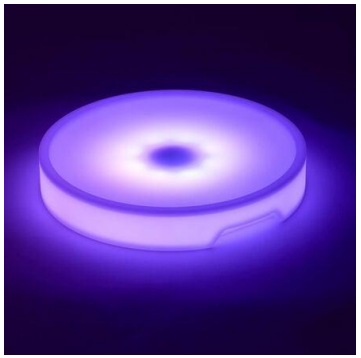
Ideas and Inspiration for the Light Up Sensory Tray



Light Up Sensory Tray (SS49606)

In this download, you will find a collection of simple, fun and engaging activity ideas to use in your setting.

This lightweight, colour changing, sensory tray has a multitude of uses that would enhance any early years setting, inclusion base or dedicated sensory space. With a charge that lasts for the majority of the school day, no one will be left disappointed as open-ended play can continue throughout the day. The remote control enables the adult to make changes to the sensory tray from a distance, whilst observing play.

The tray can be used to develop dexterity and hand-eye coordination by using tracing and pinching activities, or from moving objects around and across the tray. The exploration of colour and mixing can seamlessly combine hands-on exploration, with calming, visual stimulation. The understanding of cause and effect, alongside promoting motor skills are all supported by this light up sensory tray.

The emotional regulation that can be achieved as the soft, glowing light, changes colours, can act as a soothing tool, from babies to older children. The gentle light can help them to manage stress, anxiety, and sensory overload. It will support the creation of a quiet, focused environment that is especially beneficial for calming down, even within smaller spaces.

The light up sensory tray encourages creativity, enhances fine motor skills, together with supporting emotional self-regulation, though a stimulating visual and tactile experience, supporting open-ended play. It allows for the use of materials like sand, water beads, gel shapes, and translucent tiles to create a rich, multi-sensory learning experience.

This versatile resource supports exploration across many different areas of learning, making it a wonderful addition to a variety of settings.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Emotional Regulation

The calming glow of the colour changing light tray, can really help to support emotional regulation. The soft and warm glow, mimics natural calming stimuli which can help to ease over-stimulated nervous systems, aiding relaxation and can reduce anxiety. Even babies find the lights provide a calming environment, which prevent the sudden dazzling or startling effects which can be caused by harsh overhead fixtures.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Breathing, calm, light, colour, feeling.

Taking it further:

- When a child is really struggling to self-regulate, blowing bubbles onto the light tray will further regulate their emotions, supporting them as their breathing calms and they watch the effect of the iridescent bubbles as they gently pop on the tray. The slow transitions of the colours changing, can promote deep, slow, regular breathing patterns.

Inclusion

- The predictable visual focal points of the soft, glow of the lights changing colour, can aid focus and concentration or support those with autism to stay engaged in tasks for longer periods.

Building Positive Friendships

Children will enjoy playing alongside or with friends, using the light up tray. When dry sand is placed on the tray, children can take turns to trace shapes in this, revealing the light glowing beneath the sand. What colour will they find?

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Light, my turn, your turn, next.

Taking it further:

- Babies as young as ten months old, will enjoy watching the colours change as they put their hand onto the tray.



Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Helping Each Other

Setting up a challenge on the tray can encourage children to work together to creatively problem solve. Using translucent tiles, they can try to match shapes on cards provided by adults or work to make their own shapes and patterns. Encourage them to watch each other to see if they can find a solution. Support, but only when necessary (e.g. by scaffolding, reorientating the resource and helping them to think and experiment to find the solution).

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Help, swap, turn, slide, push, try this way.

Taking it further:

- Encourage children to develop their coordination and creativity, by creating an animal of their choice on the light box, using translucent tiles. Can they help their friends and work together? Discuss how this makes them feel.

Other suggested resources to use alongside:









Physical Development

Tweezer Time!

Placing tweezers and smaller objects onto the tray, for children to grasp and move around, supports hand-eye coordination and the development of fine motor skills, as well as visual acuity.

Children learn to manipulate small objects, improving their dexterity and control. These purposeful movements take concentration, coordination and practise, particularly for younger children and babies. Allow them time to repeat the actions as often as they need to and want to.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Pinch, move, pick up, that one, find.

