

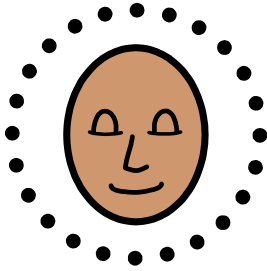
Sensory Support Top Tips

Contents

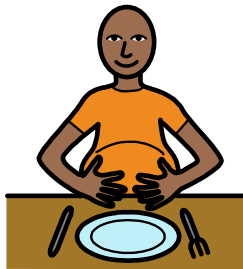
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About This Resource

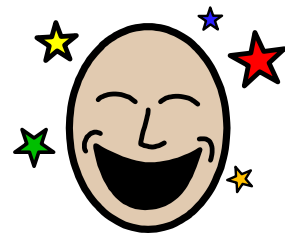
Widgit has worked with Joanna Grace to develop a 'Top Tips' Sensory Processing information guide which focuses on children:



feeling safe



eating well



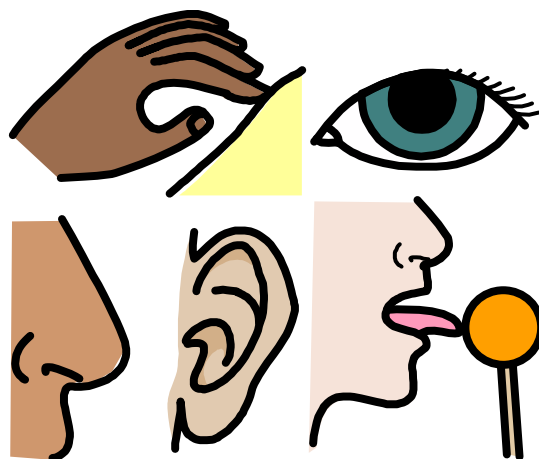
having fun

Joanna Grace is a sensory engagement and inclusion specialist, author, trainer, doctoral researcher, TEDx speaker and founder of The Sensory Projects. Joanna is autistic.

Joanna has kindly donated a Sensory Story, 'Rockhoppers' which is included as part of this pack.

Widgit symbols could be used to provide visual support alongside the guidance given in each section.

For more information on how to create personalised resources using Widgit Software, please visit www.widgit.com



From Joanna

I have two children, and I want them to feel safe, to be well fed and to have fun. I imagine most people would want the same for the children that they care about. Communication plays an important role in all of these things.

If you are caring for children who do not use words to communicate and who may or may not be understanding symbolic communication in any form, then being able to communicate at a sensory level is very valuable as you aim to provide these things for them.

I keep imagining parents starting on their journey of understanding everything but that would require a whole new book so instead, I have condensed this into some 'Top Tips.'

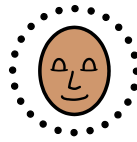
I hope that you find it useful.

Joanna Grace



The Sensory Projects

www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk



Feeling Safe

Our senses are, at a fundamental level, about finding food and not becoming food!

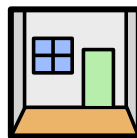
If you imagine yourself feeling safe and secure, it is likely that you imagine certain sensations in association with this, perhaps you're tucked up snug in bed, or held in the arms of someone who loves you.

What helps people to feel safe at a sensory level is always individual to them, but there are generalities we can aim for.

Understanding the differences neurodivergence makes at a sensory level can help us to guess what might help an autistic child to feel safe.

Let's start with 2 main points that might support an autistic child in feeling safe and secure in their environment.

- De-cluttering the Visual Environment
- Offering Pressure



De-clutter the Visual Environment

Autistic people often have superb visual skills, recognising and noticing detail in the environment.

I am autistic and I often explain this visual processing difference to people as it being like seeing in High Definition.

Vision makes up a third of your cerebral cortex, so the business of seeing things takes a lot of energy in the brain.

I bet when you imagined your safe space it was not a place that required you to use a lot of energy. A de-cluttered visual environment demands less from a person.

If you are someone who likes to have a lot of bits and bobs and photos around the place, consider having an area where these are kept to a minimum, a blank wall, or a little pop up tent that is plain inside.

Low level disperse lighting also helps, so draw curtains and avoid exposed bulbs.



Offer Pressure

Whilst autistic children are not always as keen to be cuddled as non-autistic children (my mother tells me that even as a baby I would go rigid in her arms if she tried to cuddle me – I make sure to give her a hug every time I see her now), they are still likely to benefit from the reassurance that deep pressure offers.

Things that wrap around you, like hammocks and stretch swings, or press down on you, like weighted blankets, can provide this reassurance.

It might not be the same for you as keeping them safe in your arms, but you can still provide that feeling of safety to them.

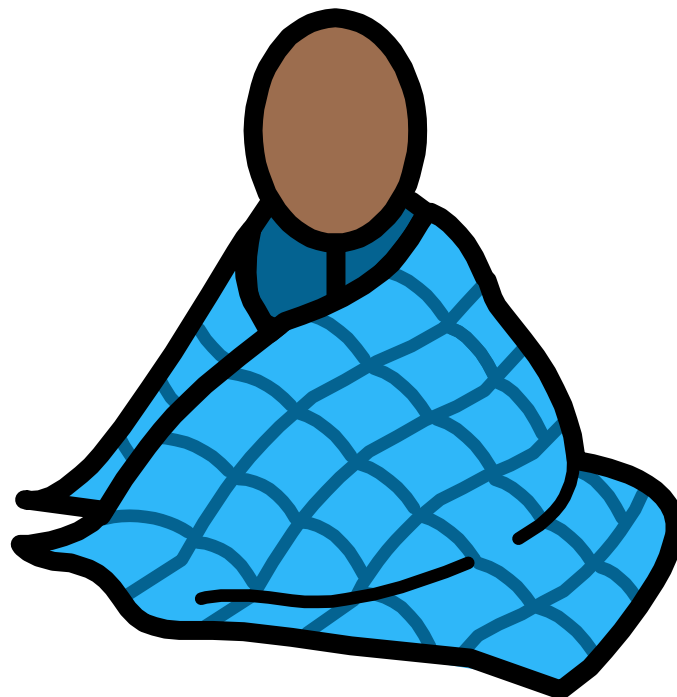
A lot of these things have high price tags, which is great if you can afford it but if you cannot, remember what you need is the sensory insight and then you can provide it in your own way.*

It can sometimes be that whilst hugs are rejected, other forms of contact deep pressure are accepted, I have known people reassured by pressure to their chest, applied with a flat hand to the back and front, or to their heads – a cupped hand on their forehead and one at the back of the skull.

