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[illegible]

*'Everything we learn we learn
better when it seems to have no
particular purpose, when it is
pure fun and when we do not
merely grasp it with our minds
but also with our hands.'*

Bruno Munari

Ready Steady Make

Welcome – This booklet provides a quick reference guide to making six sensory props; we will show you how to make sense for just a few pence!

Sensory props are objects that stimulate the primary senses. For people with autism, who often display unusual reactions to sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, the process of simply engaging with objects rather than having to achieve specific tasks can help them explore and test the boundaries of their sensory sensitivities in a safe, fun and relaxed manner.

Sensory props can also be created to help develop skills in motor movement, cognition, communication and socialisation. Through this occupational play, people with autism of all ages and ability may gain confidence and ultimately transfer newly acquired skills to practical situations.

You can purchase sensory props from several specialist retailers, but we'll demonstrate how you can make your own with items from high street shops and in and around your home. Created in minutes, these props are affordable, easy and fun to Ready Steady Make.

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Marbelous

We've started with a sensory prop that is easy to make. Find the ingredients below and follow the step by step guide to create a prop that instantly appeals to the sense of vision and equally entices touch, with its brightly coloured and bobbly textured surface.

Handling Marbelous causes the marbles inside to move, roll and tap against one another, providing aural stimulation. Place Marbelous on your lap or your shoulder and allow the marbles weight to apply deep pressure to your body. For some people, the sensation of deep pressure can help develop body awareness, relax them and even improve concentration.

Tip: Experiment with a range of fillers for the mitt such as rice, lentils or foam to create a range of tactile and aural experiences.

You will need:

Cleaning mitt
Handful of marbles
Sticky-Back Velcro (about 10cm)
Scissors



01 Fill the cleaning mitt with marbles



02 Cut Velcro to the width of the cuff



03 Affix a strip of hooked Velcro to the upper side of the cleaning mitt's cuff



04 Turn over the mitt and affix a strip of looped Velcro to the lower side of the cleaning mitt's cuff



05 Insert the cuff into the mitt opening, then close by attaching the Velcro strips



Twist

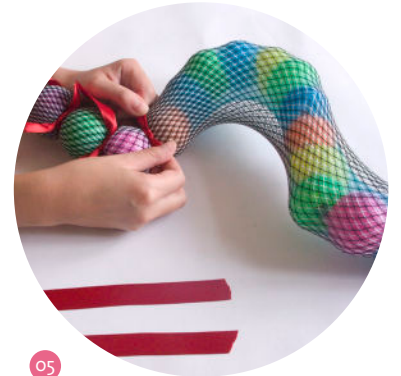
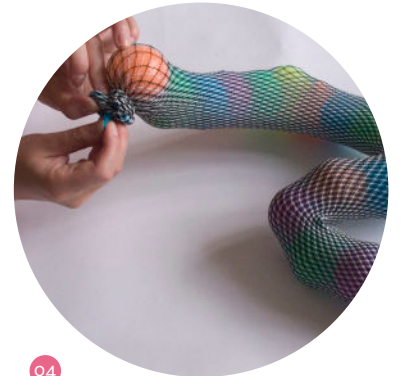
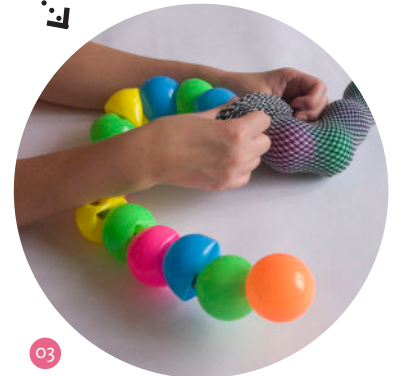
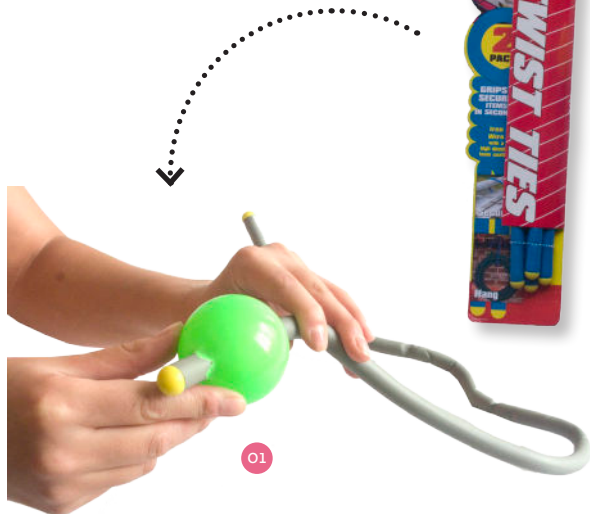
With Twist you can push, pull, turn and bend the colourful balls to create different shapes. This prop resists being flexed and so helps with motor development. We've covered Twist with patterned tights and adorned it with brightly-coloured ribbons, but if you want to soften the visual elements of this prop, you could simply use thick tights with a single colour.

