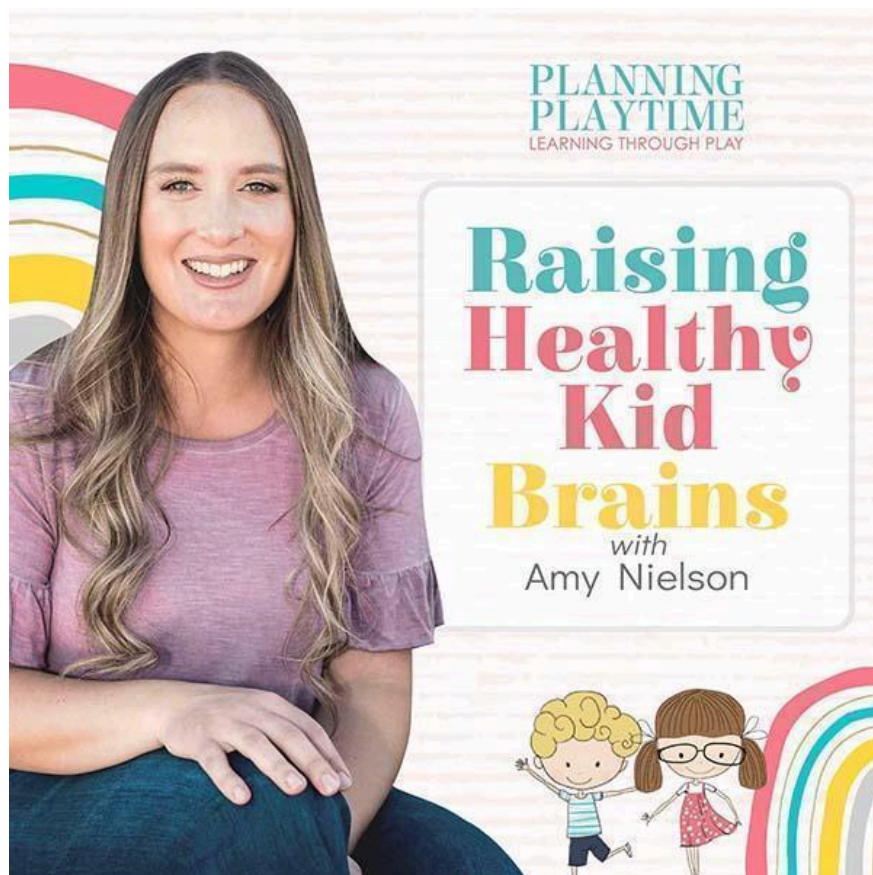


## Ep #111: Boost Your Child's Attention, Memory, and Confidence: Understand Sensory Learning with Dr. Christina Bretz



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Amy Nielson**

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Do you ever feel like you have a child that just can't sit long enough to focus? Like you've tried everything: calm voices, sticker charts, maybe a little bit of bribery, and they still squirm, wiggle, or shut down when you're pulling out learning activities or trying to do learning time. What if the problem isn't that they're not paying attention? What if it's that we're asking their brain to learn in a way that is different than is optimal?

For years, we've been taught that focus looks like sitting still, that learning happens best sitting at a desk with quiet hands and feet, but the research and real-world experience is telling a bit of a different story. Kids need movement. They need sensory input, and without it, their brains are actually working harder to just keep up.

And that's why I'm so excited about this conversation today with Dr. Christina Bretz. She's a pediatric occupational therapist with over 2 decades of experience. She's also the senior professional learning manager at Learning Without Tears and a true expert in how multisensory learning unlocks everything from handwriting to emotional regulation.

This episode is so great. It's for people with sensory sensitivities, but it's also for every child. And in this episode, we talked about what's really going on in the brain when kids are distracted or can't sit still, how sensory learning boosts attention, memory, and confidence for all children, why movement and touch aren't disruptions (they're a pathway to deeper learning), and simple ways to bring more sensory strategies into your home or classroom starting today.