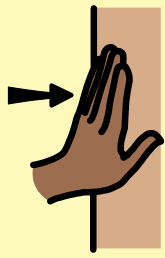
Some people enjoy receiving pressure lying down. You can do this by rolling a yoga ball over someone and pressing down upon it.

Trial and error will help you to find what works best for your young person.

Included are some symbols that may support some people in communicating their deep pressure needs.



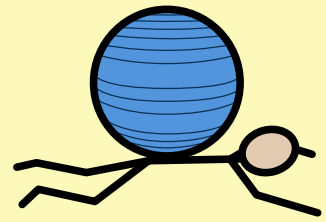
*see useful links on how to make your own weighted blanket



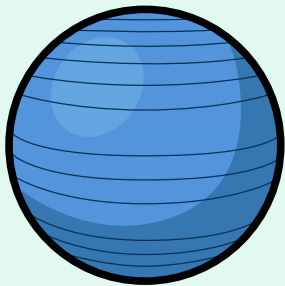
deep
pressure



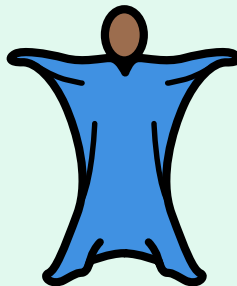
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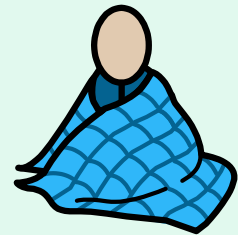
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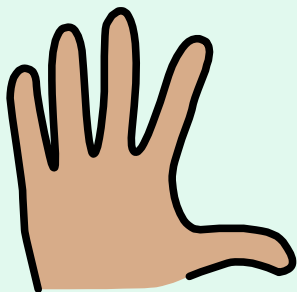
yoga ball



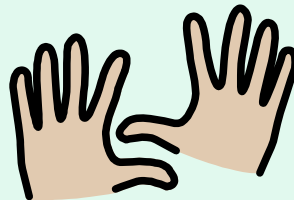
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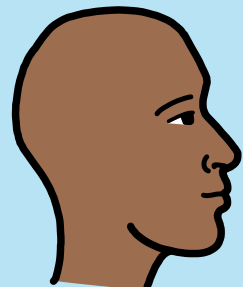
weighted
blanket



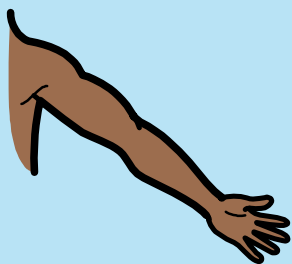
1 hand



2 hands



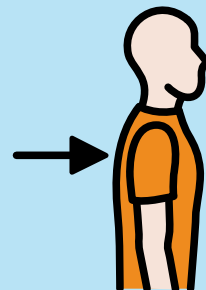
head



arms



legs



back



Being well fed

It is common for autistic people to have issues with eating food. Autistic people often process sensory information differently to non-autistic people.

Imagine I asked you to interact with a touch experience you disliked, you would likely extend your arm, finger tip out as far away from your body as possible to touch it. You certainly wouldn't bring it close to yourself, close to your face or put it actually inside your mouth!

Yet, when we ask autistic people to eat, often we are asking them to interact with sensations they find difficult in this incredibly invasive way. Not only are we asking them to touch things, not just with their fingers but with the even more sensitive body parts of their lips and tongue, we are asking them to do that simultaneously with other sensations: hearing, smell, taste.

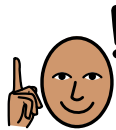
If you care for an autistic child that finds certain sensory environments overwhelming then it is likely they will find eating to be an overwhelming experience. Here are some tips to help you offer them a range of food in an accessible fashion.



Have fun!

This is much easier said than done, and can often be easier for people who care less about your child than you do!

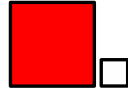
If you are worried about their eating, that tension is likely to overflow into meal times and create a feeling of insecurity around food that exacerbates the situation rather than eases it. Playing with food, having fun at meal times, can help to get rid of the fog of anxiety that can grow around food.



Make it simple at a sensory level

If someone is struggling with the sensory overload of eating and you can reduce some of that, then go for it.

This could mean blending food so they're not dealing with texture, or playing music whilst you eat so they do not have to listen to the sounds of food being chewed and swallowed.



Go bold

It can be counter intuitive but some people can find bold sharp flavours easier to handle than more mellow flavours, so you may find a child enjoys pickled onions.

Or go bold from a texture point of view, find something really hard and crunchy – remember above where we were offering pressure to help someone feel safe? The pressure a child feels in their jaw as they bite against something really tough and chewy or hard and crunchy can provide that reassurance and help to lessen anxieties around eating.



Graze

Another way pressure and anxiety build up around eating is that it tends to be at certain times and it tends to be a social situation. Being allowed to eat whenever they fancy it, and that not necessarily being with other people can take the pressure off autistic children and mean they are willing to try eating a greater range of things.

Graze boards are a great way of doing this: lay out on a tray, or plate, a modest (not overwhelming) selection of small snacks, try frozen peas (a good hard crunch, and very healthy), a few nuts (presuming no allergies), and some toast cut into fingers. Just put a little out, you can tell the child they are allowed to eat it, but do not ask them to eat it.

Just let it be around. Don't require that they finish everything – we are creating a low pressure environment. Have it available, if they eat it, restock it.

Once a child understands that a graze board is theirs, they'll get into the habit of seeking it out when they are peckish, it's actually a very healthy way of eating!



Have Fun!

We feel safe, we have food in our bellies, the next thing every child needs to do is to play, to have fun!

Having a sensory invitation to play is a wonderful tool to have in your tool belt. There are lots and lots of sensory ways to play.

