

Learning Opportunities in Everyday Activities

Developed by NCSE Occupational Therapy Team

Overview

This resource was developed by NCSE Occupational Therapists. It has been developed for use by teachers working with children with additional needs as part of Summer Provision. In line with the aims of the **Home Based** and **School Based Summer Provision Programme** the activities in this resource can be used by teachers to support student's physical, social and emotional wellbeing and to support students to re-engage in learning and social activities.

This resource focuses on the learning opportunities that exists within everyday home activities. With a little bit of creativity, everyday activities can allow us to create fun and playful opportunities to support children's **wellbeing** and **promote their physical, social and emotional development**. Home based activities that require limited resources, equipment or space have been selected.

Activities can be tailored according to a child's needs and interests in order to create the just right level of challenge. Positive experiences of success and engaging in fun 'doing' activities with others will support a child's sense of **self-efficacy** and enhance a sense of **connectedness** with others. As play is central to children's health, wellbeing and development, opportunities for supporting play are provided throughout this booklet.

The themes included in this booklet are:

1. The Garden
2. Breakfast Club
3. Caring for Animals
4. Baking
5. Water fun: Washing my Car



This resource supports the key principles of **promoting...**

- A sense of calm
- A sense of self-efficacy
- Connectedness
- Hope

The Garden

Gardening is a great way to connect with nature and it offers ample opportunities to support a child's development and skill building. It allows children:

- To **feed their senses**. Whether it's the texture of the soil, the splashing water, the scent and colour of the flowering plants or the singing birds, there is a fun sensory experience to be had. Be mindful of children with particular sensory processing difficulties (e.g. in relation to textures/smells) when planning activities.
- To experience a sense of **calm**. Connecting with nature, experiencing the relaxing sounds and sights can promote a sense of calm and regulation, reducing stress.
- To use their **whole body movement skills** to help them to balance, to move items around or to muster the strength to pull that stubborn weed from the ground.
- To experience **fine motor skill** challenges such as shovelling soil, planting seeds, or picking flowers. For some children, it is helpful to start by breaking these tasks down into small steps and to use modelling and prompting to begin.
- To use their **thinking skills** to plan their task, follow a sequence of steps, remember information and make predictions about their plants (visual schedules, prompting can be used to support students).
- To get **curious** about their natural environment.

Whether you have access to a garden, a balcony or a window ledge, there are low cost gardening ideas that children can participate in.



Planting can be done with little resources and space. When choosing what to plant consider the size of the seeds/plants (bigger seeds/bulbs easier to manipulate) and what will grow quickly with little care to help make the gardening experience a success. Be creative with planting containers. Decorate some plastic containers, old toys, household items or even old welly boots to make fun and interesting planters.

Experiment with fun ways to **water** the plants.

- Make and decorate a watering can from a milk carton.
- Experiment with containers with different sized and types of openings (e.g. a colander, something with a spray nozzle). Which pours better, fills faster and empties faster?



- Using a small plastic cup and filling it from a bowl of water allows for more control.
- Using a **squeeze bottle** (e.g. sucky top water bottle), is fun for target practice.
- Create a **sprinkler**. The adult pierces holes in the top of a plastic bottle, then the child can fill and squeeze. Bigger holes will make it simpler for children to squeeze if they have poor hand strength or smaller/less holes can be better for children who need more time to process information.



Other Garden Inspired Activities



- 🌸 Conduct a **scavenger hunt** or go on a **bug safari** (using a picture checklist) to discover what plants and creatures live outside.
- 🌸 Create a bug hotel or a bird feeder (from an old carton) to attract wildlife to the garden.
- 🌸 Build a den! The garden, filled with colours, textures and natural objects, is a perfect place to **play**. Including a child's special interest and using props is a great gateway into imagination for children who might find it difficult to engage in pretend play.
- 🌸 Use the outdoor space as an **art studio**. Use some glue to create a picture from what we can find outside. Some children might like to use their hands to create art and to explore textures from the garden.
- 🌸 Support children to create a **garden sensory box**. Decorate a shoebox and fill it with the textures, sounds and colours the child enjoys (twigs, rough rocks, crunchy leaves, soft pebbles), so that on rainy days they can bring some garden indoors.

For more garden ideas and activities visit:

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/gardening_with_children/
- <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources>
- <https://kidsgardening.org/garden-activities/>

Sensory Garden Activities:

<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Class-growing-topic/Sensory-sensations>

Create a Garden Story using My Story App (find instructions in the link):

<https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Using-the-%E2%80%9COur-Story%E2%80%9D-app-to-Support-Home-Learning-with-Gardening.pdf>

Breakfast Club

Breakfast is an important meal that helps our mind and bodies get ready for the day ahead. Learning how to make simple breakfast recipes is an important life skill. By engaging the child in the process of making breakfast, we can build confidence and provide opportunities to develop skills including the following:

Fine Motor Skills

Cutting, spreading butter, pouring milk, opening and closing cartons.

Exploring the Senses

Smell, touch, taste.

