



Home Learning
Suggestions for
parents or carers
of pupils with
PMLD

Messy Play



Top Tip: messy play is a great opportunity to explore temperature - e.g. playing with Ice Cream when it is frozen and cold to when it has melted, is sticky and warm.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Some children may not enjoy wet stimulus straight away and will need to gradually work up from dry stimulus. Explore both dry and wet textures individually at first and then combine them to change the consistency. They can then communicate likes and dislikes.
- You can use a variety of different food (cooked spaghetti, mashed potatoes, flour and icing sugar) and non-edible (paint, shaving foam and slime) to offer exciting challenges
- To support the development of fine motor skills small ball pit sized balls or toys can be covered and hidden in the messy textures. This will motivate the child to practice gripping, squeezing and grasping skills
- You could also encourage your child to touch the messy textures with their feet
- Allow your child to use their senses. Give them time to look at, smell and maybe taste (if it is an edible resource and suitable for the child to eat).

Note: Be aware of allergies and that food doesn't need to be consumed to cause a reaction.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- A child may react in different ways when exploring messy textures. Some may use their fine motor skills to manipulate the food (squeezing, pushing, picking up, hitting, scooping with cutlery/hands) and some may be more reluctant to initially touch the given resources—it is great progress for some children to look at and tolerate the mess in close proximity
- Some children may try to explore the resources with their mouth
- When offering the child opportunities to smell the resources they may bend their heads forwards or away from the smell, they may pull the resource closer to them, they may turn away, they may vocalise happily to show that they like the smell or vocalise angrily/negatively to show a clear dislike
- Some children may prefer to explore with their feet rather than their hands and vice versa

iPads/tablets etc.



Top Tip: think about the positioning of the iPad/tablet. Will your child be able to access it better in front of them or to their most dominant side? Also download the Class DoJo app so that any work your child is doing that is showing their progress can be shared with their class teacher.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Put the iPad on 'guided access' so that the app selected can't be unintentionally switched off when the screen is touched by the child
- There are thousands of apps which support developing the understanding of cause and effect. Some of the apps make very funny sounds which many of the children find motivating—the burping and trumping' piano app is definitely one to download
- On Helpkidzlearn.com there are games such as Hidden Grid and Big Bang Patterns which allow the pupils to access high contrast games. These could be played on touch screen computers, iPad's or interactive whiteboards. These games encourage tracking and develop the understanding of cause and effect
- Story apps are very good particularly those that need the child to touch the screen to make the page turn
- If you put the camera to selfie mode (and start guided access) the iPad acts as a mirror for your child. The image will change as they hold the camera which encourages problem solving if they wants to see themselves.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- A child may respond to the iPad by fixing their gaze on the screen, they may turn their head to look at the iPad. They may visibly move their eyes to track what is happening on the screen or they may stare at the screen to show they have recognised the light.
- Some children may respond more to the iPad when the sound is on, they may turn towards the iPad when a sound is activated and they may turn away or startle if they don't like the sound
- Some children may actively reach to touch the iPad, some may do this using a whole hand tap and others may use their index finger to explore the screen. They may also do this during pauses in cause and effect games
- Some children may vocalise, laugh or attempt to get a supportive adults attention to participate in joint attention.

Experiencing weather



Top Tip: try to go outside to experience the weather and get fresh air at least once a day, it has many health benefits, which include improving blood pressure and heart rate, assisting digestion, building your immune system and improving mental health and well-being, however if this is not possible talk about the weather and help them to look outside.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Going outside (for however long) and just experiencing the day is incredibly beneficial however there are several easy ways to enhance this experience further. On a sunny and hot day you could take your child from an area that is unshaded to a shaded area to feel the temperature difference. Some may also enjoy the experience of wearing sunglasses and noticing how the light changes
- On wet and rainy days vary the heights that the umbrella is above them. This will alter how they hear the rain. It is also fun to take metallic tin lids and baking trays outside so that they can hear the rain bouncing against the surface
- Windy days already offer the experience of hair and clothes blowing in the wind but lend themselves to many further opportunities like placing small brightly coloured windmills around the area or clipping it on the wheelchair so they can watch the spinning. It is also fun to attach brightly coloured ribbons and fabric to trees and washing lines so they blow in the wind and catch attention. Wind chimes also offer lovely sounds.
- Snow is an incredibly fun prospect however sometimes it can be difficult and dangerous with wheelchairs outside when it is slippery. You could fill a shallow tray/bowl and bring the snow inside to explore!
- Sadly sometimes, illness prevents people from going outside and many hospital wards have limited windows which makes looking outside challenging. Sensory weather bottles can be nice to use during these times.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- A child may react differently when experiencing different types of weather—they may respond either positively by smiling, closing their eyes with a contented and happy expression on their face, widening their eyes, laughing, vocalising, visibly relaxing and reaching to explore or recognising items that are near, or negatively by crying, vocalising angrily/screaming, covering their face or showing other signs of distress
- On wet days some children may laugh at the weather and respond to the water being on their skin with little or big movements dependent on their range
- On windy days some children may laugh and get excited and others may flinch, close their eyes and turn their head away from the direction of the wind
- Children may show that they have preference over different temperatures by changing their behavioural state—relaxed in one and distressed in the other

