

# GROWING THROUGH ART AND PLAY



VRUM's  
PLAYBOOK  
for Kinesthetic  
Connection and  
Discovery

# INTRO or WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT AND HOW DO YOU USE IT?

Dear reader, spectator, what you are about to explore with your fingers, and maybe even smell, is one of the VRUMs Playbooks: a playful publication that offers insight into the practice for very young audiences (babies and toddlers) and the mindset of VRUM Performing Arts Collective.

This Playbook will not only provide valuable information but also practical tips and tricks you can use in your daily life with your kids, grandkids, your inner child, a small neighbor, or any baby or toddler that is important to you. These ideas are also applicable to older children.

You and the child with you will soon experience a multisensory, participatory performance designed to immerse everyone — small and big, performers and visitors alike — in a world of magic, play, movements, sounds, smells, touches and insights.

This kind of VRUM's performances are crafted to help children better integrate their SENSORY — MOTOR SYSTEMS\* and support healthy, HOLISTIC\* body—mind development. It also aims

to boost their innate creativity and encourage play, which is a primary tool for learning in both children and adults.

In this Playbook, you'll find the theoretical foundations of VRUM's work, additional links for deeper exploration, fun ideas for activities with kids and much more!

Feel free to use this Playbook to jot down notes, record insights, draw, or even create origami, once you've read it all. Reuse it however you like. The digital version, with more details, is always available online, on our FUTURE MAP\*!

\*  
words  
you  
can  
find in  
the  
glossary  
section

# VRUM PERFORMING ARTS COLLECTIVE or WHO ARE WE?

VRUM Performing Arts Collective is an international, intergenerational collective of artists that combines contemporary dance with theater, visual arts, music, and new media. Under the artistic direction of Sanja Frühwald, contemporary dancer, choreographer and teacher, bold and INCLUSIVE\* productions are created, aimed at audiences of all ages, with a particular focus on young people.

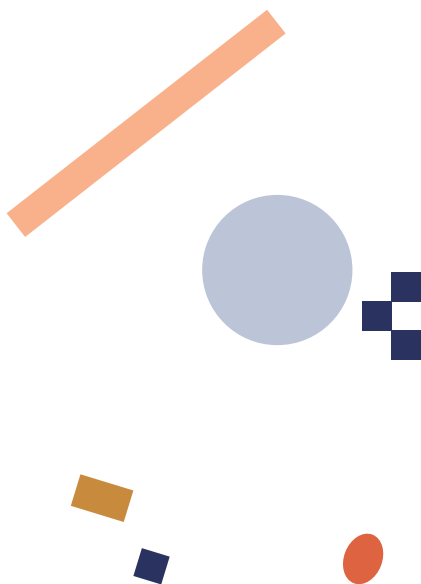
The work is characterized by a particularly sensitive approach to the needs of the target audiences. Through precise observation and in—depth reflection, it is explored what is important to the audience and which themes appear relevant. Art plays a central role even in the earliest years of life, giving babies the opportunity to explore the world in a playful and physical way. The aim is to create special experiences that engage the audience on a sensory and emotional level and leave a long lasting influence. By understanding and doing we are becoming the change we want to see in the world, a more aware and connected world.

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One of the key focuses of VRUM is the development of artistic formats for the very youngest

audiences, that support their development and simultaneously offer an unforgettable experience for the whole family.

The interactive performance **BAJA BUF** or **IMMERSIVE\*** dance installations **SCHIMMER** and **THE MILKY WAY** are outstanding examples of VRUM's commitment to contemporary dance for the youngest audiences. These productions have been specifically designed for babies and their caregivers, creating welcoming sensory environments where movement, light, sound, and space are harmoniously aligned. The goal is to stimulate the sensory **PERCEPTION\*** of the youngest children and accompany them on a journey of discovery through spaces specially created for them.



