

Sense-able Ideas: Activities to improve oral motor skills

Ideas and activities for parents or carers to
use at home and in the community



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Introduction

This booklet is to give you ideas and activities to help support your child / young person to improve the awareness and co-ordination of their oral motor skills.

Oral motor skills include awareness, strength, co-ordination, movement and endurance of the mouth; jaw, tongue, cheeks and lips.

All references to child or children mean either a child or young person.

Children can be under or over sensitive to touch sensation in their mouth which can cause problems with their eating and teeth brushing skills. Many children may find when they are stressed or anxious, they are more likely to chew on things. Chewing can be very calming and have a very quick and positive effect on the nervous system.

Taking part in oral motor activities helps to increase awareness, strength, co-ordination and movement for the mouth, jaw, tongue and lips. The following activities are an example of tools and games that can help.

A volcano of bubbles

Half fill a large bowl with water. Add a few squirts of dishwashing liquid. A few drops of food colouring may also be added. Give your child a straw, if possible a curly, crazy straw and ask them to blow into the water. Your child should keep blowing until the bubbles spill over the rim of the bowl. This is a fun activity to do with two children. Small plastic

animals can be placed at the bottom of the bowl and the children can time how long it takes until the animals are completely hidden.

Party blower target

Set up small animal figures on building blocks or cubes made of Lego. Ask your child to lie on their stomach in front of the figures. Using a large party blower (the ones that curl up and make a sound); your child can pretend to be a lizard or frog with a long tongue and knock down the figures.

Other items can be used for the same game such as cut out cardboard figures.



Bubble blowing

Use bubble mixture to blow different shapes and sizes. The semi-permanent bubbles are a fun way of creating a different atmosphere in a room as they last a while and the room can be filled with bubbles.



Blow football

On a table, smooth floor or using a cardboard box, create a football pitch. You can use pipe cleaners to make the goals. Once you are set-up all you need is some straws and a cotton ball or ping-pong ball. Use different sized straws; wider straws need less work than thinner straws, so start with the wider ones and slowly increase the challenge.

Musical instruments

The use of musical instruments (for example, harmonica, saxophone, trumpet) is another way to make sure that your child practices mouth movement.

Making silly faces

Have fun with your child by pulling lots of silly faces. Play sitting opposite each other or use a mirror. This is a good fun way to exercise the tongue and face and also increase awareness and sensations.



Things to think about:

When starting a new activity with your child, they will feel less threatened if you help to encourage them to take part. Counting to ten can be useful to help show how long the activity will last for. Children can often take part in a new sensory experience for ten seconds without anxiety. Although your child may not like the experience for ten seconds, they may realise it was not as bad as they thought and may allow you to continue for longer next time.

Try to use oral motor activities throughout the day to help your child control their sensory needs.

Using the strategies listed can:

- Increase types of foods eaten
- Help your child to eat together at family meal times
- Help to stop mouthing of non-food objects
- Improve teeth brushing skills

Strategies:

Snacks

Choose crunchy foods such as:

- carrots
- peppers
- apple slices
- cucumber
- bread sticks
- crackers
- dry cereal



Choose chewy foods such as:

- raisins
- bagels
- granola bar
- grapes
- cocktail sausages



Both give good sensory feedback for the mouth. Look at your child's level of interest and use the snacks throughout the day to help. Use them carefully when doing movement activities.

Drinks

Long curly straws give the muscles around the mouth extra work when drinking. It is also good to try different types of drinks such a yogurt drinks, smoothies and milk-shakes. Thicker drinks need much more effort.

Teeth brushing

Vibration in and around the mouth will provide extra sensory feedback. Use an electric or battery toothbrush. This helps make an over sensitive mouth less sensitive (use on low and slow vibration), or it also helps to stimulate an under sensitive mouth (using fast, high vibration). Your child may enjoy using other flavoured toothpaste, such as strawberry or non-flavoured toothpaste, during teethbrushing.

Many children enjoy firm pressure massages to the outside of the mouth and face lotion may be used if your child is not sensitive to it.

- Put a small amount of lotion on your hands (if appropriate) to help them move smoothly across your child's skin. Wash hands before putting fingers in mouth.
- With your child sitting on your knee or on the floor or a footstool facing away from you, firmly stroke your child's face. Whenever possible direct the firm pressure in the direction of hair growth. Start at the middle and work out to the sides. Firmly move your hands across the bridge

of the nose, then under the nose, moving down and out across the face and under the chin; then from the forehead out to the sides.

Oral motor equipment

For children who chew on their clothes and other non-food objects they may benefit from using a chewy toy. This can have a very calming and organising effect.

Bellow is a list of some chewy toy resources available.