Swimming



Top Tip: some local swimming pools have quiet times to swim or smaller training pools which are warmer which can make swimming a more enjoyable and quality experience for your child.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Please consult your child's physio and other involved health care professionals to make sure that swimming is appropriate for them and any other information you need to consider
- If your child is scared of the water it sometimes helps to frequently go to the same swimming pool and build up tolerance gradually—the repetition supports them to feel safe and long periods away from the pool after being anxious previously can make the fear worse the next time
- For children that love the water it can make them very excited and hold on tightly or even push away from you, ensure that you are safe too
- If possible have brightly coloured and motivating toys floating near your child to encourage them to reach out for them and move towards them
- Swimming professionals will be able to advise of suitable floats and armbands for your child to wear an offer advise on how to get the most from the swimming sessions
- Muscles relax when in the water and following physio advise you can support your child to regain a more comfortable posture and develop their gross motor movement skills.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Some children will be incredibly reluctant and distressed when entering the water and for these children building up tolerance is a big first step—at the start they may only tolerate a few minutes but this can progress to enjoying a full session in a pool. Some children may not like their faces to go in the water whereas some may actively do this themselves
- Some children may visibly relax and attempt to move in the water, some children may actively move and push their legs and arms through the water—i use bright toys that will encourage them to reach out for if possible
- When supported by a large rubber ring or armbands some children may walk along the pool floor, which will build their muscles and support the use of standing and walking frames
- Look out for vocalisations (positive and negative) and watch for changes in facial expressions

Water Play



Top Tip: water play is a great way of encouraging movement. Adding a little bit of sensitive bubble bath to the water will enable your child to get a response to their movements as the bubbles begin to froth and add to the FUN!

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Water play is a great way to introduce different temperatures to your child safely—you could use warm water or cold water. As the temperature of the room/outside begins to affect the water it could warm up or cool down naturally. Water play is fantastic in the summer when it is hot outside!
- Add water beads (non-edible) or Tapioca (edible) to the water and encourage your child to scoop them up using their hands or a big spoon. Be aware of them putting them in their mouth though
- Using a clear bowl add different food colourings to change the colour—add more than one and get the child to mix.
- Use waterproof lights to put under water and capture the attention of children who would have potentially been unengaged in a water play activity. Many companies now sell disco lights that can be put in a bath/water. Putting a mirror at the bottom of water bowls also gets their attention and if you add frothy bubbles it encourages movement as they move them to see the reflection of the mirror
- Depending on the age of the child encourage 'self-care' water play including flannels, sponges, shaving brushes etc and support pupils to wash hands/face.
- Use empty bottles and cups to encourage filling and emptying activities and to develop fine and gross motor skills.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children may react by reaching out to the water and immediately splashing in it
- Other children may not be as confident with wet resources and may need time to build up. Try putting some bubbles on their hands and blowing to feel the coolness
- Some children may pull the bowl towards them, smile, vocalise or show positive body movements
- Some children may widen their eyes when they feel the water
- The movements made in the water will vary with each child's physical range—some may move their hands and/or feet rapidly and other may make very small finger movements—all the movements should be celebrated!
- Some children may transfer bubbles from hand to hand and pick up/move items that are floating in the water

Cooking



THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Allow the child to explore the different surfaces of the cooking equipment through touch as independently as possible. Use items such as whisks, sieves and ladles for a contrast.
- Support your child to use the equipment in practical ways such as filling pans with cool water or whisking an ingredient (using hand over hand support)
- Give opportunities to 'wash' pot and pans, ladles, sieves etc to help develop life skills.
- Filling and emptying some of the pans/containers can be a great way to use both fine and gross motor skills.
- Use the pots and pans as musical instruments—hit the whisk and spoon off the pan and see how it sounds. Does it sound any different if you fill with water?
- Fill the pans with dry ingredients such as rice and pasta and allow the child time to listen to what it sounds like if you shake it or stir it. Some children may want to try and stir or shake it independently
- Offer the child a choice of at least two different smells but give them a short break in between. Giving a choice will offer the chance for the pupil to communicate a preference and show their likes and dislikes
- Sometimes adding some water to a spice can make it smell different to when its in its dry form. It also works well putting it on a tissue or in a small pot
- The sound of things boiling and sizzling in a pan adds to the sensory experience and attract the attention of the children—it is great for them to listen to this but also keep the children away from it as it is a potential scolding risk if they reach for it.
- Give your child ample opportunities to touch the ingredients. E.g. if making pastry add some flour to their tray/work area, then give them some butter to feel etc.
- Cooking is a fun daily task that all the family can get involved in

Top Tip: offer your child a smell of the ingredients when you are cooking. This is a good first step at introducing your child to new foods and will help them to communicate likes and dislikes. It is advised that the first smell presented is subtle and gradually built up so children are not reluctant to continue further. It can take around 40 seconds for the nose to register a scent so don't remove it too quickly.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Pupils may react in different ways when exploring foods. Some pupils may use their fine motor skills to manipulate the food (squeezing, pushing, picking up, hitting). Some pupils may also take it straight to their mouth, therefore showing that they can make the association between food and eating.
- Other pupils may have more of a negative reaction, they may turn away, vocalise or push the ingredients away from them. This shows a response however, the activity should be reintroduced to see if this is consistent and if tolerance can be built over time, for some children food is scary and they need to go at their own pace when being exposed to this—show it is okay to get messy my modelling this!
- When smelling and tasting the ingredients some children may be very accepting and will bend their heads or track the movement of the scent, some may flare their nostrils to show that they are actively smelling, some may widen their eyes and smile/vocalise others may push the ingredient away

Go to the library/read together



Top Tip: reading the story using different accents and voices can encourage children to listen and maintains their attention. This is a great thing to do with any siblings/family/friends too!

