



# Q&A with Early Intervention Professionals on Staying Sane with Little Ones at Home

*With suggestions from Paula C. Papp, M.A.Ed., and Neysa McKenney, M.A., CCC-SLP*

## Activities to Keep Your Child Meaningfully Engaged

### ***Neysa's "Bag of Tricks"***

Keep a box of novel toys and activities that your child only gets to play with when you're occupied. Remember: you don't necessarily have to buy new things for a young child for them to be "new." Try rotating out toys that haven't been played with for 1-2 weeks.

### ***Upside-Down Laundry Basket***

Turn a laundry basket upside-down and attach toys to the sides. This offers a new way for children who are developing gross motor skills to explore.

### ***Use Familiar Objects in a Different Way***

Go through the kitchen cabinets for familiar items that you can re-purpose. A clothespin and a pot are great for finger strengthening. Measuring cups and funnels can be used to scoop and pour dry goods. Or have your child sort items by size and color.

### ***Extended Tubby Time***

Water can calm and provide sensory input. Add kitchen tools like plastic cups, spoons, strainers and other familiar objects to change things up.

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## Heavy Work Activities to Provide Sensory Input

Any time you provide a sensory activity for your child (like heavy work), it's a good idea to check in with your child's pediatrician or occupational therapist first. This type of check-in not only ensures that your child's health care team is aware of their needs but gives you important feedback to ensure that you're using activities safely.

### ***Whole-Body Heavy Work:***

#### **Pillow Case and Stuffed Animals**

Have your child see how many stuffed animals they can stuff into a pillow case. Take them out and try it again.

#### **Row, Row, Row Your Boat**

Sit facing your child and place the soles of your feet together. Join hands and take turns pulling each other toward you. Sing along with "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

#### **Make a Kid Sandwich**

Have your child lay on a sofa cushion and place a cushion on top of their chest and legs. Pat or tap the cushion to provide sensory input. Sing a song together and pat to the rhythm of the song.

*continued*

### **Funny Walks**

Challenge your child to bear crawl, crab walk, or do a wheelbarrow walk down the hall.

### **Kicking**

Get outside and kick a ball. Or if the weather isn't good, kick stuffed animals in an open space in your home.

### ***Hand Heavy Work:***

#### **Clay or Dough**

Offer clay, dough, putty or slime to roll, squeeze and stretch.

#### **Sock Stretch**

Challenge your child to stretch out an old sock as far as they can. You can also play tug-of-war with your child using a sock.

#### **Into the Wringer**

Give your child an assortment of sponges and wash cloths, along with a small amount of water and encourage them to squeeze all of the water out.

### ***Mouth Heavy Work:***

#### **Crunch, Chew, Suck**

Different types of foods can offer lots of heavy work for your child's mouth. Select from crunchy foods (like pretzels or toasted oat cereals), chewy foods (like gummy candy or fruit leather), and thick foods that can be sucked through a straw (like apple sauce diluted with water or apple juice). Make sure to check with your child's pediatrician to ensure that the foods you are giving are developmentally appropriate.

#### **Blow Bubbles**

Blow bubbles using store-bought bubbles or add dish soap to water and use a straw.

#### **Scrap Storm**

Tear up scraps of paper and have your child use a straw to blow them around. See if you can make a scrap storm!

## **Additional Resources**

Google offers a number of great resources for heavy work activities. We particularly like Understood (published by the National Center for Learning Disabilities), the Inspired Treehouse Blog, and books like 101 Activities for Kids in Tight Places and Sensory Processing 101.