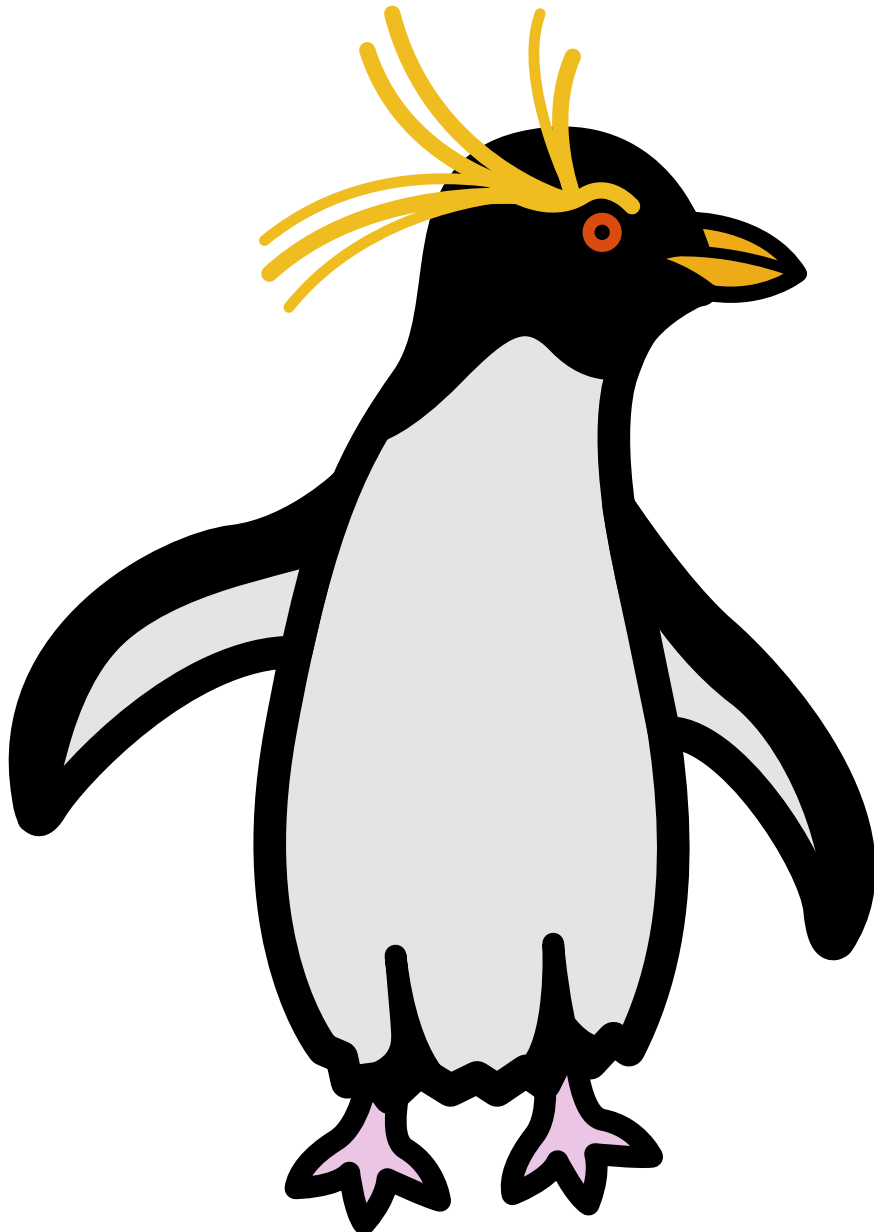


Rockhopper Sensory Story

The 'Rockhopper' Sensory Story is included as an example of how you can encourage children to have fun at a sensory level.

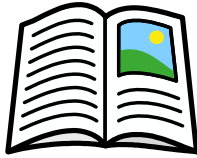
It can also help a child to engage with language. It can be an invite to consider symbols and promote communication but first and foremost the purpose of any sensory story is to HAVE FUN!

A symbolised resource list and some core symbols have been included for your convenience.

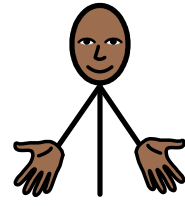




Rockhopper



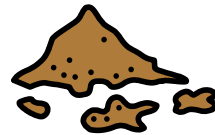
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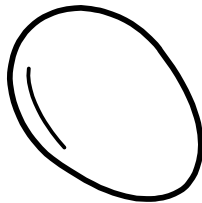
- You will need



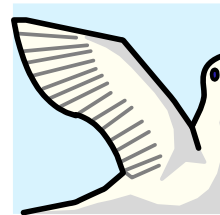
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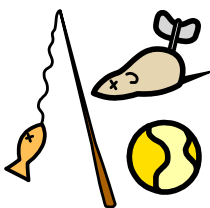
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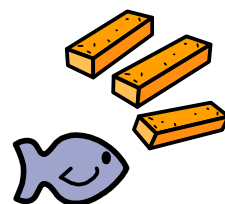
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wings



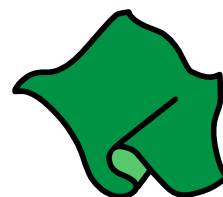
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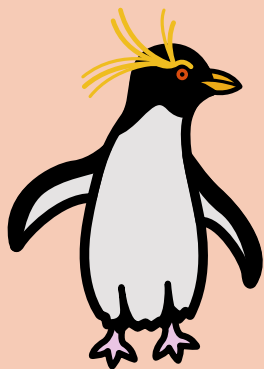
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water