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

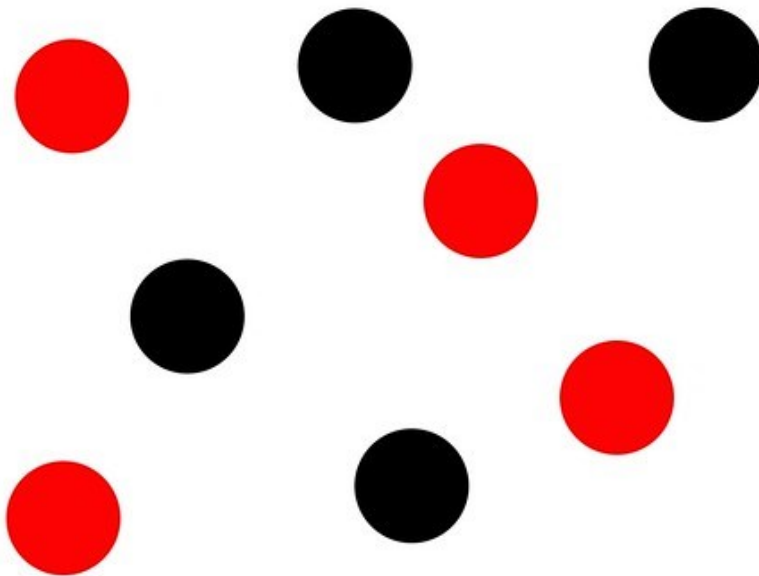
- You can get the whole family involved with reading—a sibling can read and look through a book with a child with PMLD which improves their confidence at reading aloud and develops the bonds they have
- Libraries offer a variety of books that are suitable for different ages. These range from simple picture books, touch and feel books, fiction and non-fiction.
- Some library offer Bag Books which are sensory stories varying in themes from 'going to the hairdressers' and a 'visit to the beach'. These stories have real objects that bring the story to life for people with PMLD/SLD
- When you have chosen a book repeat it regularly as this will support your child to develop their anticipation and communication skills—they could get excited about what is to come or show they are a bit apprehensive about it
- Stories with repeated key words work well as they often have a rhythm and rhyme which gains attention and encourages vocalisations
- When reading the book adopt intensive interaction strategies and go at the pace of the child—let them take the lead and communicate they want it to stop or continue—they may vocalise, get excited or touch the page of the book
- When reading move the book every so often to see if the child follows where you have moved it, this is a good way to see if they are looking at the book and will develop their visual tracking skills and support positive looking
- Support your child to turn the pages and give them opportunities to do this themselves—this promotes fine motor skills

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children will show an awareness of being read to by widening their eyes, turning to watch you talk, reaching for the book and looking at the images in the book. Some children will track the book when it is moved
- Children could show anticipation during the story by smiling, vocalising/getting excited, covering their eyes/ears
- Children could show that they want 'more' of the story by vocalising, smiling or arching their backs
- Some children may reach for the book and turn the pages independently, some may tap the book to signify that they want you to turn the page over

High contrast sensory images



Top Tip: if your child takes a particular interest to an image laminate it so that it can be enjoyed longer and doesn't suffer wear and tear.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- YouTube! Use YouTube to watch high contrast pictures—this will help with tracking objectives and awareness. Some of the best channels to watch are: Hey Bear and Tiny Adventures TV.
- Attach iPads/tablets to the child's wheelchair/desk and allow them to access videos and pictures
- Using black or white paper support your child to paint their own high contrast pictures. You can use cut out shapes too! Once they are dried they can be used to look at
- On Helpkidzlearn.com there are games such as Hidden Grid and Big Bang Patterns allow the pupils to access high contrast games. These could be played on touch screen computer, iPad's or interactive whiteboards.
- If using paper sometimes using a torch to highlight certain areas of the image attract the attention of the child and encourages them to track the light with more focus and intent
- The colours red, white and black are the most dominant and easily seen—start with these before trying other colours especially if your child has a visual impairment
- Try and keep a record of what images your child responds to and at what distance as this can provide valuable information for vision support specialist and teachers for setting next steps

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children may turn to look at the pictures and/or the screen, especially if the room is quiet and not too bright
- They may react by vocalising and tracking objects that are moving across the screens or the torch light illuminating a printed image, some children may reach out to touch the moving image
- Children may also bring printed pictures up close to their faces and twist and bend them to see how they change
- Children may choose to disengage by closing their eyes or turning away
- Some children may respond to some colours more than they do others

Walks Outside



Top Tip: Bradgate Park and Abbey Park (both in Leicestershire) have 'Changing Places' toilets and wheelchair accessible cafes.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Walks outside are very beneficial to supporting mental health and well-being. It can aid digestion, improve the immune system and improve the heart rate and blood pressure, and making sleeping at night easier —it doesn't have to involve going very far, a stroll in the garden or down to the shops will do wonders
- If your child has a walking frame and it is safe to do you could support them to go outside for a while and explore a different environment
- When your child is in their wheelchair you can vary the pace that you are pushing them at which will develop their proprioceptive sense
- Vary the locations that you go as this will open new sensory experience to the child and widen their sense of community and belonging which also contributes to their mental health and well-being
- For people with PMLD (especially with visual impairments) following the same route to a location you visit regularly develops their understanding of where they are and supports them to understand routine
- It is important to use body signing so that a child knows when they are going to be moved forwards or backwards, left or right or if they are going to stop.
- If it is safe to do, pushing a wheelchair over different terrains gives very different sensory feedback—mainly through touch, sound and vision.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children may smile and vocalise to show they are enjoying being outside
- Some of the children may visibly relax or tense which is often dependent on the weather conditions at the time
- Children may respond to the change of pace when in their wheelchair by vocalising, smiling, laughing, closing their eyes, raising or lowering their head, rocking excitedly or stilling and going quiet
- Children may show that they have noticed a difference in terrain by vocalising (happily/unhappily, getting excited, smiling/laughing, looking confused, widening eyes and looking towards the floor
- Children may sleep better and appear more relaxed during and after the walk

Fine motor skills



Top Tip: Playdough is great for encouraging fine motor skill development and 'Disco Dough' workouts can be found on YouTube and are fun for all the family!