Twist will appeal to people who enjoy proprioceptive (body awareness) stimuli and those who like making and creating things.

Tip: Experiment with different coloured tights, ribbons or thread layers of tights over one other to achieve different tactile qualities.

You will need:

One giant twist tie down
Hollow plastic balls (enough to cover the length of the twist tie down)
Pair of tights
Ribbon and string



- 01 Make two small incisions in all but two of the plastic balls. Thread these balls over the twist tie down
- 02 Make a small incision in one wall only of the two remaining balls. Thread each of these balls onto the ends of twist tie down
- 03 Cut a pair of tights in two. Insert the twist tie down and balls into one of the tights' legs
- 04 Tie a knot in the end of the tights
- 05 Cut small lengths of ribbon and, in between each ball, wrap them around the twist tie down and tie with knot of the ribbon loose

Snap-Wrap

Snap-Wrap is a playful and reactive sensory prop; place your hand, arm or foot onto the prop to activate its snap.

Snap-Wrap can be repeatedly uncoiled and re-set, challenging fine motor skills in the process. This prop may appeal to people who like animated and surprising responses from objects.

You will need:

Four (4) Snap Wraps
Thick fabric (approximately 25 x 18 cm)
Double-sided tape
Scissors

Tip: Experiment with different textures and weights of fabrics, which will make Snap-Wrap react at different speeds.

- 01 Lay the fabric out on a flat surface and cover with double-sided tape. Remove the tape backing
- 02 With the fabric in landscape orientation, affix snap wraps to the left half of the fabric
- 03 Affix double-sided tape to the tops of the snap wraps. Remove the tape backing
- 04 Peel off the tape
- 05 Fold the fabric in half as shown and press firmly together



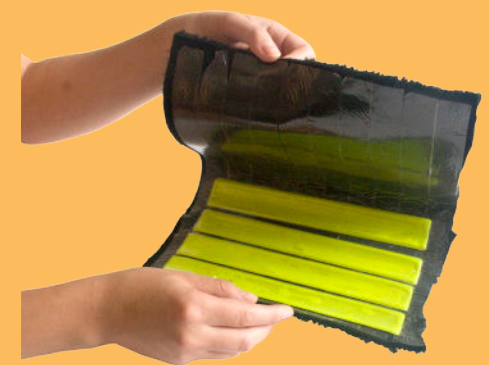
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Springy-Thingy

Springy-Thingy celebrates and accentuates the unique behaviour of the slinky. Enveloped in a pair of tights, the slinky cannot become tangled and is transformed into textured plaything that invites touch and motor movements.

Stretch and release or wrap Springy-Thingy around your arms and legs. By attaching the two free ends together, Springy-Thingy becomes a hoop that you can independently roll along your limbs to massage and relax.