Taking it further:

- Adding small translucent pots to the tray can encourage sorting, grouping and counting activities, as well as the concentration and coordination required for moving the objects from on the tray and into the pot. Many young children will then enjoy tipping the objects back onto the tray!





Glitter Mark Making

Adding glitter or sand to the tray, which the children can trace in, adds a new, very tactile dimension for them. They can use their fingers or objects such as modelling tools, to trace different shapes and early mark-making, as a precursor to writing.

They will enjoy revealing the light through the glitter and the shimmer from the glitter adds a further dimension to this.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Light, trace, mark, shiny, hold.

Taking it further:

- For older children, enhance the sensory engagement even further, by adding squidgy sparkle letters into the sand or glitter.





Physical Development

Footprints and Tyres

Add some different play animals or different kinds of vehicles to the tray. What happens as the footprints or tyres go across the tray? This can be further enhanced by the use of soil, sand or paint for the tyres or footprints to go though.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Which one, match, footprint, track, pattern.

Taking it further:

- Fitting in with the children's likes, get three objects (animals, transport or otherwise) and make marks in the soil or messy material with these. Can the children find the match. Great opportunities for discussion, conversation and collaborative learning.



Other types of resources to use alongside:







Communication and Language

Conversations and Interacting

The light up sensory tray really does support communication, where illuminated play naturally inspires children to describe the colours and shadows they see, boosting their language development. Sit alongside the child/children and comment as they watch the different colours or the colour changes on the tray. What objects do they choose to play with on the light tray? Short, playful phrases and statements can really help to support the play and develop the verbal interactions, for example: “What does my hand look like when I put it on the tray? What about your foot?”.

Younger children may repeat the words and copy the actions, whilst babies will really benefit and enjoy the rhythm of the words and the interactions themselves.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Light, colour, blue, red, pink, white, purple, green, yellow, same, different.

Taking it further:

• Place translucent shapes on the light tray, with a cloth thrown over them. Can they see the shapes through the cloth as the light changes colour? What might be under there?

Taking Turns

Invite a small group of children to play together on the light tray, perhaps with small world under the sea creatures and the light turned to blue. Each child could have a small net that they try to ‘catch’ one of the creatures with.

Use prompts such as “My turn, your turn” to encourage sharing and turn taking. Further discussion will come naturally to most children as the play continues. The activity feels like a game, and they quickly spot the pattern with the repetition.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• My turn, your turn, sharing, wait, next, caught one, put them back.

Taking it further:

• Use the changing light tray to develop retention skills. On the colour scrolling mode, can they take turns trying to remember what the last two or three colours were? Discussing how they do this can all help to develop understanding about how they remember things and can support those who find this more challenging.

Stories and Reading

Re-telling

The light up sensory tray naturally creates an ideal immersive environment that is perfect for storytelling. Familiarise the children with a picture book, such as 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt', written by Michael Rosen (illustrated by Helen Oxenbury).

Leave the book near the light tray and allow the children to retell the story in their own way. Can they think about which colour might be good for the 'long, wavy grass', or the 'swishy, swashy' river?

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- First, next, then, looking, feeling.

Taking it further:

- Encourage a small group of children to talk about when they have been looking for something. Can they use small objects and the light tray to re-tell this to others?

Songs and Rhymes

The calming nature of the gentle glow as the lights change on the tray lends itself wonderfully to singing rhymes and songs. Songs such as 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' could be sung whilst moving star shapes around the light tray.

Babies will love the rhythm of the voices and the shared time as songs are sung. Older children will enjoy joining in with the song and remembering and repeating familiar phrases, as well as moving to the rhythm.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Shine, bright, twinkle, light, dark, near, far.

Taking it further:

- As children become more familiar with a song or rhyme, leave out or change words and phrases. Can they spot this? Can they make their own new words up? Ideas include: 'Twinkle, twinkle little bat, how I wonder where you're at...'

Early Maths

Counting As We Go

Encourage children to count items on the tray. Can they also sort them? Discuss what happens if I add one more? What about one less?