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- A hand massage is often a good starting point prior to doing a fine motor skill based activity. It relaxes the hand which encourages more movement in the fingers
- Allow the child to explore the resource either independently or with your support depending on their ability. Offer a range and variety of resources that vary in size, texture and shape
- Take a ball of play dough and hide small toys into the play dough for the child to find. The child has to push, pull, tear, roll, and manipulate the dough until all pieces are found. Make sure you observe or support the child doing this so it doesn't present a choking hazard
- Finger painting is a good activity for developing fine motor strength, finger isolation, fine motor coordination, and for helping a child who is sensitive to messy textures. Remember this doesn't need to be limited to normal paint alone and can be food or something that can be spread with fingers (see the messy play page for more ideas)
- Some children could be given opportunities to try and build towers/ stacks from paper cups or building blocks. This will help develop fine motor precision and gets even more challenging the lighter the resource
- Pulling shoe laces and pulling up zips practices fine motor skills. Attaching ribbons through the holes makes them less fiddly to grip and with lots of practice some children learn to pull zips which aids future

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children may visibly relax their hands and improve their range of movement in their fingers
- Children may move their hands over a surface before gripping the object—some may develop dexterity to hold and pull tiny objects like zips
- Some children may be able to manipulate the resources to change its shape and appearance or to make something happen (activate a sound when squeezed)
- Some children may increase their tolerance of the variety of objects that are offered—children that would previously be unaccepting of messy textures could start to explore them
- Some children may pick up items from their trays/laps and pass items between both hands—these could vary in size/weight

Ball games



Top Tip: Balls can be positioned on foot plates so that children can have opportunities to kick them. For children that can use walkers you can encourage them to kick the ball whilst they are walking—choose a bright ball that will attract their attention.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Sit opposite the child and push the ball backwards and forwards between the two of you. The child can push the ball back either independently or supported by another person. This really improves their turn taking and anticipation skills and builds up their focus and endurance during a more physical activity
- If you have lots of balls available use them to fill a ball pit (or paddling pool). This is fun and can be a great chance for children to play with their friends and siblings
- Bounce the ball and vary the pace that you do this. Some children may reach for the ball and intercept it between a bounce and some children may visibly track the ball and make noticeable head movements
- Use floating balls in water trays. The child may reach for them and hold them in one or both hands which will improve their fine and gross motor skills, if the balls are small enough they may also transfer the ball between both hands which is a significant fine motor skill to develop
- Different balls vary in size, weight and texture. Offering your child opportunities to hold different balls. Some balls have bells inside that can provide auditory feedback, these are especially good for engaging children with vision impairments
- If your child is in their wheelchair you can encourage them to push the ball off their lap, this can also be done towards a target. Ramps to push the ball down can also be brought online or made with wood. Family outings to Bowling Alleys are also great opportunities for children to use ramps to push the ball.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children could show an increasing awareness of the people they are playing with—they could look between the person and the ball to develop their social, joint attention and turn taking skills
- Children could hold the ball, reach for the ball, grasp the ball, push the ball, roll the ball, tolerate the ball on their lap, push the ball off their lap, throw the ball, throw the ball toward a target, shake the ball, pass the ball between two hands, hold the ball in one hand, grip the ball between two hands, play with an adult or peer.
- Children could watch the ball moving and listen to the ball bouncing.

Spa Opportunities



Top Tip: whilst special water bead foot spa's are brilliant a washing up bowl filled with the beads works well too! You can put the bowl onto the wheelchair footplates so that your child can explore the water beads with their feet whilst in their wheelchair. This encourages independent foot movements.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Give your child a variety of creams to smell (for at least 30 seconds each). This gives them a chance to communicate their choice/preference
- Create a nice relaxed atmosphere, include some relaxing spa music (YouTube has some great choices). This is also great to do before bed time or after a bath
- Give your child a hand massage before doing Fine motor skill activities. It relaxes their muscles and gets them ready to use their hands
- Start the massage in the palm of the pupils hand and work your way down each fingers. This could take several minutes. Vary the pressure of the massage and work in circular motions. Encourage turn taking. You squeeze their hands and wait to see if they squeeze yours back.
- Pupils could be encouraged to massage their own hands by bringing their hands together. Adults can model this and wait to see if the pupil copies
- Creating a spa like atmosphere is a very good opportunity to encourage the development of self-help and personal care skills—use wet flannels to support your child with face washing and dry flannels for drying. Encourage them to wash and dry their face with support before offering them opportunities to perform this task independently. For some children tolerating the difference between wet and dry flannels is significant progress.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children could smell the hand creams and show this by flaring their nostrils, moving head closer, pulling the cream nearer to their nose or moving their head away.
- Some children may smile or grimace to show a like or dislike.
- Some children will relax their hands and tolerate touch. Some children could pull away.
- Some children may perform the hand massage independently by bringing their hands together
- Children may show tolerance of being supported to wash and dry their face, some pupils will hold the hand of the supportive person to guide the flannel to their face, this can then develop to a child independently moving the flannel to their face.

Sensory stories and Sensology



THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Several sensory stories can be found online or they can be easily adapted from children's stories/short books. You could also create your own stories that are personalised to your family. Stories around 10-12 lines long work the best
- Try to explore the resource using one sense at a time although some resources will lend themselves to another sense too
- If you create your own sensology workouts try to offer two resources for each sense—eg for taste you could offer something sweet and something sour, and for smell you could offer a strong smell (coffee) and a subtle smell (sweet vanilla). You can make your own to suit your needs
- Sensory stories and sensology workouts are brilliant at marking special occasions like Christmas, Eid, Diwali, and Birthdays—for Christmas you can use resources like Cinnamon, Shiny baubles, Brussel Sprouts, Jingle bells etc.
- Remember to include the vestibular and proprioceptive senses—you can do this by including movement and balance/experience of weight into the story/sensology
- Remember that you can use YouTube for unusual sound effects
- It is important that your child is allowed to explore the resource at their own pace, it is okay for the story to take up to an hour, as the story is repeated they will begin to show signs of anticipation of the resources and may build tolerance to something they previously didn't like.