# SCHIMMER

immersive dance and music  
installation for babies

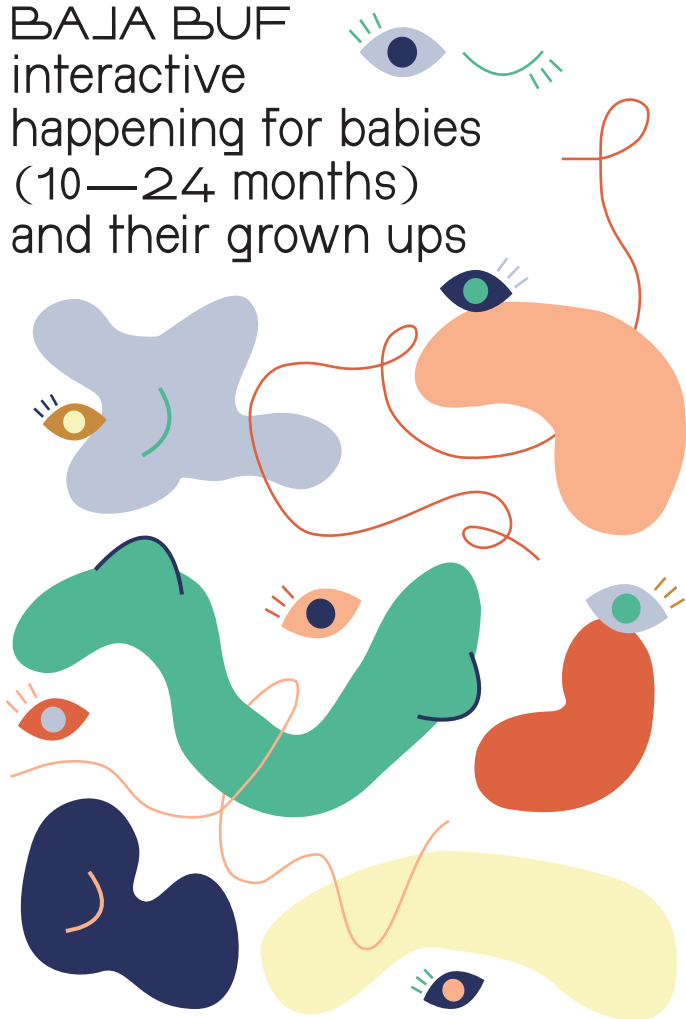
(6—18 months)

and their  
grown ups



Inspired by the experiences children have with light and movement while still in the womb and then in their first "duets" danced with the primary caretaker, Schimmer invites its young audience to explore a world of gentle sounds and glowing colors. The project combines dance, light art, and live percussion to create a unique environment where babies can actively engage with their surroundings.

BAJA BUF  
interactive  
happening for babies  
(10—24 months)  
and their grown ups



Babies have a natural need to move spontaneously and freely, exploring the space and the world around them with their own bodies. Together with three performers, who receive and reflect every movement, the sound and the mood of the babies, an unpredictable and playful dialogue develops. The experience of BAJABUFING\* is a first discovery of the possibility of non—verbal communication and body feeling. Surprising and fresh, always different and revealing the already very personal character of each baby!

# THE MILKY WAY

immersive dance installation  
for babies (6—18 months)  
and their grown ups



The Milky Way invites the audience to immerse themselves in a dance of motion and space, where forms of all shapes fill the air — fluid, tangible, and alive. The dancers, at times guiding the shapes, at times becoming them through costume or the quality of their movement, weave through a soft, warm landscape. This ever—shifting world, filled with objects large and small that beckon to be touched and explored, pulses with the exciting and soothing sounds of Oliver Stotz's composition, inviting discovery at every turn.

# THEORY or WHAT IS THIS WORK ABOUT?

The performance you are about to experience highlights the immense benefits of exposing babies and toddlers to MULTISENSORY\* content. It fosters connection with their environment, encourages exploration of inner and outer worlds, and nurtures awareness of self, others, and space.

Dance and movement offer children a unique way to explore and create. It helps them develop an awareness of their own space, recognize the personal space of others, and better understand their surroundings, the space itself. Participating in collective movement children learn that anyone can contribute to the community and that everyone can work together towards finding a solution to a problem. Since emotions are often easier to express through movement than words — especially for children who have not yet fully developed verbal skills — dance becomes a powerful emotional outlet. In fact, even adults sometimes struggle to express their feelings verbally.