The familiarity of hearing the numbers is useful for babies, who will enjoy the repetition, older children in the early years, will be able to touch each piece as the number is said, which reinforces the idea that every number said matches one object. This is a tangible way of exploring 1:1 correspondence. Hearing and seeing the action together helps them make sense of how counting works.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Number names (one, two three etc), more, less, match, same.

Taking it further:

• Placing objects and numerals onto the tray can encourage matching the number of specific items to the digit. They can also be encouraged to practice subitizing (when they develop the skill to instantly see how many items are in a small group without counting these). The light can help to capture the children's attention and may increase engagement.

Shape Recognition

Placing shapes on the light tray (translucent ones work really well), can help with shape recognition.

Children can also develop their understanding of directional words, as they consider where shapes are in relation to other shapes.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Shape names (circle, square, triangle etc), match, same, edge, straight, curved, next to, under, on.

Taking it further:

- Can they use the shapes to make representations of familiar objects from their lives, such as houses, people?





Understanding and Exploring the World

Sensory and Visual Stimulation

The tray supports developing colour recognition, both from the colours of the lights and the colour scrolling mode as the lights change, together with adding coloured translucent shapes, letters, numbers and seeing how these change with the lights.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Colour words (red, blue, yellow, green, purple, orange etc.), same, different.

Taking it further:

- Use this as a colour spotting game. Ask “What colour can we see? Who can find something that is yellow?” Many children will enjoy the interaction with their friends with the game. Different challenges can be set for different children, adding a dimension of challenge for those who need it.

What Happens If... What Can I Discover?

Children are often curious to test out experiences, repeating the actions to see if it changes. What happens when I put a red translucent shape on the yellow light? These early explorations into cause and effect are observable with the light up sensory tray, where learners interact with glowing objects or pressing buttons to change colours which all builds early problem-solving skills.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Change, same, different, colour words.

Taking it further:

- For those who are gaining confidence with colour mixing, encourage them to experiment with making secondary colours, using different coloured translucent objects. Discuss whether when they use different objects, do they get the same shade of orange?

Understanding and Exploring the World

Natural World

Use different materials from the natural world and explore how these look and feel on the light up sensory tray. Children might like to try different colours or use the colour scrolling mode.

Try objects like soil, leaves, conkers, stones, shells, feathers and so on. What do the children prefer? How do they choose to play with these on the tray? How they approach their play tells us something about the children's interests and how they choose to explore.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Likes, dislikes, smooth, rough, clean, dirty, soft.

Taking it further:

- If a child shows an interest in a particular type of play or texture, can this interest be explored in different areas of learning with other resources. For example, if they enjoy the feel of the leaves, could they explore these further doing rubbings, prints or even painting on them?

Discovery Learning

The tray lends itself beautifully to discovery learning, where linked items can be hidden on the tray, in sand, shredded paper or even (for older learners), in dry lentils. Whilst some will delight in finding the items, others will focus on finding the link with hidden objects, this again all develops early problem-solving skills.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Same, different, link, pattern.

Taking it further:

- This can be a great opportunity when introducing new themes to your setting, where children's natural curiosity and desire to see patterns and links in things can be harnessed and supported, building real enthusiasm.



Schematic Play

For a number of children, the Light Up Sensory Tray really does appeal to their schematic interests. Here are a few examples of how children may use it:

Transforming Those with a transforming schema, will enjoy the multisensory nature of the light on the tray, as they mix playdough, or play with sand, slime or soil on top of the tray.

Transporting For a transporting schema preference, they will like moving different objects across the tray. Consider how these change when materials are placed over the tray, or sand added.

Connecting Those with a connecting schema, will find the appeal of attaching items together on the tray, particularly if the items they attach are translucent and allow the colours to shine through.

Trajectory Children with a trajectory schema may be more interested in rolling or sliding items across the tray. They may enjoy dropping objects such as coloured feathers onto the tray and watching how these fall and land.

Rotation Particularly when soft sand is on the tray (or even glitter), spinning items on the tray will appeal. They may enjoy using rollers to move across the tray, seeing the light patters revealed where they have rolled.

Positioning Some children will love to arrange items on the tray, lining these up in neat rows, or grouping them, before deciding what to do next.





