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What Are The Benefits Of A Multi-Sensory Environment (MSE) ?

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Evolution

The philosophy behind sensory rooms spread to the UK and to all different areas concerned with intellectual or learning difficulties and was used for both adults and children. In the late 1970's, two Dutch psychologists developed the idea of Snoezelen Rooms, initially as a therapy for those with learning disabilities. Over time this initial idea has merged with the use of a wide range of multi-sensory stimulation to provide special environments for people with a variety of disabilities, disorders and conditions including dementia, autism, intellectual disability, brain injury, chronic pain, and for those in palliative care. The terms Snoezelen Rooms, White Rooms and Multi-Sensory Rooms tend to be used interchangeably but, as the term "Snoezelen" is now a registered trademark of an English sensory equipment supplier, we prefer to use the name Multi-Sensory Room or Multi-Sensory Environment.



What is a Multi-Sensory Environment?

A multi-sensory environment (MSE) is a room that brings multi-sensory equipment into a designated space to stimulate the senses in a calming environment. It aims to provide a “failure-free” experience, allowing pleasurable stimulation without the need for verbal, cognitive, or physical abilities. The focus is to help the student gain maximum pleasure from the sensory activity they are involved in.

Each student is allowed the time and opportunity to experience the equipment in the MSE at their own pace. MSEs help change behavior, increase focus and attention, and add to the feelings of positive self-esteem and well-being.

What will you find in our MSE?

Our MSE is a white space containing a 6 ft. switch-activated bubble tube, mirrored walls, fiber optic light sprays, therapeutic heated waterbed, aromatherapy machine, interactive light dome, H2O light, a projector that casts slow-moving images and colors onto the walls and ceiling, fiber optic light curtain, a vibrating heated mattress, mirrored balls, tulle-lined ceiling, textured reflective wall panels, huddle cushion, interactive light balls, sensory kit, bean bags, various multi-textured positioning equipment, and calming music.

Evolution

The philosophy behind sensory rooms spread to the UK and to all different areas concerned with intellectual or learning difficulties and was used for both adults and children.

The original concept began to evolve when professionals working with children in special needs schools determined that these sensory rooms could be used in a more interactive way.

These professionals wanted children, regardless of their limits, to be able to control the effects in the sensory room, with switches. This new concept allowed children or adults to control their own environment.

Present

Today both the passive and interactive sensory rooms remain very popular and can be found in a wide variety of environments including nurseries, neo-natal units, hospitals, child development centres, hospices, nursing homes and of course mainstream and special needs schools

The Future

Virtual environments using multi-projection, green-screen technology, large plasma screens, moving platforms, and 3D technology likely will be developed in the near future to create a true whole body experience.

Multi-Sensory Rooms and the equipment in them are designed to create a stimulating and yet calming atmosphere. They can be set up for children or adults of all ages and can be installed for therapy and education, or for recreation and leisure. There are about six commonly used types of multi-sensory rooms. These include the white room, dark room, sound room, interactive room, water room, and soft play room. Outdoor environments have also been developed including multi-sensory gardens. These environments have many similarities, and their differences are based on the specific population they are designed for and the aims that the provision of the environment is designed to achieve.

Most **Multi-Sensory Environments** (MSEs) typically have bubble tubes, special lighting with a projector to cast slow-moving images or colors around the walls, a mirror ball with spotlight and fiber-optic sprays. There may be or other lamps, music or sound equipment and aromatherapy materials. A variety of tactile items can be provided, such as cushions and vibrating pillows, as well as special hanging chairs and massage chairs. Panels with a variety of textures such as rough surfaces, stiff bristles, smooth or contoured mirrors, beads, or soft and squishy items are often also included. Activity walls can be custom built to provide a range of tactile, as well as electronic audiovisual stimulation. Fans or bubble blowers sometimes feature, as well as ball pools, water beds, adaptive swings or vibrating mattresses. Thus there is equipment to provide visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic and olfactory stimulation.

As **Multi-Sensory Environments** are often be used for more active activities as well as relaxation, much of the equipment can be designed or modified to provide switch interactivity. Special switches to suit the physical abilities of users can be used to start or modify the behavior of the equipment, thus changing the sensory experience. This allows the rooms to be used in active programs, where switch skills, cause-effect understanding, concentration and memory abilities can be developed in a fun, focused environment.