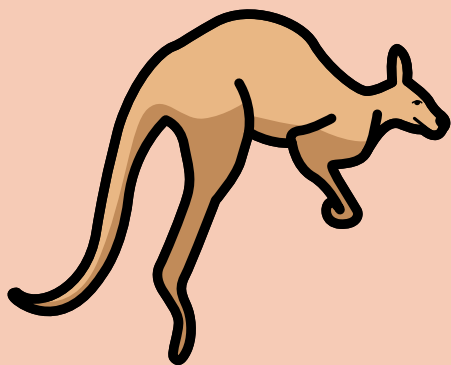
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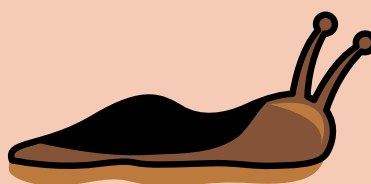
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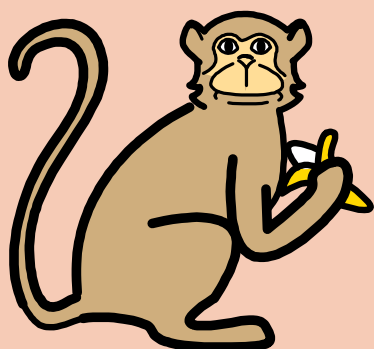
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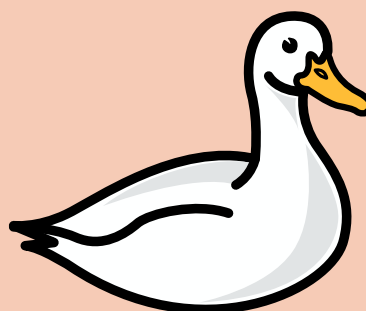
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slug



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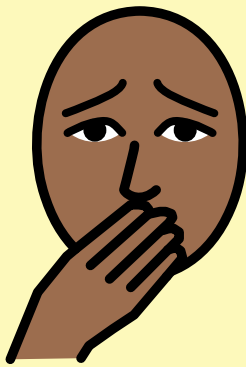
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hop



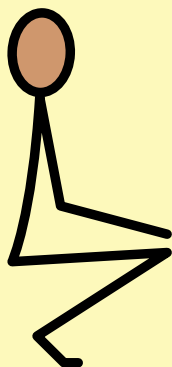
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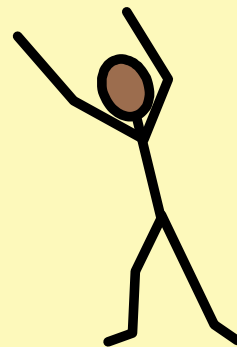
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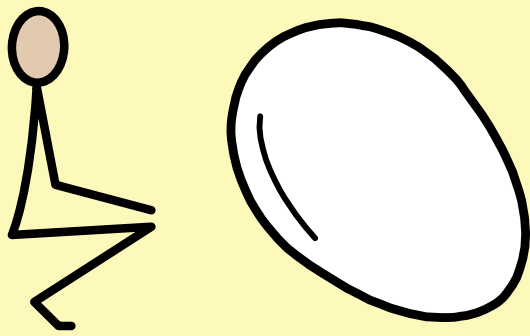
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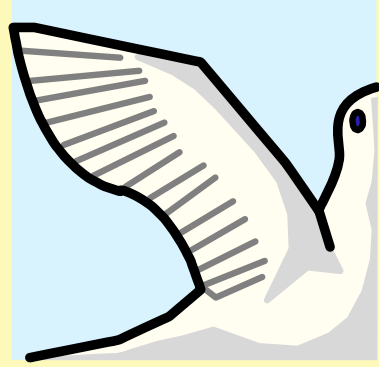
squat