As social beings, dependent on each other for much of our survival and satisfaction, much of a child's development happens through social interactions. From infancy, children model behavior by interacting with those closest, safe and familiar to them. These interactions can be seen as a "dance" where emotions and body language shift in response to each other. This is made possible by MIRROR NEURONS\*, which allow us to intuitively connect through bodily resonance, also known as KINESTHETIC EMPATHY\*. It allows us to explore how we influence one another's physical

space and helps create a natural connection. With it we explore, and become more aware of how we influence each other's physical space. We mirror each other as an automatic way to connect.

Our view of children as capable, curious, and trustworthy shapes how we design their environments and multisensory experiences, encouraging exploration and independence. This approach respects their unique developmental processes and fosters holistic growth, enabling children to express themselves freely and grow within a supportive, responsive culture. Each child's interactions co—create and nurture these expressive "languages" of life.

This is why we create multisensory, participatory experiences for very young audiences. With this playbook, we aim to share the knowledge behind our work, fostering a more aware and connected world.

# PSYCHOLOGY & NEUROLOGY or WHAT INFORMATION ON DEVELOPMENT OF PERCEPTION AND LEARNING ARE WE USING?

Movement and sensory experiences are the foundations of life. Without them, higher brain functions like attention, reasoning, and language cannot develop properly.

Our **SENSORY RECEPTORS\*** constantly gather information, but how we interpret this information shapes how we interact with the world. From birth, babies rapidly develop perceptual abilities that help them connect with their surroundings. Sensory and **MOTOR SYSTEMS\*** work closely together: sensory input helps guide movement, and movement provides feedback to refine our perceptions.

While most of us are familiar with the five main senses (touch, hearing, sight, taste, smell), there are three lesser-known but crucial internal senses:

## PROPRIOCEPTION

*Sensing the position of our  
body in space.*

## VESTIBULAR SENSE

*Our  
sense of  
balance  
and movement.*

## INTEROCEPTION

*Recognizing internal signals,  
like hunger  
or the need  
to use the toilet.*

Children learn by doing, moving freely and exploring their world. Their development follows a natural order, beginning with basic reflexes and gradually advancing to complex skills like motor patterns, language, and reasoning. A strong foundation in movement and sensory experiences is essential for all higher learning.

Learning is not something that can simply be transmitted; it's a process of co—creation. Children grow through social interactions, problem—solving, and revisiting experiences, which helps build new neural pathways. To learn effectively, children need to feel safe and engaged, entering a FLOW STATE\* where they can fully immerse themselves in an activity. This state fosters creativity, motivation, and emotional regulation, and is a key aspect of VRUM's work with young audiences.

Latest neurological research confirms intrinsic physiological need for movement which directly influences development of the nervous system. Humans are born with billions of neurons. These neurons form SYNAPTIC\* connections that grow and rewire throughout life, beginning IN UTERO\* and intensifying after birth. The most rapid growth occurs during infancy and early childhood. Neuroplasticity — the brain's ability to rewire itself — enables us to learn from our environment and adapt our behaviors.

Each time we learn something new, our brain forms new connections, creating memories and encoding learning experiences into who we are.

# ARTISTIC LANGUAGE or THE POETIC UNIVERSE OF EARLY THEATER

Creating for young children requires simplicity and presence, like a straight line, yet must also be complex and varied. With small children, it's essential to ensure time and space aren't stretched too far. We're not here to fill them like empty vessels, but to ignite their joy in being alive.

Children, like adults, want to share their thoughts on love, loneliness, day and night, the sun and stars, shadows, fears, beauty, and the moon — themes of a poet.

Babies experience the world much like adults perceive abstract dance and music. They absorb colors and shapes, recognizing abstract qualities like form, intensity, and symmetry. Babies notice the SYNCHRONICITY\* between their movements and others', while their developmental goal is to form deep bonds with living beings. The child explores the richness of the everyday world, noticing patterns and delighting in the repetition that mixes the familiar with the new, gradually expanding their understanding.

Babies understand a pre-verbal language; they respond to their senses, physical needs, and emotions. Thought and speech come later. Our task is to embrace their varied expressions, from nonsensical sounds to music, rhythm, and movement. We want to mirror their insatiable curiosity, offering them emotion, poetry, and close company.

Before language, we communicate through movement, facial expressions, sounds, and energy. We all want to express ourselves. For artists, this need is especially strong, often taking form without words. Artists and small children share the same language — a nonverbal language of sounds, movements, shapes, and rhythms. Performing for the very young requires going straight to the essence!