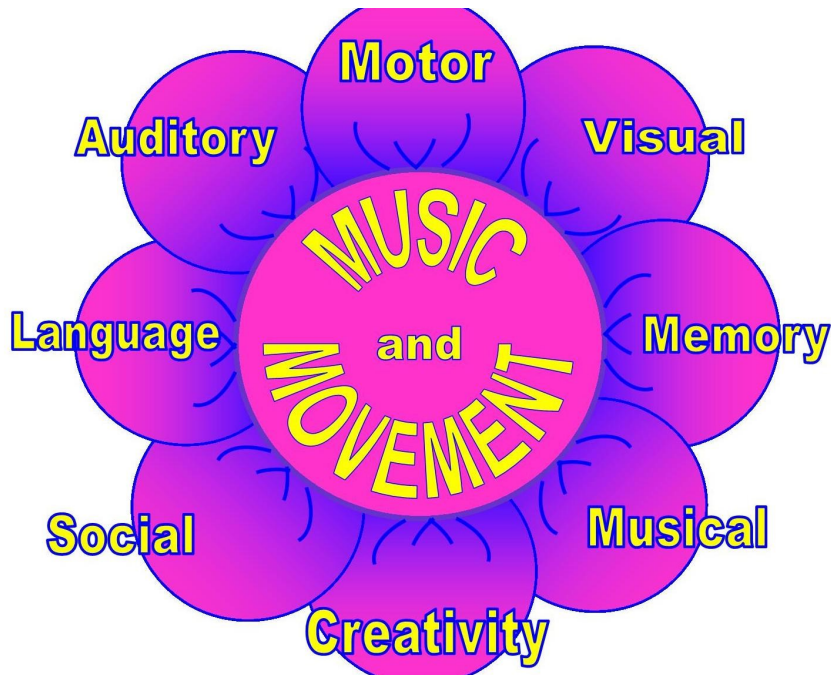
Top Tip: Sensory stories and sensology workouts are best when they are repeated frequently so that your child can begin to anticipate what is coming and sequence the events of the story together. There are several sensory story and sensology packs available for loan from new homework resources at Ash Field Academy.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Smiling, laughing and positive vocalisations to communicate a like
- Crying, distressed facial expressions and negative vocalisations to communicate a dislike
- Children can show preferences between two different items that stimulate the same sense—for example, smile and pull the vanilla smell towards them but push away and turn their head away from the smell of coffee
- Children can show that they are anticipating what is coming by smiling, stilling, closing eyes, turning away, vocalising and getting excited— e.g.—when shown the water spray they could turn away/cover their face
- Children can show increased tolerance of stimulus by exploring something that is repeated regularly for longer periods of time than they initially did

Movement to Music



Top Tip: music is one of the most stimulating things for a person with PMLD. Try to be creative with your music choices as they often find what we would consider an usual choice the most appealing and exciting.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Playing music with different tempo's can start to teach your child about emotions. Your child will begin to understand that slow songs are sometimes sad and that upbeat songs/music make you feel happy and uplifted
- Different types of music also teaches your child about body awareness and movement. They may naturally move more to upbeat and lively music which also improves mental health and well-being and improves their physical fitness in a fun and engaging way
- Dancing, moving and singing together improves a child social skills and self confidence
- You could make your own musical instruments using found objects around the house—an empty Pringle crisp tube/tupperware and lentils make a great shaker
- Songs with repetitive lines are very good opportunities to encourage Makaton signing and encourage repetitive movements—eg arm stretching, bending legs etc.
- Have music on around the house/car etc regularly—listen to both familiar and unfamiliar music and notice any changes in the child's behaviour. Some children begin to associate certain songs with their parents and siblings because of frequent repetition
- Vary the volume of the music, turning it up and down may encourage the child to vocalise at a different volumes
- Playing albums can support your child to develop their anticipation and memory skills and communicate their likes and dislikes—do they respond consistently to the same song. Attaching a supported movement/massage to a specific song can also be another way of developing body awareness and anticipation of routine –some children may begin to do the action themselves
- whilst singing try to include frequent pauses to encourage your child to fill the gaps and use their voice or communicate in another way (like smiling or arching back) that they want 'more'.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children may show that they like or recognise a song by smiling, vocalising, moving and getting excited
- Children may initially only tolerate supported movements briefly however over time this can progress to actively participating in supported movements for prolonged periods of time
- Children may show their increasing body awareness by performing the correct movement when the associated song is playing
- Children may show that they want 'more' during pauses in the music by vocalising/smiling etc – they can show that they recognise a pause more quickly by showing responses quicker during the pause
- Children may reach for you to initiate a movement or may begin to move independently

Art



Top Tip: you can make edible paint from natural yogurt and food colouring.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Try adding some spices or scents to different paint, this especially supports visually impaired children to choose what paint they want to use and adds further interest for all involved
- Give options to your child on what paint they want to use—some could communicate this choice by fixing their gaze on the colour or reaching for it
- Try supporting them to paint with a variety of options like fingers, brushes and rollers (with initial hand over hand support if needed), shapes cut from fruit and vegetables and even things like toy cars, this will develop their fine motor skills and coordination—give plenty of time for them to move their own hands/fingers, very small movements is excellent progress for some children
- Making collages can also provide an appropriate challenge for many children. Ripping, tearing, scrunching and patting down paper really develops fine motor skills and coordination
- Putting paint into water balloon and supporting your child to throw them at a canvas/sheet can be very fun and messy! It also develops their gross motor skills
- Painting can also be done with feet rather than hands! This is especially fun when out of wheelchairs
- You could make sensory water bottles using a clear bottle, coloured poms poms, sequins, glitter, ribbons etc. Make sure the lid is firmly closed and then sealed shut. They last a few days/weeks before the water starts to go murky but provide hours of fun beforehand!

