

2012

Museum of Motherhood: Special Needs Sensory Playgroup



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Description of Group & Contact Information

With the increase of children with special needs in our community, there was clearly an obligation on the part of an institution like the Museum of Motherhood, which is especially interested in the welfare of mothers and their children alike, to provide for their needs. This is therefore the inspiration behind Museum of Motherhood's Special Needs Sensory Playgroup.

In existence since 2011, the group has a two-pronged mission. First, to provide children with special needs a safe place to feel free and unhindered to play and explore with other children with similar needs. Second, to provide mothers with an outlet and safe environment in which to share stories, advice, and general thoughts and feelings about raising children with special needs.

This mission is achieved by furnishing the play area with an array developmentally-appropriate and sensory-sensitive toys, as well as providing experienced facilitators from the Clinical Psychology Masters program of Teachers College, Columbia University during the group to provide some minimal supervision of the children, allowing mothers more of an opportunity to share with each other.

The addition of a sensory swing this November has been especially exciting for all the children. It has been provided on loan generously by a Museum of Motherhood supporter, and has created quite a stir amongst the children of the playgroup! It is highly beneficial for the sensory needs of many children with special needs, with different sensations of pushes and spins under different speeds and with different combinations of children creating a multitude of possibilities for the exploration of sensory experiences for these children. A photo of a familiar scene of children enthusiastically playing on the sensory swing can be found below in the Photo Gallery.

Over the last months, Museum of Motherhood's Special Needs Sensory Playgroup has certainly taken flight. Many more activities are planned to further enrich both our children's and our mothers' experiences, including art therapy workshops, yoga therapy workshops, and music therapy workshops. We hope that you will come join us one day as well!

Group Co-ordinator: Tricia Cooney

Contact E-mail: triciacooney6@aol.com

Special Needs Sensory Playgroup

Our kids are extraordinary! They can crash, play and discover with serious intensity! Sometimes it's hard to find an accepting place where they can play and make friends.

The Sensory/Special Needs Playgroup offers an appropriate environment for children with all disabilities and abilities. Parents and caregivers can trade experiences and chat with the Museum of Motherhood's Family support experts and interns: (note: we offer friendly conversations and suggestions, not professional advice!)



Playgroup best for children 2-6 years and their siblings.

Suggested Donation: \$15 per child/\$5 per sibling.

4-5:30 on Wednesdays
3-4:30 on Sundays

Playgroup features:

- Therapy swing
- Slide
- Water table
- Tunnels and tents
- Arts and crafts
- Ride on bikes and cars



Our mission is to offer support and education in a warm, inviting and safe environment.

Museum of Motherhood
401 East 84th street, (LOWER LEVEL)
New York, NY 10028

Contact the museums front desk:
212.452.9816 or
museumofmotherhood@gmail.com

Or

Sunday group facilitator:
Tricia Cooney 646.483.0564 or
triciacooney6@aol.com



join us in our safe & friendly community space!

Dear _____,

I'm writing on behalf of the Museum Of Motherhood in New York City. As a community gathering place, our mission is to offer support and education to families in a warm, inviting and safe environment.

We are located on the Upper East Side of Manhattan: 401 E. 84th Street (lower level) PH:877.711.MOMS (6667).

We have been hosting a 'Special Needs' playgroup for all ages: 4-5:30pm on Wednesdays and 3-4:30pm on Sundays.

We are writing to invite you to share this information about our groups, community play space, informal support from Teachers College, Columbia University Clinical Psychology interns and our caring staff. In addition we have appropriate sensory play equipment available during our playgroups here.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Meagan Mak

Intern/Volunteer M.O.M.

MOMmuseum.org

You can share the following with your friends, followers and associates:

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On Wednesdays, it is a freeplay playgroup, where children are free to explore and interact with one another in an unstructured environment with all the toys and equipment available in our play area.

On Sundays, depending on the developmental level of the participating children of each week, playgroups will be more or less structured to accommodate the children's needs. However, the general structure of Sunday Playgroups will be as follows:

- 20 minutes each of the following (led by a clinical psychology intern):
 1. Dance, music and movement
 2. Social skills play (taking turns, sharing)
 3. Classroom skills play (circle time, story time)
- With various combinations of the following changing from week to week (these are areas we're looking to explore):
 1. Arts and crafts
 2. Yoga
 3. Art therapy

4. Music therapy
5. Pet therapy
6. Free play

Available toys and equipment:

- Tent with pillows and light-up toys
- Crash pads
- Climbing equipment with a slide
- Dramatic play centers
- Water table
- Tunnel
- Books
- Sensory activities/crafts

In addition to helping our children grow and explore, we also hope that this will provide mothers a safe and inviting place to offer support, share stories, and explore the joys and difficulties of being mothers of children with special needs.