wave arms



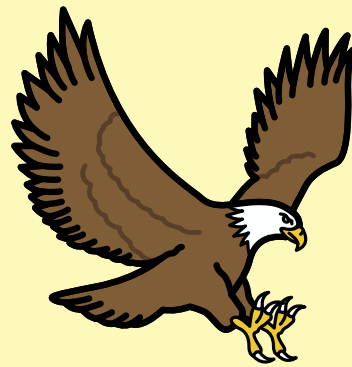
lay an egg



shoo



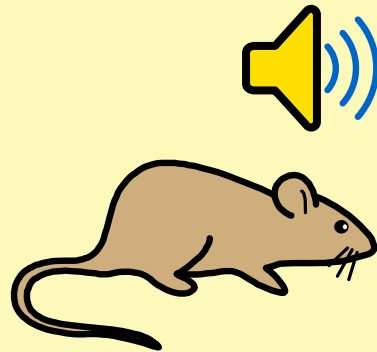
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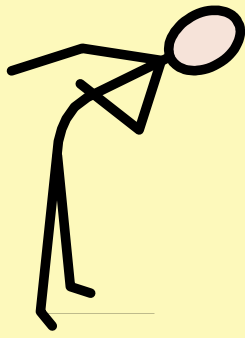
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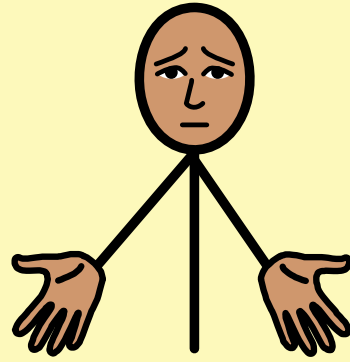
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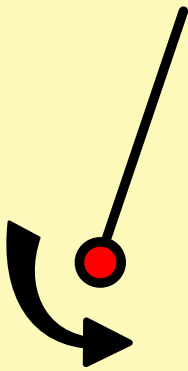
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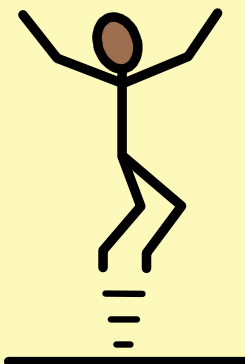
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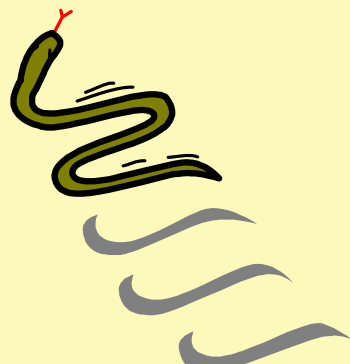
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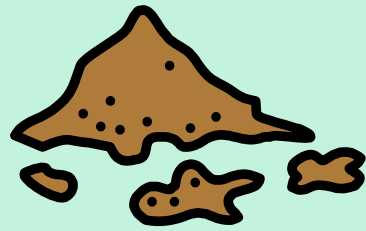
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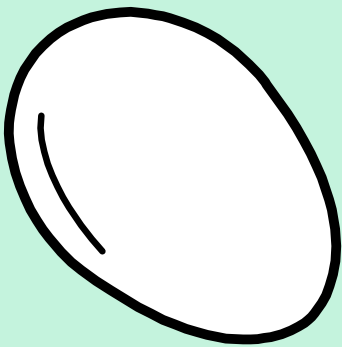
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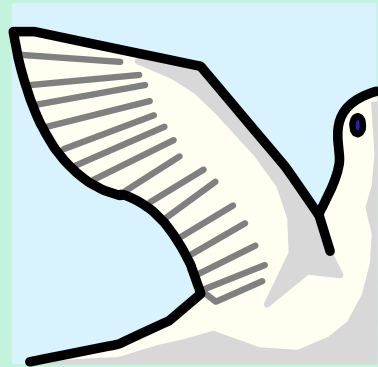
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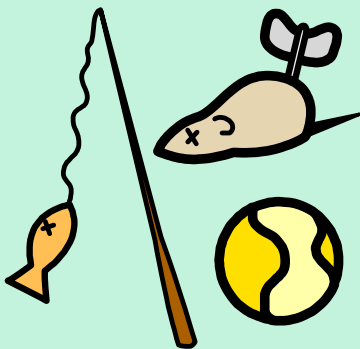
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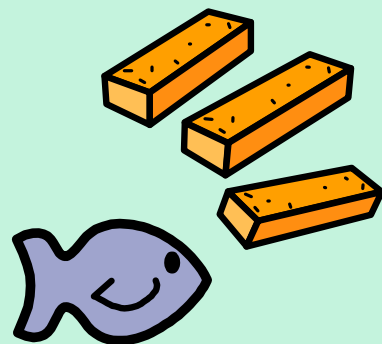
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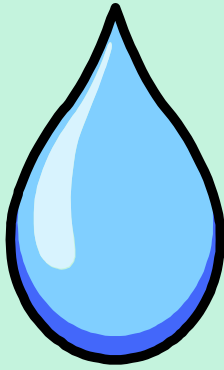
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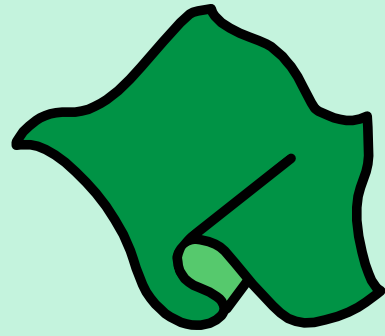
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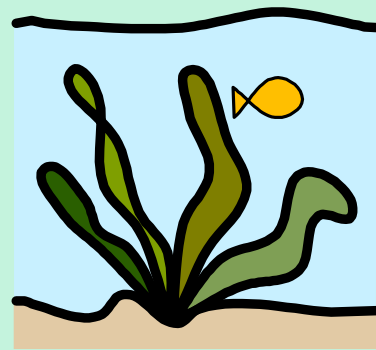
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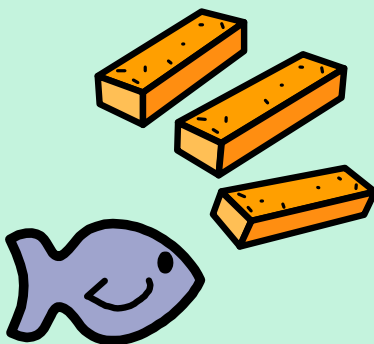
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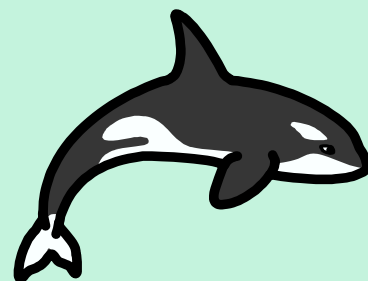
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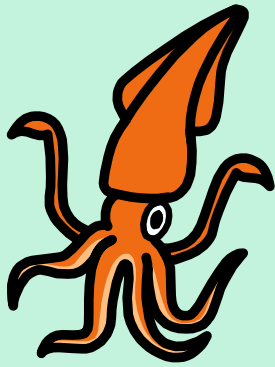
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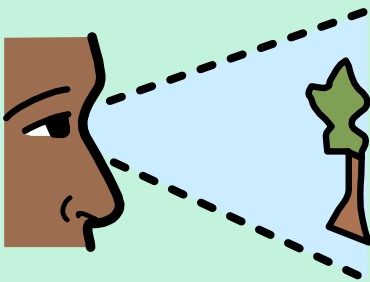
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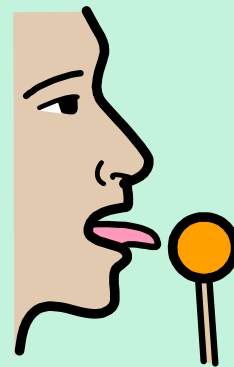
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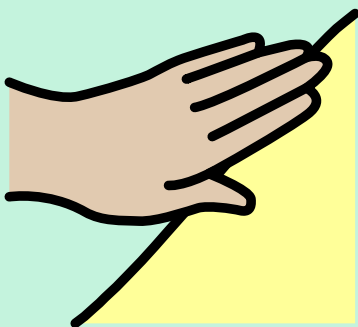
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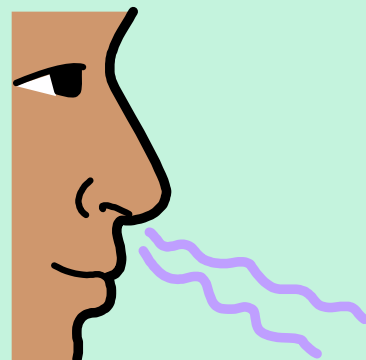
see



taste



touch



smell



Rockhoppers

A Sensory Story

by Joanna Grace

Safety

This story has been designed to be facilitated by a responsible adult.
Stimuli should only be used under supervision.

It is the responsibility of the person telling the story to ensure that it is shared in a safe way.

The author accepts no liability.

There is a free basic guide to sharing sensory stories available to download at bit.ly/SensoryStoryGuide. It gives insight into sharing the stories with different audiences, and how to get the most out of your story.