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children who were previously reluctant to touch the messy paint may be more tolerant of the mess and may begin to actively engage and enjoy exploring the paint/messy resources
- Children will move their hands and fingers over the surface of the paper/canvas etc.
- Children may begin to squeeze/scrunch resources more showing a development in hand strength
- Some children will start to look towards their hands when making marks and develop an understanding of cause and effect
- Children will demonstrate choices by vocalising, laughing, reaching, pulling towards them and pushing away. Some may begin to show consistent preferences—e.g. Always reaching to the yellow paint but not to the green

Light Toys



Top Tip: toys that are brought in high street shops can be converted to switch toys to enable people with PMLD to actively play with toys and develop their understanding of cause and effect.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Put a light toy underneath fabric so that it is just visible and encourage your child to try to find the toy.
- Encourage your child to hold the light toys independently if possible. Some toys have a limited time setting so that the lights will go off after a specific time, ensure that you model to your child how to turn them back on, this could be by pressing the button or banging the toy on a surface (dependent on the toy)
- Whilst some children may not be able to restart the light, they could communicate that the light has gone off by responding to this through vocalising or looking towards an adult to get their attention
- Use light toys such as 'fake' candles to create a relaxing atmosphere.
- Use waterproof lights to put under water and capture the attention of pupils who would potentially been unengaged in a water play activity
- Use a light box and put sand or foam on top. You can encourage your child to manipulate it with their hands or feet.
- Disco lights can be used to create a party like atmosphere
- Light up bubble tubes also create a sensory room type atmosphere, they are brilliant at encouraging tracking skills, some can also be attached to a switch to encourage the development the understanding of cause and effect.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Some children may react by reaching out or turning to show their attention to the toys. They could stare at the objects and widen their eyes in response to the light
- If the toys can be switched on and off they may show anticipation of it being switched on through smiling, vocalising and reaching
- Some children may show an awareness of the light by moving their eyes to track the toy or by moving their arms/hands up to block the light
- Children can go from initially exploring the surface of the buttons by moving their fingers across them, to pressing them on and off and showing an understanding of cause and effect
- Children may show more interest in picking up and exploring the light toys when in comparison with an unlit object

NOTE: Light toys are NOT suitable for children with photosensitive epilepsy.

Everyday Objects



THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Support your child to experience lots of different objects in their everyday environment (after checking they are safe). Here are a few examples:
- Cellophane/sweet wrappers could be added to torches to alter the colour of the light –which children will enjoy tracking or holding independently. These torches could then also be used in a story for the sun, the moon or fire etc.
- Hang balloons from an activity arch or doorframe—this should encourage children to reach out with their arms or legs and touch, push, kick the balloons—supporting their gross motor skills.
- A simple blanket could provide hours of fun playing peek a boo and develop a child's interaction and anticipation skills
- Attach fairy lights, ribbons and bells etc. to the prongs underneath the umbrella. If possible also attach the child's favourite toys. This will motivate them to look at,, each up or touch the resources . This can be done inside or outside and some umbrella's can be attached to wheelchairs to allow independent play
- Giving your child everyday personal care things to play with like toothbrushes, hairbrushes and flannels etc supports your child to be interested in these items and more tolerant and accepting of them when you are getting them dressed. Some children may even begin to use the items in the right context (e.g. wiping their face with a flannel) which will assist their development of independent life/personal care skills.

Top Tip: allow your child (if it is safe to do so) to explore everyday objects and familiar items. There are lots of fun yet challenging things that you can do with the most basic of resources. A booklet entitled 'sensory suggestions' can also offer support and guidance with this.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Smiling, laughing and positive vocalisations to communicate a like
- Crying, distressed facial expressions and negative vocalisations to communicate a dislike
- Children can show preferences when offered at least two different items
- Children can show that they are anticipating what is coming by smiling, stilling, closing eyes, turning away, vocalising and getting excited— e.g.—when shown the water spray they could turn away/cover their face
- Children can show increased tolerance of stimulus by exploring something that is repeated regularly for longer periods of time than they initially did
- Children can reach, touch, pull, grip and manipulate the object and show development of fine and gross motor skills.

Cinema/theatre



Top Tip: Bamboozle theatre company do performances that are smaller in scale and suitable for people with PMLD at the Curve in Leicester. They also come to Ash Field each year to perform for us so children are familiar with the actors.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