Tip: Remove one of the gravy lids and place objects inside the slinky that will generate sounds when you shake or stretch Springy-Thingy. Place coffee granules or lavender inside to appeal to your sense of smell.

You will need:

Two (2) Gravy pot lids
Tights
Handful of small bells
Slinky (approximate diameter of 7 cm)
Electrical tape
Sticky-Back Velcro
Pliers
Scissors



01 Using the pliers, cut the slinky to leave a compressed height of approximately 3.5 cm. Affix tape to the free ends of the slinky to cover any sharp edges



02 Cut a pair of tights in half. Insert the trimmed slinky inside one of the tights' legs and pull through to the end



03 Take a gravy pot lid and fit it over one end of the slinky



04 Place bells inside and attach a second gravy pot lid to the other end of the slinky



05 Affix Velcro to each gravy lid. Press together to create a ring



Flip-Flop

Tap, press and squeeze Flip-Flop to watch it wobble; roll it along the floor or play throw and catch with a friend.

We've used bright colours, which look fascinating as Flip-Flop springs back and forth, but may be overwhelming for some people. Flip-Flop is an excellent prop for developing your vestibular (balance) system.

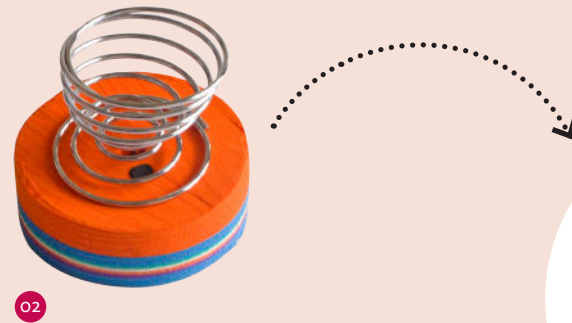
Tip: Place a marble inside the egg cups before you fix them together to create noise as Flip-Flop wobbles.

You will need:

- Pair of flip-flops
- Two (2) metal spiral egg cups
- Strong tape
- Clear tape
- Scissors



01



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01 Remove bands from flip-flops. Draw one circle; slightly larger than the diameter of the base of your egg cups; onto each of the flip-flops. Neatly cut out two discs

02 Place and align an egg cup to the centre of one of the flip-flop discs

03 Affix the egg cup to the flip-flop disc with strong tape. Trim the tape, removing loose ends

04 Repeat steps 2 to 4 for the other egg cup and flip-flop disc

05 Affix the two pieces at the tops of the egg cups with clear tape



Pingy-Thingy

Pingy-Thingy provides visual stimulation and makes a wonderful boing sound in response to flicking, flipping or tapping. Its fabric cover provides a soft textured handle through which you can feel the subtle vibrations of the spring.

Pingy-Thingy may appeal to people who like light pressure and those who enjoy making sounds with musical instruments and household objects.

Tip: Before step 3, place objects inside the sock that will generate sounds when you shake or flick Pingy-Thingy.

You will need:

Gravy pot
Sock
Doorstop
Double-sided tape
Scissors



01 Using the threaded end of a door stop, puncture a hole in the centre of the base of the gravy pot. Screw the door stop into the hole



02 Wrap double-sided tape around the walls of the gravy pot



03 Remove the gravy pot lid. Remove tape backing and fit sock over the gravy pot



04 Insert the loose end of the sock into the gravy pot



05 Place the lid back on the gravy pot



Sensory differences

Autism is a lifelong and complex neurological condition that affects the way a person communicates and relates to other people and the world around them. It is a spectrum condition so it affects people in different ways. People with autism might have rigid routines and special interests, they can be very sociable or find social relations difficult; some have learning disabilities whilst others may possess high levels of intellectual ability.

In addition to their communication difficulties, people with autism often display unusual reactions to sensory input. Everyday sensations can be experienced at unbearable levels or appear not to be noticed at all, compromising their abilities to interact with the environment effectively and participate in daily activities.