If you've ever wondered why traditional learning strategies maybe aren't working for a child you're working with or why your students thrive when they're up and moving, this episode will connect the dots for you and give you tools that you need and some ideas to get started today. So let's dive in. It's coming up right after this.

Welcome to the *Raising Healthy Kid Brains* podcast, where moms and teachers come to learn all about kids' brains, how they work, how they learn, how they grow, and simple tips and tricks for raising the most resilient, kind, smart,

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compassionate kids we can. All while having lots of grace and compassion for ourselves, because, you know what? We all really need and deserve that, too. I am your host, Amy Nielson, let's get ready to start the show.

Christina, welcome back to the show. We're so happy to have you here.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here.

Amy: We get to talk about something really fun today, and I think this one's such a good one because, oh, there's so much in here we can do. But before we get all the way into it, can you just kind of talk to me about what is sensory learning? Like when we're talking about sensory learning, what is it? And then why is it important, especially in early childhood?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Oh, goodness. For our young children, sensory learning is so important because when we think about sensory learning, think about our senses. Think about touch and smell and hearing and movement. And all of those things are happening in a good pre-K classroom, right?

So we want children to be able to with all those different learning styles to be able to be learning in a multisensory environment so that the brain is really stimulated when all of that learning occurs. And that's why multisensory learning is so important for our young children on up, but especially for our little ones.

Amy: So is it helping like actually build stronger or more connections in the brain because we're using multiple senses? Is that part of this?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yes, exactly. And it really is firing those synapses in the brain, especially even our reading circuits in the brain with all the different sensory learning that's happening with our young children.

Amy: Mmm. Is this something that we need to do even like before preschool, or is this just something we're kind of focusing on at preschool age? What age group are we talking about that this is healthy for?

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Dr. Christina Bretz: I think all ages it's healthy for. Honestly, I see it a lot in the pre-K environment just because when I'm in a pre-K environment, I just see all of this sensory learning happening. But of course with babies, we can have different environments for them. When they're crawling, they may be crawling on carpet versus hardwood. That's sensory learning. That's them putting things, our babies are putting things in their mouth.

That's the way of exploring, right? And that's how they're learning is through that exploration. So being able to provide them with different materials in different sensations and tactile experiences is really important too.

Amy: Mmm. Does it help with memory at all? Like how does that relate with memory?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah, so it can help with memory in the fact of when children are using the different senses and different learning styles, it really does help them with retaining information. So just think about when a child learns a song. If we're talking about Frosty the Snowman with two eyes and that corn cob nose, and those kind of things, they're remembering those lyrics. And then it's actually a good way to help with numbers and to help them with the alphabet too. If we're singing a song about the alphabet, those are ways that that sensory learning is happening with our young children in ways that they're recalling that information.

Amy: Mmm. It's so powerful. I remember one of the first things I had go viral was a project I did with my homeschool kid, and we were doing these skip counting songs to teach multiplication tables to nursery rhyme songs. So everyone already knows the tune, right? It's a very familiar tune. And then we're just putting these series of numbers, right? To a tune. And then people could just memorize them so quickly because they already knew the song. And so they just learned this pattern that went with the music they already knew, and it was just amazing.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah. We do that in our Keyboarding Without Tears program. We have songs to help them with keeping their fingers on the home row. We start that in kindergarten. And there's one song called, "Home, Home on the

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Row.” It is such a cute song to help them to remember. And we all know the tune of “Home, Home on the Range.” And we're singing that, but we've got it to help them with keeping their fingers on the home row. So I think music is something that is so powerful for our young children because they respond so positively to music, and it's a great way to have that recall of information.

