Accessible libraries:
Crafts and Activities

How can you make your programs more inclusive for all participants?

There are many ways to make your crafts and activities inclusive for children with different kinds of disabilities. Whether their disability affects how they move, hold materials, see, hear or perceive their environment, you can create new activities that involve all five senses or adapt old favourites so more kids can join in the fun.

From planning your activity through delivering your program, this guide will walk you through all the steps.

Contents

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1-855-655-2273 or help@celalibrary.ca

CELA Centre for Equitable Library Access

General tips for accessible activities

- Offer help, but don't assume it's needed.
  - Follow the child's lead about the type of help they need, if any.
  - Some children may need more direct help from you, such as repositioning their hand. Always ask first if they are comfortable with hands-on help.
- Allow for lots of time. Participants will work at different paces and the activity may take longer than anticipated.
- Be prepared for mess.
  - Use washable material and have a washing station or bathroom nearby.
  - Provide paint smocks.
- Allow kids to have the option of sitting or standing.
- Encourage the creative process and put less focus on the finished product. This way participants don't have to focus on specific instructions and can participate in a way that works best for them.
- Build in choice by offering a variety of materials so kids can select the ones that are most accessible to them.

- Get creative about the materials that you use.
    - For example, instead of painting with brushes, use large stamps, marbles and balls, or soap bubbles. This is fun for lots of children and more inclusive for those who have difficulty using a paint brush.
- Include tactile crafts whenever possible.
    - Tactile activities are fun for everyone and are more inclusive than flat, paper-based activities.
    - For example, use three dimensional, textured objects to create a nature scene, rather than just paper cutouts and crayons.
- Offer alternatives to paper-based activities such as colouring pages, mazes, and word searches as they may not be accessible to children with vision loss, mobility disabilities, some learning disabilities, or who are neurodivergent.
    - You can adapt some of these activities, especially mazes, for child with vision loss by using puff paint. Trace the lines of the maze with the paint so the child can feel the raised edges and follow the maze's pathway with their fingertip.

Preparing your craft and activity areas

- Make sure that some, if not all, of your tables are wheelchair accessible. Height adjustable tables are particularly useful since not all wheelchairs are the same size.
- Stabilize craft paper or other materials by taping the paper to the table while the child is working on their creation.
- Buy a few pairs of adaptive scissors.
- Put glue into a pot or on a plate and include a brush or stick. This is easier than a squeeze bottle.
- Use trays so that each child's materials stay together.
    - This prevents materials from rolling out of reach or off the table and helps children with low vision keep track of where the materials are in front of them.
- Offer materials in a variety of sizes.
    - Support kids who struggle with fine motor control by providing thicker crayons and paint brushes.
    - Buy or create grips for writing implements. Use foam hair rollers, tennis balls, or 3D printed designs that are available online.

Three different types of accessible scissors.

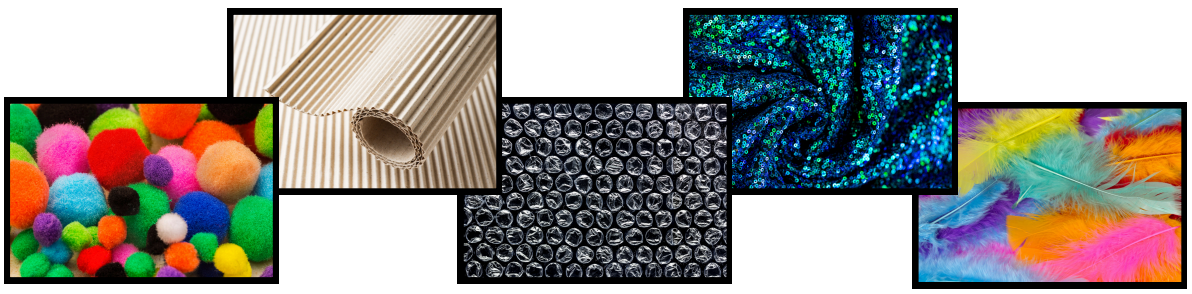
3D printed ball grip. Open source design available from Makers Making Change. You can also make this style of grip using a tennis ball.

Foam grips. You can make a thicker version of this grip using a foam hair roller.

Pointer grip. Versions that support two and three fingers are also available.