Thinking Skills

Plan a task, organise materials, follow a sequence.

Responsibility and Independence

Hand washing, safely handling food and kitchen equipment.

Applying Learning to Life Skills

Mathematics, science, reading and language skills.

Social Skills

Listening to table orders and role play activities, talking through recipe steps.

What's On the Menu?



It is important to consider where to start to make this task attainable for the child and to ensure they get a sense of achievement once completed. Think about the child's skill level - what task adaptations will they require so that it is a 'just right challenge' for the child (e.g. use of a picture recipe, set up of a 'to do', 'doing' and 'done' station to organise materials as they are used). As the child's confidence and skill level increases adult support and assistance can be gradually reduced. Not only does this activity give children hands-on practice in an important life skill such as preparing food and setting the table. It also allows children to practice the social skills involved in sharing a meal with others.

- Starting small, the first thing on the menu could be a bowl of cereal and/or a cup of juice. This task includes a lot of challenging activities such as opening the milk and juice bottle, pouring the cereal and milk into the bowl and carrying the bowl and cup to a table.
- Next on the menu, could be a slice of toast. Buttering toast can be a tricky activity. Practice with butter that is soft. Consider the utensils being used (is the knife easy to grip, would non-slip mat under the board/plate be helpful?)
- Liven up plain foods by allowing children to decorate (e.g. use fruit to make a face or an animal on toast). Baking tools such as cutters can be used to create fun shapes.



Other Breakfast Club Activities



1. Get Creative with **setting the table**. Create and decorate unique dinner place mats and/or napkins. Use flowers from the garden or pretend it's a party and use what you can find around the house to decorate.



2. To help with locating items in the kitchen **create labels** using words, drawings or pictures for kitchen drawers and cupboards.



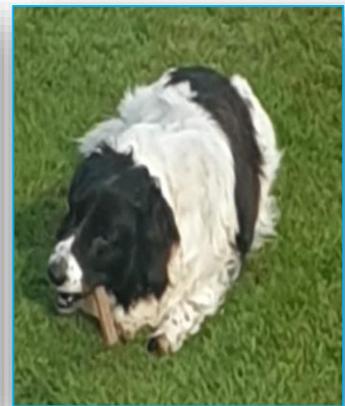
3. **Restaurant Role Play**. Create a menu, take table orders, and welcome guests. For younger children use play cups, plates and pretend food.



4. **Create a Shopping List Together (using words or picture)**. You can use the online shopping websites to calculate the price of the items on the list. Older students may be able to participate in steps involved in purchasing the items in the shop. This would support the development important life skills and independence skills.

Caring for Animals

Supporting a child to participate in caring for family pets can promote the development of important life skills and create opportunities for social emotional and physical development.



- Pets need fresh water, food and a clean living space which needs to be attended to daily. Identifying task that children can get involved with can provide them with **roles** and **responsibilities** and help develop their **independent living skills**.
- **Playing ball games** like fetch, bringing the pet for a walk, opening food containers, pouring water into their bowl, grooming and making their bed can all develop **gross and fine motor skills**, and support strength and balance development.
- Pets provide a great deal of **sensory input**, with their sounds, smells and fur coats. For some children pets can have a calming influence, reducing stress and supporting **relaxation**.
- Pets can support the development of important **emotional and social skills** such as empathy and compassion. Pets can provide comfort, unconditional positive regard and emotional support to a young person.
- Pets need **consistent routines** to ensure they are fed at a regular times and have a set bed time and sleeping space. Supporting a child to develop a visual schedule of the set chores and tasks required to care for their pet may act as a prompt and memory tool to support consistency in routine.

Animal Related Activities

If the child does not have a pet, you can support the child's **imaginative play** through pretending an animal teddy is a pet. You can groom it, feed it, take it on walks and even pick up the poo! Children can take turns in pretending to be the pet to be cared for. For young people who struggle with imaginative play, use of props can help them to get into character.



 **Other play ideas:** create a Zoo or Farm and act out the duties and work to be done by the farmer/zookeeper. Set up a Vet station with some towels and bandages to care for the animals and pets. Others may enjoy throwing a teddy bear's picnic with all their favourite animal toys. These play activities provide opportunities for practising social skills, emotional understanding and using planning and organising skills through fun.



 Make **healthy treats** for pets. There are many recipes online <https://www.kids-cooking-activities.com/easy-dog-treat-recipes.html>

 Get creative and use **arts and crafts** to support the child to make their own animals (e.g. make a creature from playdough or decorate an animal mask).

 Use of **animal yoga poses** and movements can support students to regulate energy levels and to feel calm and organised. Check out 'Cosmic Kids' or 'Smile and Learn' on YouTube for ideas.