"The internal, subjective domain lies outside of consciousness and cannot be verbalized. It appears in contemplative states, emotions, and in the perception of art designed to evoke feelings beyond words."

DANIEL STERN

# THE UNPREDICTABLE or EMBRACING THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

Bringing young children to the theater invites unpredictability. As adults, we may not know what to expect or how to respond to a child's reactions. It's about being fully present, not controlling.

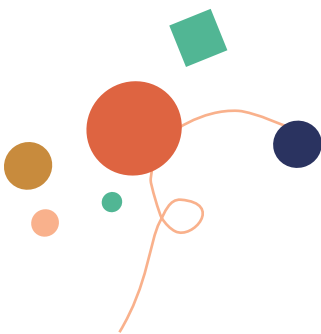
¶We step into a new space, where the senses take over, letting us know if we should stay or leave. Babies, in our arms, experience this through us. Even before the performance begins, our bodies and subconscious are already reacting, and we wait expectantly.

¶We enter the performance space seeking something; otherwise, we'd stay home. ¶We want the experience, and the child senses when adults are open, curious, and engaged. Yet, the child hasn't chosen to be here — they weren't asked. This places a responsibility on adults. They must stay present and connected, rather than passive while expecting the opposite from the child. The experience must be shared, creating a **RESONANCE\*** of feeling that promotes solidarity and allows us to be affected by the moment. This often means adults must let go of their expectations or desires and embrace intimacy, the unconscious, and the basic urges that connect us all — what we call "that there is."

16 "That there is" is a connection with the child that remains with us all throughout life, a universal bond.

As adults, we must question our assumptions, stay open to unexpected moments, and embrace complexity without the need for logical explanations.

By doing so, we enter a poetic universe that reveals new ways of understanding, allowing children to bring us back to "That there is", the essence of being human.



# BEST PRACTICE TO GUIDE ADULTS IN THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF THEATER FOR BABIES

## BE PRESENT AND OPEN

Stay engaged and curious,  
your attention inspires the  
child's interest.

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## EMBRACE THE MOMENT

Share in the child's experience  
and let it affect you.

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## FOLLOW THE CHILD'S CUES

Respond to signs of discomfort,  
excitement, or calm.

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## CREATE A SAFE SPACE

Show warmth, patience, and  
make the child feel secure.

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## MODEL CURIOSITY

Your interest sparks the  
child's engagement.

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## STAY AVAILABLE

Be close, yet allow the child  
space to explore.

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## ENCOURAGE GENTLE INTERACTION

If invited, let the child explore.

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## RESPECT SILENCE

Let children experience silent  
moments, without filling them.

ALLOW NATURAL  
ENGAGEMENT

Let the child engage at  
their own pace.

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STAY FULLY PRESENT

Keep phones and conversations  
aside; children notice when  
we're truly attentive.

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HONOR AUTHENTIC  
REACTIONS

Welcome and accept each child's  
unique responses.

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BE AN ACTIVE  
PARTICIPANT

Theater for babies invites  
everyone to engage.

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RELEASE EXPECTATIONS

Approach without specific  
outcomes in mind.

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RESPOND WITH  
SENSITIVITY

Remain calm and balanced in  
your responses.

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WELCOME FLEXIBILITY

Embrace spontaneity over rigid  
expectations.

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TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Allow a moment to process and  
unwind after the performance.

# ARTISTS DIARIES or WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

For me this work is truly special. Inspired by my son, who was one year old in 2011, to create the piece *Baja Buf* working with young audiences has been both exciting and enriching. Recently, watching *Baja Buf* as a spectator, I was struck by the chaotic, creative energy of these little humans. I laughed, was moved, and felt deeply connected as I saw how the children interacted with the dancers, other kids and the space.

It's always a gift when people share special moments with us, whether it's discovering a new side of their child or witnessing their first steps during a performance.