Amy: Oh, it's fabulous. I love that one. Okay, let me ask you this question because I think this comes up for people. So often when we hear sensory, we're thinking of a sensory disorder or maybe a sensory sensitivity, things like that, right? Is sensory learning for every child, or just children that have kind of specific needs? Who is this for?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Actually, it's for every child, because when we think about it, when you think of a young child coming into a pre-K classroom, they're all at different varying abilities, right? So it is like, that pre-K teacher, I always said I thought that was the hardest job th

at anyone could have is pre-K and kindergarten because every single child is coming in there with a different level of current abilities. And so we can teach them all where they're at by using multisensory learning and using the sensory learning of—whether it's through hearing songs or whether it's through touching different tactile objects or whether it's through just reading and having them able to just look at the different fonts in the room to be able to understand alphabet recognition, understand that letter is an A versus that letter over there is a B.

So it's a great way to meet children where they're at. We know that kids in pre-K, we've got from one end of the spectrum to the other of different abilities.

Amy: Absolutely. Yeah, for sure. Oh, okay. So I love that and I think, yes, when they're touching it or we're doing air writing, right? And especially I think when we can stack senses with different topics that we're learning, it just builds more and more of those connections, those synapses, right? And we're just strengthening and improving that connection, that—those bonds and helping them learn and retain and be able to recall things, which is so good.

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Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah. And I think another thing, like we use wood pieces. And so we use four wood pieces: a big line, little line, big curve, little curve. That's it to build the capital letters of the alphabet. And I think when you think about that, for a young child to only have to recall four strokes (big line, little line, big curve, little curve), and that can help them to understand the letters of the alphabet and know how to build the letters of the alphabet, it really is helping children of all abilities.

Because one child can be putting those, a big line and a big curve together to make that capital D, while the other child is saying, "Okay, now I'm going to take my finger and I'm going to trace over it, or I'm going to air write it like you were saying. And then saying it. Just saying, how do you make a capital D? Oh, it's a big line, a big curve. How easy is that? It's just—making it simple for children is a way that really helps to promote success with kids at whatever level they're at.

Amy: Oh, I love that so much. It does seem like it just really breaks it down. Like four things, I can handle four things. The 26 letters sometimes seems like a lot, right? I like to learn languages. It's really fun for me. And one of the ones that I got into, my nieces and my sister got me into Korean TV, of all things.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Oh my gosh!

Amy: So Korean is so fascinating because it's an alphabet-based language, but it's a different alphabet. So their letters, if you will, look completely different than ours. And so it's almost like I feel like I'm going through the experience that a child's having with trying to learn a new language. And I know if I can learn all the letters and then figure out how they go together in syllables, then you can sound them out and you can be able to read. And so it's like I'm having this whole experience as an adult, and I'm like, oh, this is hard.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Oh my goodness.

Amy: But if you can learn the different pieces of it, right? It does. Like, oh my gosh, if I could learn like these four strokes and build any letter, how cool is that? Yeah. And so there are, there's like—there's short lines, big lines. It's not exactly



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the same, right? But there are some similarities with Korean letters. Anyway, so I just find it interesting to kind of experience it and like what kids are going through, but as an adult, it's just a new thing.

Let me ask you this. So I know you've done a lot of the Learning Without Tears or the handwriting, things like that. So tell me, I love what you do with the blocks. Tell me, what are some other things you do to bring that multisensory aspect to learning? What are some of the other tricks, tips, ideas that you use?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah. Sure. So one of the things that we use is small crayons. So I think that is one thing when we hear from teachers, "Oh, I have this box of crayons and they're just so small. I just need to throw them away and get that fresh new box of crayons." No, we love those small crayons because when you think about it, those little hands are just so little. And if we put a little tool in that little hand, it's a perfect size, and then they're going to have to pinch to hold it, which is promoting a more mature grasp. So we love to use small crayons. So just think little tools for the little hands.

We also love to use, we call it Roll A Dough, and so it's like dough, almost like Play-Doh with a blue little tray and in there are letter cards, and the children can roll out their big line, roll out their little line, put that right over top of those letter cards to form that letter. So it's a lot of playful learning. There's the Stamp and See Screen that's like, it looks like a Magna Doodle. And the stamps are big line, little line, big curve, little curve. They're magnetic little stamps that they can just stamp right on to form those letters.