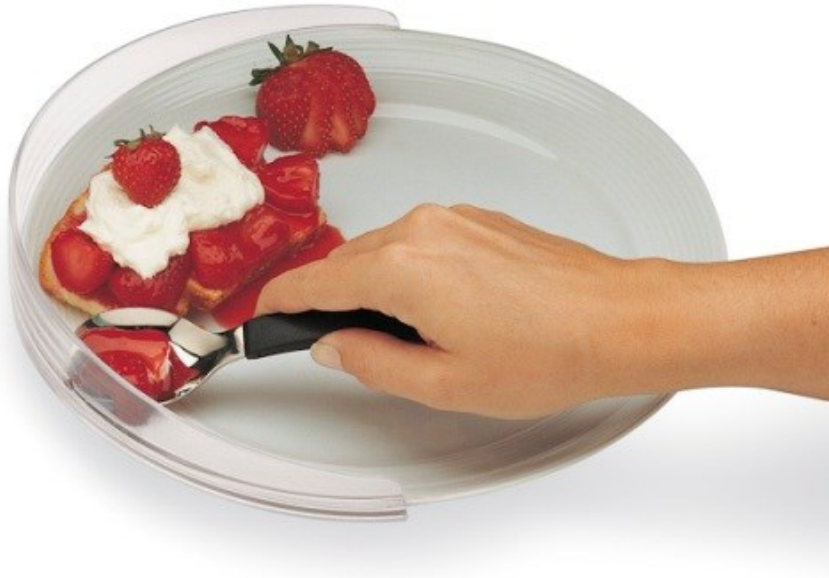
- Many cinema's host screenings for people with learning and sensory difficulties. The special performances have subtle changes to the cinema environment which mean that people who have sensory difficulties have a more positive experience than they would in a traditional cinema setting. Changes include:
 - The lights being kept on at a low level
 - Lower than usual sound levels
 - No trailers or advertisements - just the film
 - Allowance for increased levels of movement and noise
- Before you go to the cinema you could try to watch something on your television with the room darkened. This can prepare your child as it is often when the cinema darkens that's create the biggest sensory overload as all your senses are heightened when it is dark which can lead to distress and sometimes needing to leave the cinema
- Food and drink that is associated with the cinema lends itself very well to developing fine motor skills. Popcorn has a very interesting texture and smell which can add to the experience for your child—bite and dissolve foods are often available now too and for children who can eat orally this develops their hand to mouth coordination
- Try to arrive at the cinema near the time so that you don't have to wait too long for the film to start but also long enough so that you are there before it starts potentially filling up, as a gradual increase in noise and activity of people arriving is easier for a person with PMLD to process rather than an immediate sudden change like going from a quiet lobby to a loud cinema screen playing the opening credits
- Some cinemas have wheelchair spaces near the back which can sometimes be tolerated better as an overview of the whole area is available and is not too close to the screen

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children may smile or vocalise in response to the lights being dimmed—some children may also startle at this
- Children may visibly track what is happening on the screen—they might look at the screen for short or sustained periods dependent on concentration and engagement level
- Children may widen their eyes, get excited and perhaps hold their ears when the volume changes
- If offered opportunities to smell the food they may flare their nostrils, move towards or away from the smell depending on whether they like it or not, push it away from their nose or pull it nearer again when it is being taken away

Encouraging Independence



Top Tip: it is important to remember the term 'independence' varies a lot and is very personal to each individual. Some people with PMLD would find tolerating a few minutes alone a challenge whereas others like to make frequent choices to show preferences and perform independent self care tasks like eating and drinking.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- If your child eats orally you can work on them eating independently by initially offering them finger foods for them to pick up and feed themselves. With hand over hand support children can also hold cutlery and develop hand to mouth co-ordination. Plate guards (like the one pictured above) can be used to assist your child to independently load their spoon without pushing their food off their plate. Slip-mats are also good at providing friction so that the plate doesn't move on the tray/table.
- Children can work on independent chair transfers or chair to floor transfer (if applicable and agreed by physiotherapists). They may need support when then doing this but giving children opportunities to stand when transferring to somewhere else can sometimes leads to a child doing sitting to standing supported movements, walking supported steps/ balancing with the support of a surface. Whilst this isn't suitable for all children, a regular change of position is important for postural management
- Some children can work on independent chair or bench sitting. Some children may work on supported and independent floor sitting—this will support them to be able to balance when on the floor which will support postural management progress and offer them a different perspective on the world and support their social interaction/play with others
- Independent personal care skills like washing hands and face, combing hair and brushing teeth are important skills that can be developed. This could be worked on with various levels of support—this is dependent on the child but some children may hold or move their hands in a shallow bowl of water whereas some may be able to turn taps on and rub their hands together under running water
- When dressing your child wait to see if they push their arm through their sleeve independently, at first they may take a while for them to attempt but with repetition this will become quicker. Some children may also be able to pull up zips themselves—you can attach bright ribbons on the zip so that they are less fiddly pull and easier to see.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children will show progress by developing hand to mouth co-ordination. They can begin to do this with toys. They may reach out to hold the spoon/cutlery that you are holding and guide it towards their mouth. They may also move their pre-loaded spoon to their mouth independently. Children may then be able to load the spoon themselves (when a plate guard is used) and guide it to their mouths independently. This could then develop to chopping foods and not needing a plate guard because of developed motor movements. Some children may also begin to use cutlery with both hands
- During chair transfers children may initially put all their weight on the supporting person, this can develop to them shuffling forwards in their chair and holding another surface to maintain a standing posture long enough for the chairs to be swapped, this can also lead to improved independence in personal care tasks like using a rotunda, transferring from the chair to toilet with minimal support. Some pupils may go beyond this and begin to take steps