The book *Sensory Stories* by Joanna Grace contains more in-depth information.

www.TheSensoryProjects.co.uk/books



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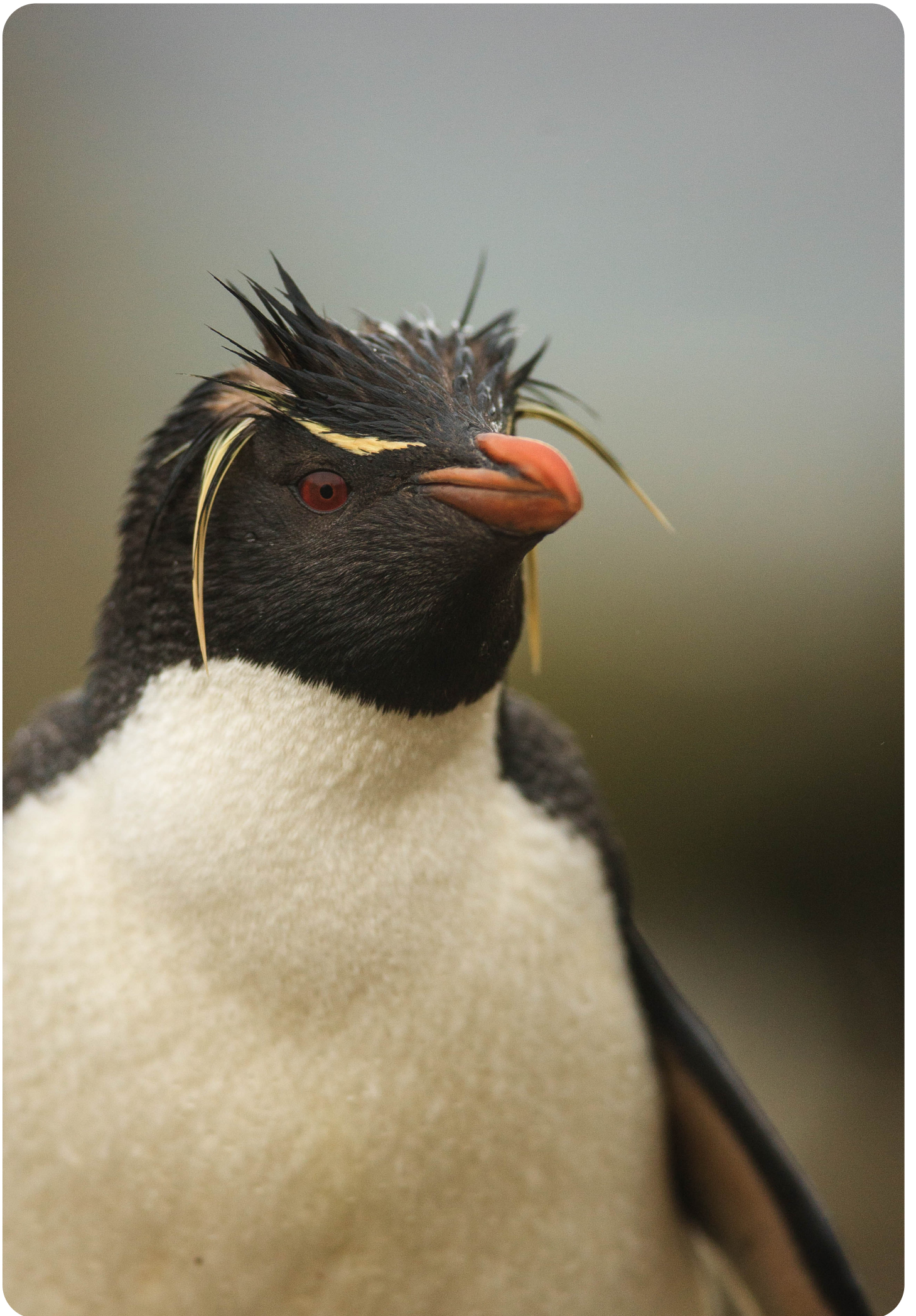
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Rockhoppers

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Introduction

Rockhoppers is the seventh story I've created for the Sensory Story Project. Many of the others have very good reasons for their creation: the science behind the birth of stars, the atmosphere of the woods where the Grimms wrote their tales. As for this one.... I have no better reason than that I love penguins; they are naturally engaging animals and always seem to raise a smile. Rockhoppers face a number of novel challenges during their lives. They lay their eggs far from the sea in burrows they dig themselves. They must defend their eggs from a variety of predators and both the father and the mother take their turn at guarding the egg. Their unusual plumage, which features yellow tufts sprouting from either side of their head, makes them look even more comical than the average penguin. I thought they were worthy of a story.

Rhythm is a very important part of early language development. The ability to keep a beat is a better predictor of later reading ability than a mother's literacy levels. Each line of this story ends with three steady beats, hopefully helping you and your story experiencer develop your rhythm. The repeated words will also help story experiencers to predict what is coming next and may encourage them to vocalise and join in.

I hope through sharing this story you raise many smiles.

Joanna

Resourcing the story

Before telling the story, collect together these resources. If you are unable to find a particular stimulus, or think it will be unsuitable for the person with whom you plan to share the story, substitute it with one that fits your needs. Keep the resources together in a good box so that they are always ready when you want to tell the story.

You will need:

Slime

You can buy slime from toy shops or make it yourself by mixing equal parts of liquid starch and clear glue. Alternatively find something slimy and use that – what about a very soapy sock?

Earth

You can collect some soil from the garden, or purchase compost suitable for use with children.

Eggs

This is a simple visual stimulus. You need to have an egg that will stand out against its background. You can find a three-dimensional egg and ensure you present it against a contrasting background, e.g. a piece of brown card, or a swathe of green cloth. You can make an egg shape, or several egg shapes, out of card. These can be presented against a contrasting background. You could Velcro or blu tack the eggs to the background card.

Wings

You can make wings for yourself to wear, or wings on sticks that you can operate. If you can find a large winged toy predator this could work as well. You can make yourself wings simply by draping fabric over your arms; if you have a full skirt wearing it around your neck and flapping will give you wings. You can make card wings by cutting wing shapes out of stiff card and snipping along the edges to fray the card like feathers.

Squeaker / food

Many toys have squeakers in them, often pet toys are the best. You can also buy squeakers on their own, but it is likely that it will be easier for you to find something that already has one in.