So making it again, there's always a purpose to the manipulatives too, which is what I love about the whole program, you know, just to be able to say, okay, well, why are we doing this? Oh, we're doing this to help with alphabet knowledge, or we're doing this to increase fine motor skills.

And that's where that sensory learning comes into because you may have a child that doesn't like to touch the Play-Doh. Okay, well, let's think of other manipulatives that we can use. We could use Wikki Stix, or we could, you know, put some salt in there and they can take their finger over the salt and form those

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letters. So there's lots of different ways that we can adapt activities as well for children too.

Amy: I love that so much. And I think one of the things that becomes so beautiful in this is that, first of all, we can keep it new and fresh, right? Like we just need repetition, right? To build all those connections and get that information in there really good. And so when we can kind of keep it changing a little bit and still like focusing on the same things, it's just so good for kids' brains.

Plus, I think, I love taking something that they didn't really think that this was what it was for, like salt, right? It's not usually used for learning. We do that in the kitchen. And I remember having Dr. Marlene Hiten on, and she talked about hierarchy of memory in the brain, right? And one of the best ways to capture a memory or attention or whatever is to surprise and delight, right? And so this idea of taking something and using it in a way that children are not used to it being used or just surprise them with it, then they're like instant attention, right? You have their attention and you can work on it.

I'll even do my sensory bins; I'll do ice cream sprinkles. And I just, we just put them back in the bag and re-use them over and over again. You can get big bags on Amazon or whatever, right? And change it up too. Like some days we're using our finger, other days we might use a paintbrush or just all the different ways that you talked about. I love the doodle thing with doing the magnets, the Magna Doodle. That's amazing. How fun is that?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Definitely. Yes. And another one that I love is we have these ABC Touch & Flip Cards. So on one side is an animal, and on the other side is the letter, but the letter has that different texture to it. So I do a lot of crayon rubbing with that. You know, just put that paper over top of that and have them cra—but it's again, it's that element of surprise. Like, what letter is this? Let's turn it over.

Oh, it is an A for an alligator, you know, and they're building it because they're building like an alphabet puzzle, but then they can flip it over and they're able to see that letter and it is that element of surprise for them. So it's really another



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way to engage their senses, to support their learning, and support their development. And that's really what sensory learning is all about.

Amy: Mmmm. So good, and it's like making these connections with real world things. So they're kind of getting that play and growing. Oh, I love it. So good.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yes, yes. Play and learning. That's what they need to be doing in pre-K.

Amy: Let me ask you this because we have a lot of parents and we have a lot of teachers that listen to our show. We also have a lot of parents. So for a parent that's at home with a preschooler or a young child, what suggestions do you have for them if they don't have maybe all the resources they have in a school, what's something that they could use at home?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Oh, that's a great question. There's so many things that you can use at home. First, do you mean just to teach letters? Or anything?

Amy: Yeah, just like some sensory, what are some sensory things in their home that they could use for learning? Maybe letters, maybe math, but you know, just something simple that they could be working on at home.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Sure. So some of the things that they can work on is just by taking shaving cream. And I would put it in a cookie sheet, but standing there next to them or sitting next to them and making sure that they're forming it correctly, not, you know, starting at the top and just doing that top to bottom, left to right directionality is so good to do.

Because we have so many children that want to start at the bottom, but if you can teach them to start at the top and go top to bottom, left to right, that's really going to help them with getting those foundational skills. So I would say shaving cream is a good one. I've also used spaghetti, you know, just pasta. Like cook the pasta and have them form letters with that. I mean, that's an easy one to do.

Amy: How fun is that? I've never done cooked pasta. I've done like hard pasta, but cooked pasta. That's genius.

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Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah, cooked pasta is a good one to do. Yes.