Birthdays and Occasions



Top Tip: a sensory story or a sensory story that is repeated each time an event occurs can prepare your child for family, cultural and religious celebrations.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Birthday parties and celebrations are great opportunities for children to work on their social interaction skills—games like pass the parcel also encourages holding and releasing objects
- There is often music at parties that will support the development of movement skills and the expression of like and dislikes
- Balloons, party blowers and other exciting party items provide hours of fun (of course these can be used anytime and not just on birthdays). Below are examples of simple yet exciting activities that can be done with a balloon:
 - Anticipation games: Blow the balloon up, count to 3 and let it go. Encourage the child to track the balloon as it whizzes around the room.
 - Blow a balloon up and hold the end taught and only let out a small bit of air at a time—this should create a funny high pitched noise.
 - Hang balloons from a doorframe—this should encourage children to reach out with their arms or legs and touch, push, kick the balloons—supporting their gross motor skills development
 - Hang balloons and using a hand held fan to support the child to blow the balloons up in the air.
 - Turn taking games—hit the balloon to a child and support if necessary to push the balloon back to another person
 - Let the child touch a balloon—can they squeak their hands across it?
- Party food and finger food is good at encouraging your child to independently feed themselves. Food can also be used to stimulate the sense of smell—they will then be able to communicate likes and dislikes. Some children may also build their tolerance to touching certain foods in a fun and more relaxed environment
- Opening presents is a great way to encourage fine motor skills and encouraging finding hidden objects
- Most importantly—**HAVE LOTS OF FUN!**

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children may smile, laugh, vocalise, reach to, and pull towards/push away the resources offered, they could also widen their eyes to show a response
- Children may increase their movements to one song more than another, if they are both songs of the same tempo this could be showing their preferences for one song more than another
- Children may improve their tolerance of touching food and those that already enjoy exploring food may work on independent eating using fingers and cutlery
- Children may show anticipation by getting excited or becoming nervous (closing eyes/change of facial expression), they may reach the person next to them to show it is their turn during games like pass the parcel etc

Shopping



Top Tip: shopping can be stressful for some people with PMLD and can cause sensory overload and distress. Many well known supermarkets and department stores have introduced time frames for quieter and less busy shopping which can support people with learning disabilities to access their community shops.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- Shopping is full of different sensory experiences for your child, particularly the sounds of the tills and the vast amount of visual stimulus. If there is an in-store bakery your child will also be able to smell the different breads and goodies
- Some stores offer little tasters to try—this is a great way of encouraging your child to try something new and communicate their likes and dislikes
- The fruit and veg aisle is an amazing opportunity for your child to explore different textures, smells and develop an understanding of weight. For example, a pineapple feels very rough/spiky, has a sweet smell and is heavy, whereas an Aubergine is very smooth, has little smell and weighs relatively little considering its size
- Shops are great places to encourage your child to interact with unfamiliar people safely with your support. When at the till to pay you could support your child to hand over the money (if appropriate)
- Shopping can help your child make choices—do they recognise the familiar packaging of products you usually buy?
- Sometimes the vast amount of stimulus available can be overwhelming—going to the same shops can reduce the impact that anxiety and over stimulation can bring as children will become more familiar with their surroundings
- Shopping is a great opportunity to encourage your child to take out and put items in a bag—this can also be done when unpacking shopping at home. Many children have difficulty releasing the objects purposefully from their hands shopping provides them with chances to do this in an everyday purposeful setting
- Shopping experiences don't need to only be restricted to food shopping, you could try shopping in clothes stores, music stores, garden centres and pet shops.

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children can show they are responding to a different environment/sensory experience by smiling, vocalising, crying, flaring nostrils, widening eyes, reaching for what is near, covering their eyes/ears, visibly looking at their environment
- Children can show they are making choices by smiling, vocalising, reaching out to touch or take one of the choices offered
- Children may hold items for longer and pick them up using one or two hands—some may give back the items and release them from their hands
- Children may show they recognise the familiar shop by being more relaxed each time and happily exploring items (when possible)

Watching Television



Top Tip: watching the same television programme at a specific time everyday can help build routine and encourage your child to develop a sense of time.

THINGS TO TRY AT HOME

- If you have a Smart TV use the YouTube app to watch high contrast pictures—this will help with tracking objectives and awareness. Some of the best channels to watch are: Hey Bear and Tiny Adventures TV
- Watch a variety of animation and live action programmes/films—does your child focus on one more than the other?
- If you are unsure if your child is focusing on the on screen pictures or the sound, try muting the television to see if they maintain the same level of focus and interest on the screen
- Watching television with your child gives them an increased sense of security—it's a nice activity that the whole family can join in with
- Television is a good resource for supporting your child to develop their concentration skills—how long do they watch the screen and has this increased over time?
- Watching and listening to music videos is also a fun thing to do. The music will promote movement and dance which improves physical fitness and mental health and well-being
- When repeating a film/programme watch for signs that your child is anticipating what is going to happen—do they laugh before a specific point each time, do they get excited or change behaviour when the soundtrack starts?

WHAT LEARNING COULD LOOK LIKE

Learning could look different for each child and the following list of responses is by no means extensive:

- Children can progress from fleeting glances at the screen to sustained focus for longer periods
- Music changes in the programmes/films can alert children to change their posture/behaviour to show they have recognised this
- When watching repeated programmes or something that is watched often they may begin to show signs of anticipation by smiling, laughing, stilling, widening eyes, turning to or away from the screen, moving themselves closer etc.
- Children may show signs that they are visibly tracking the action on the screen through the movement of their eyes—some may even stand/kneel near the TV and reach to 'catch' the moving image
- There are instances when children will totally disengage from looking at the TV and turn away/close their eyes.

THIS BOOKLET OUTLINES ACTIVITIES THAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CHILD TO SUPPORT THEIR LEARNING AT HOME HOWEVER IT IS NOT AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST OR A CURRICULUM.

LIBRARY OF SENSORY RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO LOAN (2 WEEK LOAN—CAN BE RE-NEWED)

The Airport (a sensory story that involves the experiences a person has at an airport)

The day trip to the beach (a sensory story that explores what you need to take to the beach)

Garden Massage story

Haunted woods massage story

Nature Walk Massage story

Movement to Music (various themes)

Sensology workouts (various themes)

Created and written by
Sam Lemmon

Ash Field Academy
Broad Avenue
Leicester