\$15 suggested donation per adult per visit.

You can also buy an annual Museum of Motherhood (\$100 for 8 discounted visits to M.O.M. and special access to certain private events)
<http://www.mommuseum.org/members/>

Sensational Children aged 3-5 and super siblings are welcomed!

When: 4:00-5:30pm every Wednesday & 3:00-4:30pm every Sunday
Where: Museum of Motherhood -401 East 84th ST.

To Register: Tricia Cooney Graf – Email: triciacooney6@aol.com – PH 646.483.0564

IMPORTANT: This is not a drop-off class; all children must be accompanied and supervised by an adult. The playgroup is not intended to replace therapy.

Photo Gallery



























Tips and Techniques for Mothers and Caregivers of Children with Special Needs

1. Improving Communication and Language Skills

- a. Repetition is key!
 - It may seem boring or even redundant to you, but reading the same books again and again, or even repeating the same sound or word over and over again, is very helpful to children and especially children with special needs
- b. Make language and other communicative activities relevant to what your child finds fun and interesting (e.g. Dora, Cars)
 - That will increase motivation and make learning more likely
- c. Make sure the language you use with your child is appropriate to his or her developmental level
 - This is important to ensure that he or she is learning optimally and getting the most out of your communicative transactions
 - E.g. use less words (such as “dog” instead of “say dog”) with children who have minimal language abilities or who are nonverbal

2. Improving Social Skills

- a. Taking turns is a great way to incorporate social skills into a child’s social skills repertoire, it can be easily facilitated by saying “Your turn, my/his/her turn” when your child is playing with a toy
- b. Using toys that your child is interested in to facilitate sharing and social interactions is important
 - Your child will not be motivated to play with others and practice social skills if the toy(s) involved in play is/are not of interest to him or her

- c. Vary the settings in which your child practice social skills (e.g. parks, library, classroom, home, sensory gym, indoor gym, swimming pool, religious center, community center)
 - Again, this will increase motivation by varying the experience and thereby increasing your child's interest
 - This will also generalize good, desirable behavior to multiple settings

3. *Coping with Disruptive Behavior*

- a. Try to do a behavioral analysis of your child's disruptive behavior (i.e. tantrums, repetitive behaviors, aggressive behaviors, acting), which means making a journal of each instance of disruptive behavior describing what happens before, during, and after each incident, including the time, place, and duration in which these incidents take place
 - If a pattern emerges, such as these behaviors often appears when certain toys or people are taken away, then you can make a reasonable assumption that these behaviors are a way of communicating that your child wants those objects/persons
 - Do not reinforce such negative behavior by giving your child the tangible object or attention he or she is looking for, otherwise you will be communicating to your child that negative behavior is an appropriate way to communicate
 - instead, try to encourage your child to ask for the desired object or person by communicating verbally or gesturally (ask him or her to imitate you)
 - Once he or she has asked for the item appropriately, and without negative behaviors, reward with the desired item
- b. Ignoring negative behavior (unless it is dangerous or self-injurious) is one of the best ways to extinguish it, since attention often reinforces and prolongs negative behavior

- c. Give choices: by giving your child a choice between two acceptable behaviors (e.g. put your bike away or put your ball away), you give your child a sense of control, while retaining true control of the situation

4. *Assisting with Sensory Needs*

- a. Spinning, running, and all kinds of physical activities are good for children with special needs, who tend to have special sensory needs
- b. Arm and leg squeezes throughout the day, and especially between work sessions (take 5-10 minute breaks when the child is working), are great for children with sensory needs
 - However, be careful with what each child can tolerate: each child with special needs is unique, and some are much more sensitive to touch than others
- c. Water is excellent for children with sensory needs: going to a splash pad or a wading pool is one of the best options for them!
- d. Don't be afraid to rough house with children with sensory needs!
 - Many of them enjoy rough play very much and it is excellent for their sensory needs, so let yourself go! However, make sure to gauge what is appropriate for your child; again, some children are more sensitive than others, therefore it is essential to find the right or optimal level of pressure for your child
 - If your child is more sensitive, you can try gentler means of touch such as brushing and soft massages
 - A good activity for all children with sensory needs is heavy work, such as moving heavy objects, mopping, pushing a small stroller or rolling backpack with heavier objects inside

Testimonials

“What a great space. It felt safe, grounding and inviting...The colors are calming. There’s a sense of being open, but also a sense that you can do a smaller activity.” – Erica Rooney, Art Therapist