If you want to make this experience a taste one you could offer your story experiencer a taste experience similar to the taste experiences offered to penguin chicks by their parents, e.g. a little fish. The inside of a fish finger, or a little tinned tuna would be ideal.

Water

You will need a large bowl to put the water in. You can add strips of fabric to act as seaweed if you like.

If you have access to real seaweed then you may be able to make the water a smell experience. Salt water itself does not have any odour, the smells that we associate with the seaside come from the plants and animals that thrive in that environment. You can create a fishy smell in your water by draining the oil from a tin of fish into your water or onto fabric held near the water (I expect you will have a towel under the bowl of water as you share it).



Facilitating the stimuli

Rockhopper penguins hop, hop, hop.

Have your story experiencer hop on the words "hop, hop, hop", if they are mobile enough to do this. Alternatively tap the sole of your story experiencer's foot rhythmically on the words "hop, hop, hop".

Tenacious little penguins won't stop, stop, stop.

Clap as you say the words "stop, stop, stop". You can encourage your story experiencer to clap with you.

Slippery squid to eat, eat, eat.

Allow your story experiencer to explore the slime.

Burrows to dig with their feet, feet, feet.

Your story experiencer may explore the earth with their hands or feet. If they will need physical assistance to complete this exploration you could stroke their foot through the earth as you say "feet, feet, feet".

When facilitating exploration stimuli in time with words leave time for the experience to continue to be explored after the phrase has been said.

Precious eggs to lay, lay, lay.

A rockhopper penguin will typically lay two eggs, one slightly smaller and less likely to survive than the other. You can choose how many eggs to share with your story experiencer: one or two would be accurate to the life cycle of these particular penguins, three would allow you to present an egg each time you say the word "lay". The story is talking about rockhopper penguins as a group, so three eggs could indicate three laying birds. Be sure to place the egg somewhere where it will be easy for your story experiencer to see. Think about the colour contrast between the egg and the background. Consider whether your story experiencer will be able to focus on the egg better if it is presented close to them or whether it would be easier for them to focus on it at a distance.

Predators to shoo away, way, way.

A Rock Hopper has only its beak and its wings to discourage unwelcome visitors to its nest. Large birds of prey try to steal their eggs and it is these birds of prey that you are emulating with your wings. Swoop on your story experiencer from all sides and allow yourself to be fended off.

Fledgling chicks to feed, feed, feed.

How you facilitate this stimulus will depend on whether you are offering a taste stimulus, in which case you can offer it as you say "feed, feed, feed"; or whether you are facilitating this experience as a sound experience, in which case use the squeaker to create a cacophony of noisy chicks squawking for their food.

The sea provides what they need, need, need.

Place the water within reach of your story experiencer and allow them to explore it. If you have added scent or seaweed to the experience, make sure these are accessible to your story experiencer.

Rock Hopper penguins hop, hop, hop.

As above.

Tenacious little penguins won't stop, stop, stop.

Facilitate these two lines in the same way as the first two lines. Maintaining consistency between how you facilitate these lines at the start and the end of the story will help your story experiencer to anticipate them and to predict what is going to happen.



Exploration activities

Walk like a penguin

This story is great fun for acting out. Choose an action for each line and then read the story and perform the action on the repeated words at the end of each phrase.

Possible actions:

Hop, hop, hop - Hop!

Stop, stop, stop - Keep hopping

Eat, eat, eat - Move your hand towards your mouth

Feet, feet, feet - Scrape your foot along the floor

Lay, lay, lay - Squat

Away, way, way - Wave arms

Feed, feed, feed - Bow at the waist as if feeding a chick with your beak

Need, need, need - Interlink your fingers and move your arms in the shape of a wave

... or make up your own actions!

Make your own

Rockhopper penguins move in a very characteristic way, so much so that they are named after their leaping movements. Think of other animals that have characteristic movements. Learn about their life cycles and make up stories about them. Here are a couple of starting verses to get you thinking:

Kangaroos

Kangaroos jump, jump, jump.

Landing on the ground, thump, thump, thump.

Slugs

Slippery slugs slither, slither, slither.

Moving slowly in a dither, dither, dither.

Monkeys

Monkeys in a tree, swing swing swing

Gripping the branches, cling cling cling

Ducks

Ducks on the ground, waddle waddle waddle

Looking for food in a puddle, puddle, puddle

Make a penguin

Penguins come in many shapes and sizes; rockhoppers are among the smallest. Modelling or drawing can allow you to explore the variations in the species and give you the opportunity to talk about these differences as you model.

To make a clay penguin:

Form two balls of clay: one large, one small. One will be the head and one will be the body and wings.

Take the small ball and roll it on its side so that it tapers into a point. This point will be your penguin's beak. You can flatten it a little to make it beak shaped. Use a sharpened pencil to make two eyes above the beak.

Take the large ball and roll it so that it becomes an ovoid. Use a knife or the edge of a plastic ruler to slice off each side of the ovoid. These slices are your penguin's wings.

Smooth the sides of the ovoid/body where the wings were cut from, then press the wings in place on the penguin's shoulders and smooth the join.

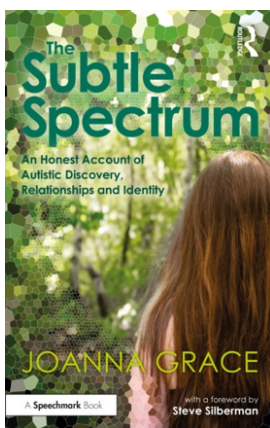
Add the head to the body.

Make feet by squishing the front of the body a little with your fingertip.

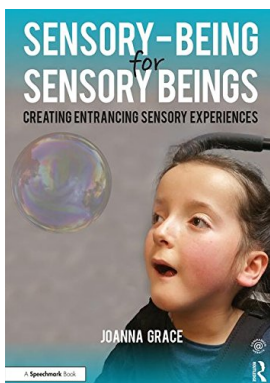
Bookshelf



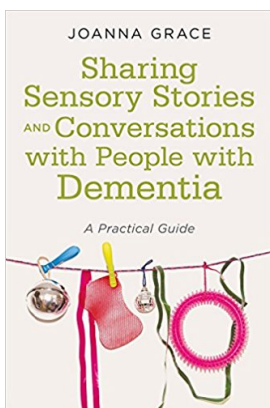
Sensory Stories is the second edition of the globally successful book, exploring the underpinning rationale for sensory work and examining the impact stories can have on our lives. It contains updated content, as well as video content, and the original five sensory stories with a further four fantastic stories by guest authors.