Chewy Tube (Yellow, Red, Green, Blue)

Chewy tubes are an oral-motor toy designed to give a safe, non-food, chewable surface for practising biting and chewing skills, and to help stop teeth grinding. All Chewy Tubes provide a safe, non-toxic surface, are latex-free and lead-free. The larger sizes are for those who need help with excessive mouthing or biting

Red Knobbly Super Chew

The Super Chew is a solid and stiff chewing tool with no place for saliva to gather. The Super Chew is ideal for school and clinic use and for children with greater chewing needs. This red super chew has a knobbly surface and a ring handle to make it easier to hold.

P's and Q's Chewy Tubes

P's and Q's are fun new exercisers for practicing biting and chewing skills. P's and Q's are solid rather than hollow so they offer a firm surface for biting.

Chew Buddy

The round head gives a two sided biting surface with ridges for extra interest. The legs have raised dimples for sensory feedback. In addition to having great bite resistance the chew buddy can be stretched and bent making a great fidget toy. Not recommended for aggressive chewers.

Oh Plah[®] Chewy Wristband

These chewy cuff/wristbands/bracelets can be bent, bitten, chewed and twisted to help children who need sensory input from biting or chewing. They are almost unbreakable and can fit almost any size wrist.

Chewlery Chewy necklace and bracelet

A non-toxic colourful (yellow) chewy bracelet and necklace called Chewlery. Chewlery can be worn and chewed when your child needs to chew on something rather than on clothing or other items.

Chewy Stixx Oral Tubes XL Extreme

Chew Stixx provide a safe and bacteria free option for children who chew on items such as shirts, pencils, fingers. Chew Stixx combine many food textures into one device. This product was designed by therapists to simulate the ever changing textures of food. This helps children who have problems when certain textures are placed in their mouth. Chew Stixx is an oral motor device and not a toy. Children using this product should be supervised by an adult or therapist at all times. Product is very long lasting but should be replaced at first sign of wear.

Chew Retractable Bite Buddies (belt loop)

The Sensory University has created a safe method to both protect your child's chew device, and keep it from being dropped on the floor, dirt or sink. Bite Buddies are fun to collect, and offer a chew device that your child won't be embarrassed of, but will be proud to carry. Each belt clip can hold up to four shapes and adding more key rings allows room for extra Bite Buddies.

Chew Stixx Pencil Toppers

The Chew Stixx can help if your child bites, chews, or grinds. Pencil Toppers fits any number two pencil. Benefits include;

- decreases lead exposure from the pencil
- safe for teeth
- socially acceptable
- allowed in classrooms
- increases attention
- lowers anxiety levels
- has been proven to improve concentration skills in children need sensory input.

Package includes one smooth and one knobby surface topper. Not for use with children under four years of age.

Cuff Cover / hand and wrist cover

This is for children who like to chew on cuffs or bite the back of their hands. Designed to stop children from chewing their shirt sleeves/jumpers, stopping frayed edges and soggy cuffs. Hand and wrist cover gives protection for those who bite the back of their hands. Made from a soft, wipeable, water proof outer and soft fleece inner. An elastic strap holds the hand weight in place.

Products can be sourced from the available websites:

- www.chewytubes.com
- www.amazon.co.uk
- www.specialneedstoys.com
- www.sensetoys.com
- www.sensorydirect.com
- www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk
- www.learningspaceni.co.uk

Contact information

East Ayrshire

Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (East)

Level 2

The Johnnie Walker Bond Building

15 Strand Street

Kilmarnock

KA1 1HU

Telephone: 01563 553611

North Ayrshire

Children and Young People's Occupational Therapy Services (North)

Rainbow House

Ayrshire Central Hospital

Kilwinning Road

Irvine KA12 8SS

01294 323070

South Ayrshire

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Doonfoot Road

Ayr KA7 4DW

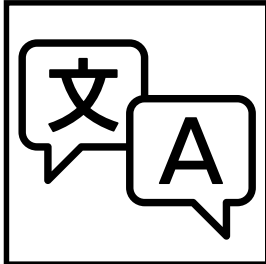
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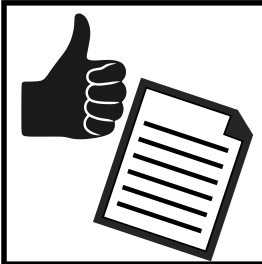
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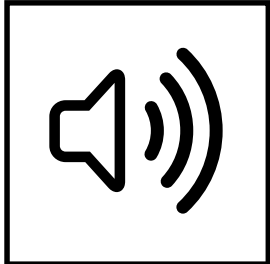
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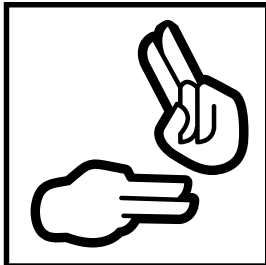
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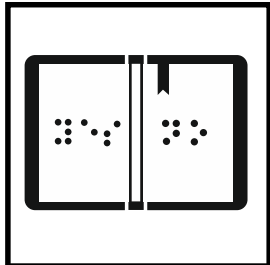
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