TILL  
FRÜHWALD  
performer

I've always been captivated by the way children see the world — their pure curiosity, their openness, and the way they fully immerse themselves in each moment. There's something so beautifully transparent about the way they navigate life, and as a dancer and creator, I find a deep resonance between this childlike wonder and the essence of artistic expression. Since becoming a mother, this connection has grown even more vivid for me. Movement, much like breath, is one of the first languages we know — it's primal, instinctual. For me, creating dance for the very young feels like a return to that first language, a form of communication that bypasses words and touches something more essential. It's a way of reconnecting with the

GAT  
GOODOVITCH  
PLETZER  
performer

core of our humanity, and in those moments, I feel not only deeply connected to my own body but also to the shared experience with the audience.

When I design a space and costumes for a project, it almost always begins with a feeling. A feeling like an atmosphere, a kind of longing for a sensory experience that works like an open question. Often, this feeling connects to a specific childhood memory: the orange light you see when you close your eyes and face the sun, the sensation of sitting in grass taller than yourself, the peculiar coolness of tassels on pigskin lampshades — each carrying the magic of childhood discovery.

Spaces, clothing, and objects are the next layers, the things we surround ourselves with, constantly interacting and exchanging with us. For me, they are always carriers of sensory experience.

This is the first time I am creating a space and costumes for a project for — or rather with — such a young audience. What a wonderful opportunity to learn from the true experts of perception. I am fascinated by the directness and curiosity with which babies connect with their surroundings. It seems they are always doing exactly that — "connecting" — and always in their own unique way.

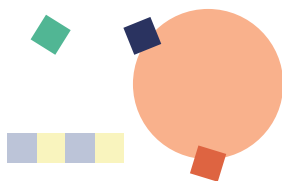
PIA GREVEN  
stage and costume  
designer

As an artist and human being, I find joy in sharing the wonder and curiosity that young audiences bring with them (often alongside their watchful parents or other adults). When they step into my world — a 'garden' of surreal ideas, vivid emotions, playful absurdities, and concrete dreams — they immediately feel at home, letting their curiosity flow and engaging in a shared language of looks, sounds, smells, and playful exploration. These little ones, so naturally fearless, dive in as explorers, even at this

SANJA  
FRÜHWALD  
performer

early stage of life. In these beautiful, intense moments, adults find themselves freed from everyday concerns and routines, reconnecting with a sense of joy, surprise, and common understanding.

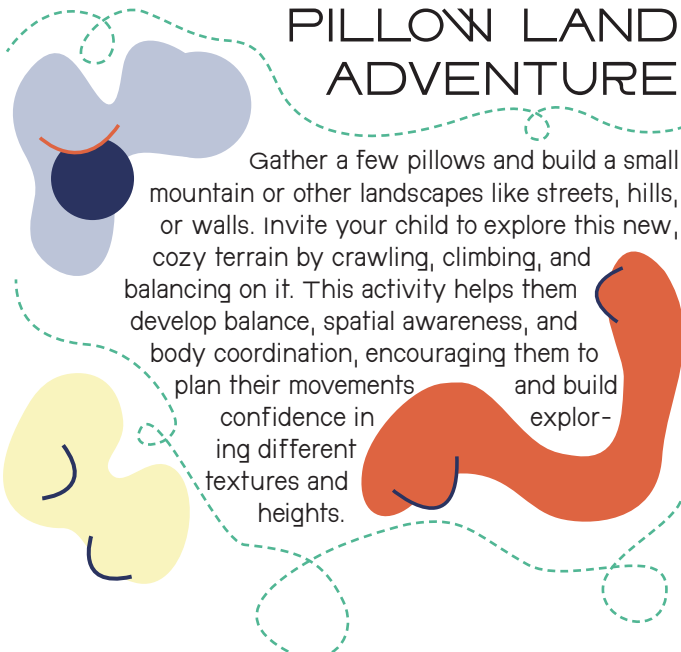
I'm deeply grateful to meet this remarkably attentive audience, whose presence is always 'in the moment': fully being, thinking, and most importantly, feeling. The richer this artistic dialogue becomes, the more vibrant my 'garden' grows. Focusing on the unique connections with these young ones, instead of on age gaps, only deepens my curiosity and enriches the experience.



# TIPS & TRICKS


— ACTION  
OR FUN  
IDEAS TO  
DO WITH  
YOUR KIDS 23

## PILLOW LAND ADVENTURE



Gather a few pillows and build a small mountain or other landscapes like streets, hills, or walls. Invite your child to explore this new, cozy terrain by crawling, climbing, and balancing on it. This activity helps them develop balance, spatial awareness, and body coordination, encouraging them to plan their movements and build confidence in exploring different textures and heights.