Amy: And it's a little slimy or sticky. It can feel the texturing going on. Mmm. This is fun. And you could even use scissors to cut it to like get it to the right shapes. You're getting some like fine motor and hand strength.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Exactly. Yeah. And I've actually taken like pieces of paper and I'll just like outline a letter and then they've got to take the cooked pasta and form that letter on the piece of paper. It's so easy and, you know, an easy way to make it fun for kids. Another one is just putting hair gel in a Ziploc bag and then put that letter underneath the hair gel and they're forming that over top of the Ziploc bag. They love to do that as well.

Amy: That's a super fun one.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah. And then ways that you can teach numbers is maybe even at dinner time. Think about the ways you can teach. Like if they're eating a sandwich, just cut the sandwich into a triangle and have them bite off the three corners and let's talk about 1, 2, and 3. Let's talk about the shape of our sandwich. Let's talk about what are the colors in our sandwich. There's so much that we can do just in learning throughout the day of what we maybe take for granted, but it can also be a sensory learning experience for kids too.

Amy: Yeah, for sure. And I think they enjoy cooking, at least my children do for the most part. And then there's so much learning that happens because they're having to read, and then we're doing measurements and teaspoon versus tablespoons, and why is one capital and lowercase, and all the different things.

And then, oh my word, fractions, right? And it's so interesting because we wouldn't normally introduce kids to fractions until much, much later, right? But when you're cooking, it becomes just this really easy concept. They kind of have to learn really quickly, right?

And then I always go to try to help them figure out, okay, because kids love candy. So I would say, all right, if we had, your Halloween candy and we got this many candies, and I want everyone to have an equal amount in our—you know,

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there's eight kids at our house. And so like they have to figure out how they're going to split it up between the different or with so many people, you know, I'm going to choose these three kids, they're get, you know.

Anyway, so they get to kind of process this idea in a form where it's not, here's a math problem, look at this and solve it. It's just like, what would I do if I had this many things and I was—anyway, but then they get to play with the food while they do it. And then they want to come and do it with chocolate chips or whatever we're baking with because they love to be touching, that touch is such an important thing and they get to feel it and do it. It's so great.

Dr. Christina Bretz: And you're helping them with sharing, which is such a key concept that we want them to learn about at a young age. So that in itself, like is a great way to help with fractions. We're going to share equally, but how are we going to share this equally with each other?

Amy: Yeah, so good. Oh, isn't it so cool how like things can just, you're getting some of social emotional learning, you're doing all the things in there all at once.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yes, most definitely. Yes, yes. It's great.

Amy: Let's talk about what are some signs maybe because, you know, this is really good for, we want to kind of try to bring these things in. But what are some signs that maybe there are some challenges or some struggles with sensory processing? Is there something we should be watching out for around that?

Dr. Christina Bretz: I think just watching the children as they're participating in the different multisensory activities. Are they kind of tactile defensive with some certain textures, or is it hard for them to play with another child together in a social setting or in the classroom? Are they able to share with one another?

Those are kind of the things that I would be looking at just to make sure that children are boosting that engagement and being able to participate with each other. If that's something that you see as a concern, then I would talk to your pediatrician and see what they say about that. Like, what is it that they're seeing that is a difficulty and then talk to the pediatrician.

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Amy: Yeah. Okay. So I'm going to ask you a question. For those of us that don't know the term tactile defensive, can you tell us what that would look like?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yes. Sure. So that's if you have the shaving cream out and the child puts their finger on it and they come back real quick and like, "Nope, I'm not going to touch that." So it becomes to where they are not going to participate in that activity because they don't like the feel.

And if that's happening over and over or you're seeing some sort of commonality with that, like, "Oh, they're constantly, they don't want to pick up things, they don't want to touch that. They start screaming when they're going to touch certain things." Those are things that you want to, okay, let's, let's take a look at this and see what's going on and let's talk to the pediatrician and see if they have any suggestions too.

Amy: Interesting. Okay. So I'm sitting here and I'm thinking like the image that came into my head. I remember I was at the park and I was a college student, but I was there with my older siblings and they had their little kids and we're at this park and they have their new baby and they're like putting him down towards the grass and as soon as his feet would touch the tops of the blades of grass, they would just pull them right up and like try not to touch. And it was—it was so funny. But it was just like something like that.