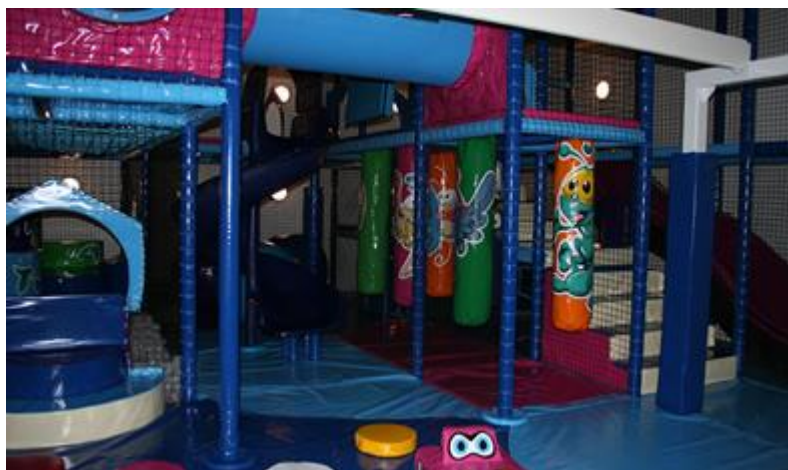


The idea of an MSE is to provide stimulation, and yet be calming. It aims to provide a "failure-free" experience, allowing pleasurable stimulation without the need for verbal abilities or requiring specific outcomes. The focus is to help the user of the room to gain maximum pleasure from the sensory activity they and their career are involved in.

The approach to using an **Multi-Sensory Environment** is generally non-directive, without the need for intellectual or verbally mediated activity in terms of following instructions or rules, and regular exposure seems to be more effective. Essentially, one would allow the user of the space the time and opportunity to experience at their own pace what the room has to offer. One may not use or activate immediately all equipment that the room has available, but gradually introduce more of the sensory stimulation, allowing the cues given by the client to guide the career.



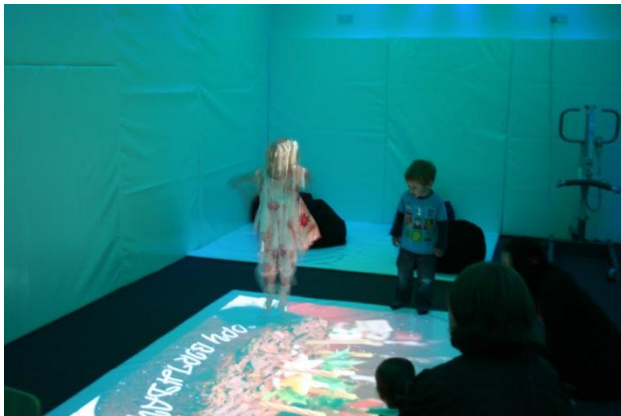
The time in the Multi-Sensory Environment should be client-focused, with the wishes of that individual determining the activity. Their attention, interest and expressions of pleasure or displeasure are the basis for participation in the Multi-Sensory Environment. Obviously the responses to the experience of the room will be highly individual and careers need to be sensitive to the client, suspending their expectations and judgments, closely monitoring any responses they notice in their clients. For example, a student with poor eyesight may be frightened by a "flying" bird in the Multi-Sensory Environments, while another whose vision is not impaired may be delighted by the same projected image. Some may find soft colors projected onto the walls soothing, but become confused by pictures. Music may be pleasurable for some clients, but too stimulating for others. In another situation, one who is tactile defensive will not want to touch or even have near them any tactile stimuli, and should not be pushed with this, but allowed to explore other aspects of the Multi-Sensory Environment. Over time, and perhaps being close to others and watching them touch and enjoy the tactile stimulation, this client may begin to feel safe enough to give this sensory experience a try.



Interactive Room

Our state-of-the-art interactive environment encourages the use of the senses as well as fine and gross motor skills. Ceiling-mounted projectors create a unique affect allowing children to interact with various games on the floor, these includes playing a piano, rustling leaves, kicking a football, attracting frogs, disco dancing and catching fish. The games and interactive experiences change every few minutes to keep children interested. This also ensures there's something that children of all abilities can enjoy.

The gallery below has a selection of photos of the interactive room:



The specific benefits of Multi-Sensory Rooms are hard to assess. There are countless anecdotal reports of improved mood, fewer disruptive behaviors, decreased anxiety and fear, improved communication and enhanced interpersonal interactions. However, rigorous scientific studies are relatively few. This is probably because Multi-Sensory Environment can be so varied in what they contain and provide, and are used in so many different ways with a broad range of users that it becomes impossible to control all the variables required for a stringent study. It would seem that some behaviors, such as aggression and self-injury do improve, especially whilst the client is in the Multi-Sensory Environment. Some evidence suggests that challenging behaviors in autism may be reduced after Multi-Sensory Environment experiences. If the reader is interested in following up on the research, it is best to look at internet sites dealing with "Snoezelen" rooms and also ones regarding specific disorders such as dementia or autism. This can give access to the latest scientific evidence with reference to particular behaviors and contexts.