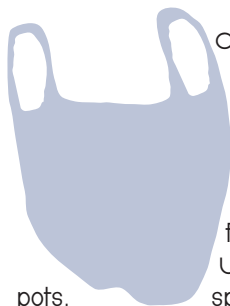
## MIRROR PLAY



Sit with your baby in front of a big mirror, allowing both of

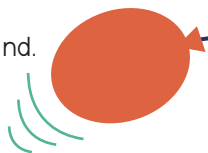
you to see your reflections. Begin by copying your baby's movements, observing their reactions. Once they understand the game, switch roles and encourage them to mimic your actions. Try varying rhythms, facial expressions, and using different body parts. You can also add some distance to introduce them to the concept of space and depth, enhancing their spatial awareness and connection to their environment.

# HOMEMADE MUSIC MAKERS



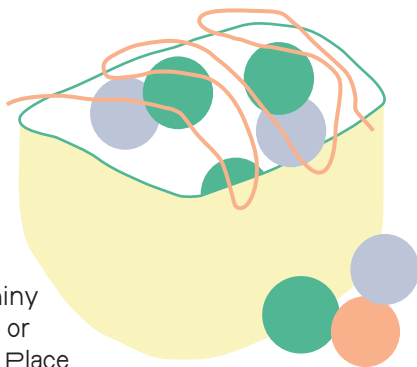
Create simple instruments with your child using recycled materials. Try filling plastic bottles with dry lentils or rice for shakers, or add water (colored with food dye if you like) for a soft, swishy sound.

Use crinkled paper, plastic bags, pots, spoons, or tie two balloons to a rope for other sounds. Introduce each "instrument" one at a time, letting your child explore. Once all are presented, play and compose rhythms together, encouraging creativity and a love for sound.



## WEB BASKET

**Gather Materials:** Grab a laundry basket, some small toys or objects (like balls, cubes, or shiny items), and a long rope or string. **Fill the Basket:** Place various objects inside the basket, making sure they're easy for your child to grab. **Create the Web:** Take the rope and weave it in and out of the basket's holes, crisscrossing in different directions until you create a "web" over the objects. **Challenge Time:** Encourage your child to reach through the rope web to pull out the objects, working on their problem-solving and fine motor skills. **Play and Enjoy:** Watch as they navigate the challenge of freeing each item!



# SOUND AND MOVEMENT PLAY

Expose your child to various types (genres) of music and let them move as they feel (tip — let the child lead the movement). Hear the rhythm and react spontaneously to its beat. Everything is possible. Explore also sounds that bodies can create (clapping, stomping, patting, clicking, whistling, yelling, whispering, snoring...) or sounds of your environment — percussion on various surfaces with palms or with cardboard drumsticks (they are not too loud). Experiment with the sounds of nature — clapping sticks, tapping rocks, rustling leaves — and move in response to the sounds created.



# HOMEMADE SENSORY PLAYDOUGH (RECIPE)

INGREDIENTS	
1 CUP all—purpose flour	1 TABLESPOON vegetable oil (or coconut oil for added softness)
1/4 CUP salt	1 CUP water
2 TEASPOONS lemon juice or white vinegar	* Food coloring (optional) * Essential oils (optional, for scent)

1. **MIX DRY INGREDIENTS** → In a medium saucepan, mix the flour, salt, and lemon juice until well combined.
2. **ADD WET INGREDIENTS** → Add the water, oil, and a few drops of food coloring if desired.
3. **COOK OVER LOW HEAT** → Stir the mixture over low heat. It will start to thicken and form a dough. Keep stirring until it pulls away from the sides and forms a ball.
4. **COOL AND KNEAD** → Remove from heat and let the dough cool for a few minutes. Once cool, knead it for a couple of minutes until it's smooth.
- \* **ADD SCENTS (Optional)** → For a sensory boost, add a drop or two of child—safe essential oils like lavender or chamomile.
5. **STORE** → Store in an airtight container, and it will last for weeks!



## BAREFOOT WALKS AND SENSORY AWARENESS

Walking barefoot on different surfaces — grass, dirt, sand, and leaves — enhances sensory awareness, connecting children with various textures and temperatures.