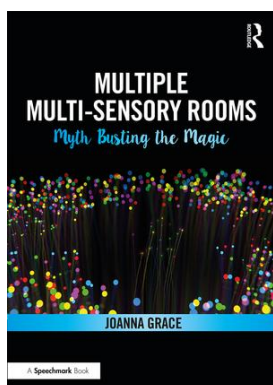
The Subtle Spectrum – A raw and exposing exploration of the journey to discovering autistic identity, mapping the post-late-diagnosis landscape. With a foreword by Steve Silberman, author of *Neurotribes*, who described the book as "wise and compassionate" as well as "engaging and uplifting".



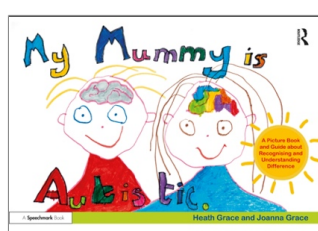
Sensory-Being for Sensory Beings looks at the development of seven sensory systems and uses this information to show you how to create gorgeous sensory resources to support a type of sensory mindfulness (sensory-being) for Sensory Beings (people whose primary experience of the world is sensory).



Sharing Sensory Stories and Conversations with People with Dementia looks at how sensory work can support people with Dementia to better access the world and help them with the stresses that naturally occur on a journey into Dementia. It contains a sensory story suitable for sharing with someone with Dementia and guidance about how to create your own stories.

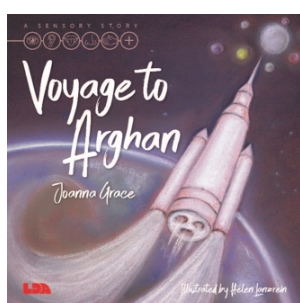


Multiple Multi-Sensory Rooms – Are multisensory rooms magic, or is the hype around them unfounded? This book unpicks the magic from the myths, identifying the key elements to effective practice and revealing some of the most common pitfalls of multisensory room usage.

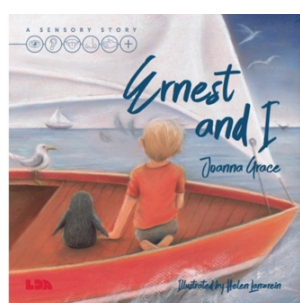


My Mummy is Autistic explores the language processing differences between autistic and non-autistic people. Written and illustrated by a 5-year-old, the book is a shining example of how simple understanding and embracing neurodifference can be.

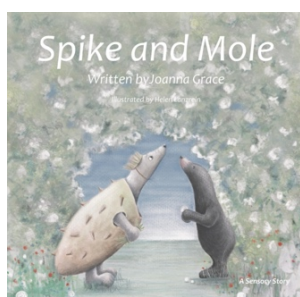
Children's books – *sensory stories with full-page colour illustrations*



Voyage to Arghan follows the adventures of Nila, who has Down's Syndrome, as she wins a competition to be the first child sent into space.



Ernest and I follows the life story of a young man with autism as he moves from a home on the ocean waves to a new home on land.



Spike and Mole – When an emergency happens in the garden, solitary hedgehog Spike races to help brave Mole and a wonderful friendship is found.

Visit www.TheSensoryProjects.co.uk/books for more information.



Training from The Sensory Projects

The Sensory Projects runs on the philosophy that with the right knowledge and a little bit of creativity, inexpensive items can become wonderful sensory tools for inclusion.

Training from The Sensory Projects combines insight from research and practice with a little sprinkle of creative magic to create content to inspire and improve your provision.

To explore the range of in-person events, visit The Sensory Projects Conferences & Training page:

www.TheSensoryProjects.co.uk/conferences-training



To view upcoming events hosted by The Sensory Projects, visit our Eventbrite page:

bit.ly/TSPeventbrite



To browse the selection of online workshops and courses, visit The Sensory Projects Online College:

www.TheSensoryProjects.co.uk/online-college



In addition to the events described on the website, The Sensory Projects can create bespoke training to suit your particular interests and needs.

Founder of The Sensory Projects, Joanna Grace, can also be booked as a conference speaker, workshop facilitator, or twilight training session provider (online or in person). To explore these options more fully, view the T&C document that can be found on The Sensory Projects Conferences & Training page, or get in touch via email at sensorystory@gmail.com.

The Sensory Projects on social media

Joanna Grace, founder of The Sensory Projects, is very active on social media and always welcomes new connections.



Twitter

@Jo3Grace twitter.com/jo3grace

Tweeting about the sensory world and sharing insight from the latest research into all things sensory.



Facebook

facebook.com/JoannaGraceTSP

Sharing conversations around inclusion and ideas for sensory makes.



LinkedIn

linkedin.com/in/JoannaGraceTheSensoryProjects

LinkedIn is used as an archive for all the magazine, journal, print and online media publications from The Sensory Projects, many of which can be accessed for free. Simply visit Joanna's LinkedIn profile and scroll down to the Publications section.



Rockhoppers

Rock Hopper penguins hop, hop, hop.

Foot tap

Tenacious little penguins won't stop, stop, stop.

Clap

Slippery squid to eat, eat, eat.

Slime

Burrows to dig with their feet, feet, feet.

Earth

Precious eggs to lay, lay, lay.

Egg

Predators to shoo away, way, way.

Wings

Fledgling chicks to feed, feed, feed.

Cheeping

The sea provides what they need, need, need.

Water

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Foot tap

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Clap



The Sensory Projects

@Jo3Grace

www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk



Useful Links

www.widgit.com

For further information on our products and services including free training.

www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk

Find out more about Joanna and The Sensory Projects.

[www.Facebook.com/JoannaGraceTSP](https://www.facebook.com/JoannaGraceTSP)

A short photo album explaining how to make your own weighted blanket.

www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk/books

All available books written by Joanna including '*Sensory Stories*' and '*My Mummy is Autistic*,' written by Joanna's then five year old son.

www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk/sensory-stories

Information about Sensory Stories and their purpose.

www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk/conferences-training

Online and In Person training information