And then I'm thinking myself like, I really like don't like peach fuzz. Like I think about peach fuzz or I'm like doing, I actually grow peaches, but like I'm thinking about canning them and it's just like I start getting goosebumps. Like I'm getting goosebumps thinking about it right now. Like that sort of thing. So is it normal to have some kind of like some sensory things that kind of just are like an ick factor or something for you? And is that something to worry about? Or is it just kind of like this repetitive thing you're talking about where you're seeing patterns of it with different

Dr. Christina Bretz: Oh, definitely. Yeah, if you're seeing patterns, that's when I would start to say, well, maybe we need to look at this a little bit more. We all have something sensory. You know, we all have some sort of sensory—

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Amy: Maybe discomfort. [crosstak]

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah, discomfort is a great word to use. Yes. And you know, we all have it, whether it's putting dishes in the dishwasher and we don't like the clanking of that.

Amy: Or chalkboard scratching.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah, or hearing someone eating too loud. There's things like that and we get through our day and we're able to function throughout our day, but there's sometimes where children hear those things and it just, it's too much. And so what are ways that we can help them be able to still function in this world, but also be able to cope with those, or what other modifications do we need to make if that's happening.

But really one-off type things we're okay with. You know, it's more of if we're seeing more of a pattern and things that are really having that distress in their lives, that we want to see about helping with that.

Amy: Yeah, okay, that's so good to know because I think we all hear this and we're like, "Oh, no. Do we have a thing, you know? Do I need to look into this?" So it's always good to just be like, okay, is this like normal, not normal? Like where am I on the curve, right?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Right. Right. Yes. Yes.

Amy: Okay. So let me ask you this question because we kind of live in a world of screens, and what is the impact of screens and screen time on historically what has been like sensory learning? What are your thoughts on that?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah, I think screen time has really decreased the fine motor skills of children because when the iPad came out, children started to go to the iPad and just swiping, and now they're not manipulating objects. Now they're not taking those puzzle pieces and putting those puzzles together or the ball that has the different shapes and they would have to put those shapes into that ball. Those are things that are helping with our visual skills. Those are helping with

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our touch, our tactile skills or our fine motor skills, and just the sensory. That's sensory play right there.

So we really started to see a decrease in fine motor skills when children were on screens. It's such an importance to have that sensory play to aid in their development. If that's been taken away and they're just looking at a screen, it's not helping with their development. And, you know, that's what we see.

So I think it's fine motor. It's how children are interacting with one another because when we're doing some sensory play, even if we're doing say finger paint at a table, we're socializing, we're talking, we're laughing, or we're sharing different color paints with each other. But if we're on a screen and we're just sitting there looking at the screen, think of all those sensory activities that are being taken away from a child because they're just focused on what's in front of them and not on what's happening with the world around them.

Amy: Yeah. Oh, so good. It's hard because it feels like some of these apps are so good at kind of bringing in things that we thought that, you almost feel like you're doing a lot of it because they have puzzles and they have learning activities and they—and you're like, this is good. We're doing lots of learning. And yet, just because of that part where it's isolating them from working with people and because it's really decreasing sensory input, it could really be challenging their proper development and growth.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Definitely. I mean, if we just think about a puzzle, like you said, doing this puzzle on a screen where we're just using one finger, we're using our dominant hand, our pointer finger, and we're just moving that puzzle piece from one end of the screen to the other, instead of actually feeling that puzzle piece and, you know, taking it and feeling the different corners, and then we can talk about the different shapes.

And so they're feeling those shapes of that puzzle piece, that is a way of them being able to learn at a young age, their shapes, their colors. That activity is really stimulating so many senses and stimulating the brain in so many ways.



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Amy: I think about too, what are you hearing, what are you seeing, what are you touching, all these different senses. Puzzles, we get very into puzzles around here. So it's like a winter thing because winter is not my favorite, all right? So in the summer and spring and fall, we just go outside every evening, right? And just hang out. In the winter, it's cold. So we set up a puzzle table and we just do puzzles all winter.