## TOUCH AND SMELL SCAVENGER HUNT

Prompt children to find textures (soft moss, rough bark) and scents (pine needles, damp earth), helping them tune into nature's sensory layers.

# GLOSSARY\*

**BAJABUFING** — an active experience offered in Baja Buf, an interactive, non-verbal performance for babies, created by VRUM p.a.c.

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**FLOW STATE** — a condition where a person becomes fully absorbed in an activity, often losing awareness of time and external distractions. In this state, skills and challenges are balanced, creating intense focus, enjoyment, and often peak performance. Also known as a sense of "being in the zone"

\*

**HOLISTIC** — an approach that considers the whole system or individual, focusing on all aspects — physical, mental, emotional, and social — rather than individual parts in isolation

\*

**IMMERSIVE** — an experience that fully engages one's senses, making them feel absorbed or deeply involved in an environment, often creating a sense of presence within that experience

\*

**INCLUSIVE** — practices, spaces, or approaches that ensure equal access, opportunity, and support for people of all backgrounds, abilities, and identities, making everyone feel respected and valued

\*

**IN UTERO** — referring to the period of fetal development inside the uterus before birth

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**KINESTHETIC EMPATHY** — the ability to participate in someone else's movement or sensory experience, often creating a shared feeling of connection through bodily resonance

\*

**MIRROR NEURONS** — a type of neuron in the brain that enables us to imitate behaviors and understand the actions of others through empathy and mimicry

**MOTOR SYSTEM** — includes the brain, spinal cord, and muscles, coordinating voluntary and involuntary movements. It enables actions ranging from simple reflexes to complex tasks and is influenced by sensory information and cognitive processes

\*

**MULTISENSORY** — experiences that engage multiple senses at once, enhancing perception and understanding

\*

**PERCEPTION** — the process of organizing, understanding, and interpreting sensory data to make sense of the world

\*

**SYNAPTIC** — anything related to synapses, the junctions between neurons where communication occurs

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**SYNCHRONICITY** — meaningful coincidence of events or experiences that are not causally related but seem to be related in a significant way

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**SENSORY RECEPTORS** — specialized cells that detect specific sensory stimuli—like light, sound, or touch—and convert them into electrical signals sent to the brain for interpretation

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**SENSORY SYSTEM** — includes organs and receptors that detect and process sensory information (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, proprioception, vestibular sense and interoception), enabling us to perceive and interact with our environment, influencing our responses and emotions

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**RESONANCE** — the sense of depth and connection created within us, often stirring something deeply familiar or meaningful. It can feel amplified or echoed emotionally, creating a lasting, impactful experience

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**THE FUTURE MAP** — an online repository of hope created by VRUM Performing Arts Collective, hosting additional resources, insights, and updates on their work

# LIBRARY

Evolve your brain, the science of changing your mind / Dr. Joe Dispenza

Sensory integration and the child / Anna Jean Ayres

The Interpersonal World of the Infant / Daniel Stern

The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life / Alison Gopnik

Theater for Early Years, Research in Performing Arts for Children from Birth to Three / Wolfgang Schneider

Child's Play: A Postdramatic Theatre of Paidia for the Very Young / Ben Fletcher-Watson

From Cradle to Stage: How Early Years Performing Arts Experiences Are Tailored to the Developmental Capabilities of Babies and Toddlers / Ben Fletcher-Watson

Youth Theatre Journal / Toward a Grounded Dramaturgy: Using Grounded Theory to Interrogate Performance Practices in Theatre for Early Years

/ Ben Fletcher-Watson

Youth Theatre Journal / The infant audience: the impact and implications of child development research on performing arts practice for the very young / Rachel C Drury and Ben Fletcher-Watson

Journal of Early Childhood Research / Babydrama — an artistic research report / Suzanne Osten

From Children's Perspectives: A Model of Aesthetic Processing in Theatre / Jeanne Klein

Seen and Not Heard: Participation as Tyranny in Theatre for Early Years / Ben Fletcher-Watson

Baby Diaries / Daniel Stern

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience / Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach  
Advanced Reflections / Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, George Forman

SPACE FOR  
THOUGHTS AND  
IDEAS