For more information on caring for pets visit:

- [https:// spca.bc.ca/programs-services/for-kids-teens/for-kids/pet-care-for-kids/](https://spca.bc.ca/programs-services/for-kids-teens/for-kids/pet-care-for-kids/)

For Animal themed activities and craft ideas:

- <https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/crafts>

Baking

Baking is a motivating, exciting and rewarding learning activity for children of all ages. Engaging in baking activities provides opportunities to work on lots of different skill areas:

- **Fine Motor Skills:** Stirring, mixing ingredients, kneading dough and decorating baked goods all provide opportunities for working on children's hand strength and dexterity.
- **Bilateral Coordination:** using two hands together to perform tasks (e.g. holding bowl steady while stirring with other hand) and **coordinating hand - eye movements** (e.g. when adding ingredients into the bowl, pouring/scooping mixtures onto baking trays).
- **Reading and Maths Skills:** Involving the child in reading the recipe, measuring ingredients and calculating the correct amounts provides an opportunity to develop literacy and maths skills in a 'real life' task.
- **Sensory Processing:** Breaking the eggs, mixing batter and kneading dough are all strong sensory experiences Baking offers opportunities for children to explore different textures, smells, tastes and colours. Be mindful of children with sensory processing difficulties and make adjustments before commencing the task (avoid use of foods with smells, tastes, textures children are averse to).
- **Planning and Problem Solving:** Support the child to get organised for the task (wash hands, apron on, ingredients and equipment ready). Use instructions (picture/written) to help them follow the steps of the recipe; learning how to read instructions is an important life skill.
- **Communication and Connection:** Baking provides a fun platform for practicing communication and listening skills. You work as a team to complete the steps of the process and most importantly you enjoy the finished product together.
- **Healthy Eating:** Baking and cooking can teach a child to form positive relationships with fresh healthy food and develop awareness of what foods are used to make some of their favourite baked treats.





Think about the child's skill level and consider if the recipe should include pictures, numbers, simple words etc. so that it is a 'just right challenge' for the child to follow along.



Choose recipes that include food that the child likes to motivate them to participate.

Links to Visual Baking Recipes

- <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NCSE-Recipes-and-Activities-to-Support-Home-Learning.pdf>
- <https://ncse.ie/visual-recipes>

Other Recipes

- Cupcakes -try different ways of decorating them every time
<https://www.delish.com/cooking/g4151/cupcake-recipes-for-kids/?slide=7>
- Easy cornflake tart: <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/easy-cornflake-tart>

Additional Information

- Tips for Baking with students: <https://autismclassroomresources.com/cooking-in-classroom-resources-for/>
- More information on Sensory Processing:
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/lho/corknorthlee/therapy/paediatric-occupational-therapy/sensory-processing.pdf>
- Video, Tips and Recipes: <https://www.odlums.ie/baking-tips/>

Water Fun: Washing My Car

Washing the car is the perfect job for children of all ages and abilities to get involved in! Not only is it an amazing sensory learning experience but it also allows children to enjoy the pleasure of 'doing' with others. Depending on the child's age and level of ability you can make this activity as simple or as challenging as you feel appropriate. Washing the car provides opportunities for developing and practicing a number of skill areas:

1. **Whole body movement skills** including balancing and using the two sides of the body together (bilateral-coordination) can be developed when washing the car. It also involves lots of bending, reaching and stretching.
2. Scrubbing the car is a great resistive activity, providing lots of **heavy work** to the muscles. It involves large body movements that helps to develop **body awareness and spatial awareness** (where I am in space and where I am in relation to other objects). Help children to develop their understanding of positional and directional words by describing their movements; "That's it, move the sponge from top to bottom".



3. **Fine motor skills** in particular hand strength and dexterity can be developed as hands wring out the cloth, grip on to the sponge or perhaps twist the nozzle of the hose.
4. **Sensory exploration:** Water plus suds = lots of sensory fun. Use language to bring their attention to the sensory experience (wet, warm, smooth, splashing sounds etc.). Tailor the activity to the child's sensory needs and preferences.
5. Older children can get more involved in the process, learning the details about good car washing. This will challenge their **planning and sequencing skills** as they will need to **a)** use the correct tools for the different parts of the car and **b)** complete the task in a particular series of steps. Children can be supported through the use of visual schedules, prompting or other ways familiar to them.

Car Wash	
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Helpful Tips

- 🚗 Turn on some upbeat **music** and everyone can wash along to the beat!
- 🚗 **Old socks** can be useful wash cloths – just pop them on like mittens.
- 🚗 Washing the car creates lots of opportunity for **play and imagination**. Children can splash in the puddles, watch things float in the streams, make patterns with the soapy water or bring toys outside to play in the puddles.

Pretend Play Car Wash



- Gather the children's bikes, scooters and outdoor toys and set up a '**Bikes & Trikes**' car wash. Simply provide a bucket of soapy warm water, various sponges and brushes, and a towel for drying.
- Alternatively set up a **pretend car wash indoors** for small toys and cars. Set up two stations, one for washing, and the other for drying.
- Build a drive through 'Car Wash'. This can provide lots of fun for pretend play! Use some building blocks, Lego or even dig into the recycling bin for a box. Add a spray bottle of water and a cloth for the washing process.

For more information on water play:

- <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/water/>

For more puddle fun activities:

- <https://www.playscotland.org/resources/chuckies-n-puddles-4/>

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