But yeah, when I'm thinking about that, we are like teaching kids how to like, we're talking them through it because they can get like, we do hard puzzles, you know? There's like, you know, sometimes 2000 pieces, whatever. We do tricky ones. We get a subject matter they like, like donuts or Jolly Ranchers or something fun because then they're a little more motivated.

But then we have to talk about different ways of critical thinking. How would we sort through this, right? And then they have to practice that. Okay, I'm looking for colors. All right, we know there's this piece, but we're looking for pieces that this would fit into and we know based on it having these three pieces on these three sides, it's going to have to go into somewhere that fits with this. And all of that stuff.

And we're talking, we're working together. There's cooperation happening and there's the touch and there's all these different elements that happen. And I think if you just have a puzzle on a screen, there's some of that maybe, but you're missing so much of the experience around just solving a puzzle.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah, think of all that social emotional learning that's happening with one puzzle at your puzzle table. I mean, there's a lot that's going on and just the language development too.

Amy: Right.

Dr. Christina Bretz: I mean, there's so much like a puzzle can support a lot of language development that's happening.

Amy: I'm like puzzles are really good. I'm so glad we got into puzzles.

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Dr. Christina Bretz: Puzzles are great.

Amy: But I think that connection too, like there's that connection. So there's so many pieces.

Mmm. Yeah. Okay. So for kids that like are finding maybe sensory learning, do you find that kids are resistant to it at all or do most of them kind of enjoy it? I feel like my kids get pretty excited when we're bringing sensory stuff in when we're playing with mud or fake mud and worms and doing. I mean, it's like you can just add it to almost any like other learning activity you're doing and it makes it way more fun and interesting. But do you ever find that there's kids that are a little bit resistant to it? Like, or maybe even parents are resistant to it because it's like mess. We don't want to mess. Yeah.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yes. Yeah. I think, you know, I think that it depends on the child and it depends on that parent too, because we know sensory play, it provides a lot of fun for kids. But there are children that may not like the songs, but like the messy, you know, playing in the dirt. So I think it's just finding out which kind of sensory play your child likes and what they find that is making it fun for learning too.

And just understanding how they react to those different sensory play activities. So once you see that, "Oh my goodness, my child just loves to dance and to sing and so let's start saying some nursery rhymes and doing those songs and that's really going to help to support that brain development."

Or my child really likes to play in the mud. So let's get some kinetic sand and we'll use that to work our hands. or I use a lot of the Roll A Dough with kids from Learning Without Tears because they just love it. We put different little pennies in there or we put little objects in there that they have to pull out and find. Again, that element of surprise to find too.

Amy: I love it so much. Okay, kind of getting to the end here, but I had this question come up. I'm so curious around this. Is there any benefit to also

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exposing them? So we talked about finding, you know, activities that they enjoy and something they connect with.

Is there any value in also giving them exposure to sensory activities that aren't their favorite? So say we have some kids that are like, don't like to get dirty, right? And they might be a dancer, but they don't like to get dirty. So we do a lot of the dancing and the singing and things like that we know they really enjoy and are going to help them. Is there any value in also giving them at least some exposure to some of their sensory activities that are not their favorite?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Oh, yeah. I think so. Because even if it's not their favorite, you're still helping to enhance their skills. You know, you're still helping to—even emotional regulation. You know, that can help too in helping them, like if they're not liking it, "Well, let's think about why are we feeling this way?" And we can start talking about it and then probably helping them to understand that sensory sensitivity that they're experiencing.

And it may be, I mean, every child is different. So one child may have a sensory sensitivity to the mud where another child doesn't. And so it's just their needs may change. That child that's having that sensory sensitivity to mud maybe in a couple weeks will be fine and understand that, "Oh, well, this isn't as bad as I thought it was." It may be just getting them to experience it and to be able to be introduced to it.