Meanwhile, reports continue to flow in, detailing **the positive effects of exposure to Multi-Sensory Rooms**, and not just for direct clients of special schools or nursing homes. We have been told of the positive changes that have been effected in staff to client interactions in a variety of settings. It would seem that in the Multi-Sensory Environment both the career and the client can simply experience something pleasant together, which has the effect of reducing the pressure and stress sometimes felt in normal day to day interactions. Thus Multi-Sensory Environments may be of benefit to staff as well as clients.

The basic belief behind sensory rooms (and similar treatment) is that human personality and intelligence are shaped by the impact of sensory experience—that infants are “blank slates” whose development and eventual characteristics derive from the sensory experiences they have had. This idea dates back to the French philosophe Condillac, who at the time of the French Revolution put this suggestion forward as relevant to creating good citizens in the post-revolutionary world. J.M.G. Itard, an admirer of Condillac, used this approach as he attempted (unsuccessfully) to work with the “wild boy of Aveyron”, an apparently feral, language-less boy who was about 12 when “caught”. Itard used a variety of sensory stimuli such as massage and the production of different sounds in his efforts to produce in the “wild boy” more normal levels of ability, which of course Itard assumed to develop in most people as a result of the sensory experiences of which the “wild boy” had been deprived. Similar approaches were taken later in the 19th century as American educators tried to work with blind and deaf children. (This was the reason for the famous scene in the life of Helen Keller, when Annie Sullivan pumped water over her hand.) Some children responded well to social interaction and stimulation, but more generally it appeared that whatever the source of their cognitive and sensory limitations, they could not be cured just by additional sensory experience.

Special Needs Gardening – Creating A Special Needs Garden For Children



Gardening with special needs children is a very rewarding experience. Creating and maintaining flower and vegetable gardens has long been recognized as being therapeutic and is now being widely embraced as a tool to help children with

special needs develop skills necessary to enjoy all of the positive paybacks that come with being in nature.

Cited benefits of special needs gardening include improved motor skills, enhanced creativity, increased social skills and improved self-confidence. Gardening also reduces stress and helps children cope with anxiety and frustration. Let's learn more about gardening with special needs children.

Creating a Special Needs Garden

Creating a special needs garden does require some planning and attention to details. The plantings and hardscape garden elements should be well suited for the population that the garden will serve.

The first step in planning a garden for kids with disabilities is to assess the range of disabilities. Make a detailed sketch of the proposed garden and use it as a guide.

Sensory and theme gardens may be appropriate too.

- [Sensory gardens](#) full of textures, smells and sounds are extremely therapeutic. Well-designed sensory gardens are also relaxing and educational.
- [Theme gardens](#) can be fun and flowers, nuts and seeds from the garden can be incorporated into [art projects](#) and other special activities. Special needs garden ideas include paying attention to each child's specific needs. Thought should be given to plant height, walkways or space for wheelchairs and other walking aids. Build [table high beds](#) for children in wheelchairs so that they can reach plants easily. Make paths and seating accommodating as necessary.

[Plant selection](#) for gardening with special needs children is also important. As with any garden, choose plants that are well suited for your particular growing region. Native species work best. Also, always put safety first. Some plants grow [thorns](#) while others tend to be toxic. Children are curious and much care should be taken to ensure that all elements of the garden are safe.

Since special needs gardening has gained popularity, there are many special needs garden ideas and resources available to help plan appropriate gardens for kids with disabilities.

A sensory garden experience is perfect for children to learn about nature and encourage their development. Sensory experiences can also benefit the visually impaired, as well as being the perfect place to relax and contemplate. Learn how to make the perfect sensory garden with the help of Video Jug's experts.

Bring sounds into a sensory garden with running water, and dense bamboo which will rustle in the wind. This provides a soothing and relaxing environment.

Sensory garden design can be unusual. For example, trees may be planted path side to be touched rather than set back in a bed as usual. Sensory design is about stage managing what events and experiences happen when and where for maximum impact.

Plant a dense bank of herbs, that will fill the air with heady aromas that blend into each other. Include the likes of cat mint, rosemary, lavender, and sage.

A sensory garden is ideal to encourage the development of children via a hands on approach. The abundant colours, smells, sounds, and textures will help develop their sensory skills, and teach them about nature.

To change the sensation under feet, use a variety of materials for paths such as paving, wood, and steel plates.

Use brightly coloured plants such as a Buddleja that will attract plenty of wildlife such as bees and butterflies.

Designing a multi-sensory experience can be hugely



beneficial for the visually impaired. Basing the garden around a trail can help the blind to gain confidence in their movements, learning to interpret sensory experiences that help them find their way.