Through appropriate stimulation of the primary senses, people with autism may be given opportunities to develop skills and learn more about themselves in relation to others and their environment.

The main senses include sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, as well as the vestibular and proprioceptive sensory systems. The vestibular system contributes to balance, spatial orientation and movement whilst the proprioceptive system contributes to a person's awareness of the relative position of parts of their body by sensing how much muscles are stretching or contracting, or how joints are being extended or compressed. The process of responding to, organising and interpreting information from these senses is called sensory processing. People with autism can be under- or over-sensitive in any or all of these sensory systems and may be said to have sensory processing disorder (SPD).

Sensory props allow people to explore and test the boundaries of their sensory sensitivities in a safe, fun and relaxed manner. They provide sensory experiences through movement, touch and playful activity as well as providing cues for communication and interaction. They are appropriate for both children and adults, who are at the sensorimotor stage of cognitive development.

The best gains are achieved when sensory props appeal to a person's preferences, as well as challenging their sensitivities and sensorimotor abilities. If activities are a positive sensory experience, participants are more likely to engage in or initiate similar activities.

When a person does not express their preferences verbally, those closest to them have a key role. It is the family, friends and support workers of people with autism and communication difficulties, who together with the individual they support discover and gather information about sensory sensitivities, thresholds and bias. Sensory props can help facilitate this process of discovery.

Our senses are in constant dialogue with our surroundings. The colour of a wall, the texture of a chair cover, the intensity of lighting, build-up of odours, and breeze from an open window are examples of sensations that we can experience all at the same time. Typically, our brains process this kind of sensory information automatically and formulate a response.

The abilities of people with autism to interpret, perceive or regulate sensory information can be impaired; leading to them being over-whelmed or under-stimulated by what they sense. Living in an environment that does not take into account their sensory sensitivities can cause anxiety, which in turn may bring about unusual behaviours and diminish motivation and confidence. Therefore it is essential to provide environments, in which the visual, acoustic, odour and tactile qualities can be modulated to suit a person's preferences and to eliminate their sensory dislikes. Participating in activities with sensory props will help to reveal an individual's sensory preferences, which can then be used to inform the design and decoration of their home. Small changes to a person's home environment can have profound impact on their wellbeing.

The sensory props shown in this booklet are from a larger collection of occupational playthings, which were created as responses to the sensory needs and preferences of a cohort of adults with autism. This work was undertaken as part of a research study, conducted by the Kingwood Trust and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, Royal College of Art, in 2011. For more information on this study or housing design for adults with autism, please visit our websites.

www.kingwood.org.uk
www.hhc.rca.ac.uk

Resources

We encourage you to discover your own sensory preferences as well as those of your family, friends and people you support and think about how you would create sensory props, activities or make changes in the home to improve your and their wellbeing.

For more information about autism and sensory differences, we recommend the following reading list. If you would like to speak with someone about these subjects, we encourage you to contact an Occupational Therapist.

Reading list:

Bogdashina, O., Sensory perceptual issues in autism: Different sensory experiences: Different perceptual worlds. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003

Bogdashina, O., Autism and the Edges of the Known World Sensitivities, Language and Constructed Reality. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010

Bundy, A.C., Lane, S.J., Murray, E.A., Sensory integration: theory and practice. (2nd ed.) Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 2002

Dunn, W., Living sensationally: understanding your senses. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009

Fowler, S., Multisensory rooms and environments. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008

Fowler, S., Sensory Stimulation. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1997

Verheul, A., Snoezelen materials homemade. Ede: Ad Verheul, 2007

Writers - Katie Gaudion, Andrew Brand.
Katie and Andrew are Research Associates
at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design,
Royal College of Art, London

'I feel that it would be exciting to see how Tony would respond if I were to make a prop that incorporated hair and smell. Maybe something along the lines of a blanket with five or so pockets containing various hairy textures that were some how infused with different aromas. I think he would really like that because he loves hair and scent.'

Inspired support worker for adults with autism