And if they're too sensitive to the sound or the touch or the taste or the smell or whatever that sensitivity is, it may be that it could possibly pass and it may be something that will change over time and maybe not. We can at least introduce it and see how they do and then maybe later on introduce it again to see, is this still a sensitivity? But we also want to honor that too. You know, honor the—if it's too much noise or if it's too much of a smell or they don't like that physical contact of certain textures, then we need to honor that and just know that's their personal sensory sensitivity and what that looks like.

Amy: So we provide opportunity and then encourage, but not push. I'm thinking, so I was helping at my stepdaughter's field trip and we were going on this grand

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adventure and the bus broke down. It was crazy. It was all the fun experience with the fourth grade. So we get to this amazing place and it's kind of like this old military fort and we're getting to experience like what it was like in the olden days. And so they were making bricks, right? And so there's mud and we're making bricks out of this clay, right?

Dr. Christina Bretz: Gosh.

Amy: And of course, so I have this group of 13 kids. It was so funny. I'm like, 13 kids, that's a big group as a mom volunteer, right? So anyway, so I have this group of 13 kids and one of my kids is just not going to participate in the making of the clay bricks. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, but it's so fun. You have like the molds and you get to do all the patting and whatever." But of course, you know, we're not going to like push and force.

But I just thought that's, this kind of reminded me of like giving opportunity and inviting and then, and I think almost too, they learn from our like doing it. And if we're modeling, "Oh, this is actually really kind of fun. Ooh, it does feel kind of sticky, but I can always come and like wash my hands after," and just kind of talking through it and normalizing it and making it less scary, but not pushing. Is that kind of maybe what you're talking about a little bit?

Dr. Christina Bretz: I would try that. And then I'd also, I would recommend like even for a parent to start like a journal and when you see those behaviors, just kind of writing it down so then maybe you're able to find out what is triggering that response.

Amy: Oh, interesting. Okay.

Dr. Christina Bretz: Yeah. So that can be, you know, I mean, I think it's great to be able to introduce things and to show children and see if they want to do that because we want it to be more of that child directed, but also recognizing their needs. You know, recognizing where they are. And I think a great way to do that is just by journaling and being able to kind of figure out where those triggers might be.

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Amy: Yeah, so good. Oh, I love it. This has been so, so helpful. Okay, what is like, if you could just like really quick at the end, like one thing you would want our educators to know, our preschool teachers or kindergarten teachers, like if you could just share like one like thought for them around sensory learning, what would it be?

Dr. Christina Bretz: I would say have as many multisensory activities in your classroom to help children with their development. Whether that would be ways of visual activities, so they're seeing letters or they're seeing different printed labels in the classroom or being able to use songs so that they're hearing those different songs and the different tunes of those songs and different smells. That's a big one. Like if you're doing a cooking activity, having those different smells can really be something that's great for children, but then we also have to make sure that we're also meeting the needs of our children wherever they are.

Amy: Oh, so good. Okay, tell us where we can find more information about you if we want to come follow you and learn more about what you do.

Dr. Christina Bretz: That would be great. Yes, so I work for Learning Without Tears and our website is lwtears, L-W-T-E-A-R-S.com and you can find all of our multisensory activities and just our formal handwriting as well as keyboarding and some phonics programs there as well.

Amy: Amazing, amazing. Okay, and we'll link all of that in the show notes as well. Thank you so much for coming on and chatting with me today. It's been such a pleasure to talk with you again.

Christina: Wonderful. Thank you, Amy. I really enjoyed it. I hope you have a great day.

Amy: Thank you.

Christina: Thank you.

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So what this freebie is, I'll tell you, is an amazing alphabet activity that you can start using with your kiddos. And it is based in play and is so fun. You can use dot markers with it. You can use Q-tip painting. You could use circled cereal. There's all kinds of options. You can print it out today and get started. Just head over to [PlanningPlaytime.com/special-freebie](http://PlanningPlaytime.com/special-freebie), and we'll send that to you right away.

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