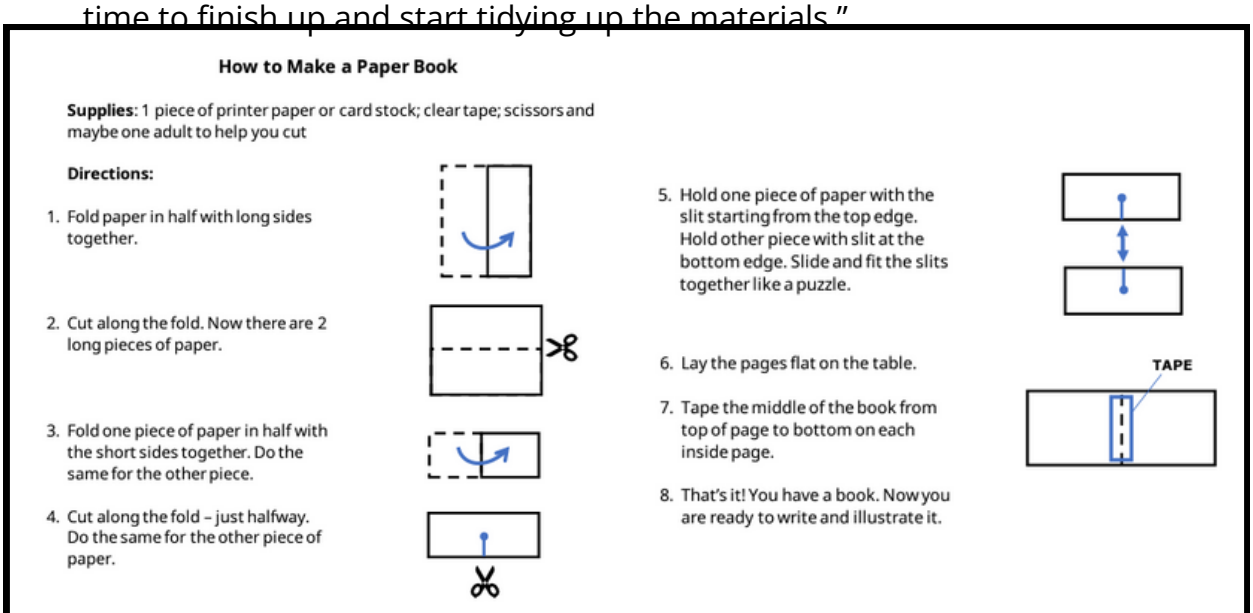
Engage all the senses (Except maybe taste!)

- Use 3D materials like buttons, artificial flowers and leaves, pompoms, pipe cleaners, feathers, and more.
- Incorporate lots of different textures not just the soft, fuzzy ones. Try sandpaper, sequin fabric, bubble wrap, burlap, and corrugated cardboard.
- Use materials that are squishy and malleable.
    - For example, play dough, clay, kinetic sand, and slime.
    - These tactile materials are an accessible option for kids with a variety of disabilities, including vision loss. They are also accessible to some kids with mobility disabilities because they don't necessarily require precise fine motor skills or significant hand and arm movements.
    - Some children, especially those with sensory issues, may not be comfortable with the feel of this type of material. Offering small tools, such as rolling pins, cookie cutters, and scissors, can enable a child to participate without having to touch the material. You can also offer the child a pair of disposable rubber gloves.
- Include shiny things! Lots of children with low vision can see bright colours and shiny, metallic materials.
- Try out materials that can make noise, like crinkly plastics, bells, or crepe paper.
- Be careful using scented materials. They can be fun for some kids but harmful to others.
    - Use un-scented markers for everyday use.
    - Announce ahead of time if you are doing something with lots of heavy scents.



Accessible instructions

- Only give one step at a time. Many children, especially those with learning and developmental disabilities, may have difficulty processing multiple tasks.
- Use clear, descriptive language to explain each step.
    - For example, say “Glue the yellow pompom onto the pointy part of the gnome’s hat.” This is much clearer than saying, “Glue the pompom right here.”
- Demonstrate each step visually.
    - This is helpful for children who are Deaf or hard of hearing, have audio processing disabilities, or otherwise process visual information more comfortably.
- Provide an instruction sheet with instructions written in a clear font, that is at least size 12 points. Also include diagrams.
- Towards the end of the activity, provide multiple updates on how much time is remaining.
    - This is helpful for children who have difficulty with sudden change, transitions, and time management.
    - For example, say something like “Ok everyone, there are ten minutes left. Start thinking about being finished.” And then, “There are five more minutes so it’s time to finish up and start tidying up the materials.”



How to Make a Paper Book

Supplies: 1 piece of printer paper or card stock; clear tape; scissors and maybe one adult to help you cut

Directions:

1. Fold paper in half with long sides together.
2. Cut along the fold. Now there are 2 long pieces of paper.
3. Fold one piece of paper in half with the short sides together. Do the same for the other piece.
4. Cut along the fold – just halfway. Do the same for the other piece of paper.
5. Hold one piece of paper with the slit starting from the top edge. Hold other piece with slit at the bottom edge. Slide and fit the slits together like a puzzle.
6. Lay the pages flat on the table.
7. Tape the middle of the book from top of page to bottom on each inside page.
8. That’s it! You have a book. Now you are ready to write and illustrate it.

Example of simple written instructions with diagrams.

Examples of accessible crafts

Stringing beads

- Offer big beads and beads with larger holes.
- Use a pipe cleaner instead of string to provide more stability and structure.
- Use a large plastic needle on the end of the string to make threading beads easier.

Under the sea tactile scene

- Use a felt panel, rather than a piece of paper, so it is more distinguishable from the table. Adding a raised border around the panel can also help the child identify the edges, especially if the child is blind and working by touch. You can do this using puff paint or by gluing down string.
- Provide a variety of textured materials, such as sandpaper for the ocean floor, sequins and foil material for fish scales and mermaid tails, artificial grass and leaves for seaweed, and small shells.
- This is a great self-directed tactile craft that can easily be adapted to other themes, seasons, holidays, etc.

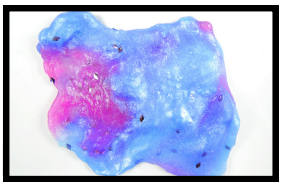
Monster and creature “sculptures”

- Provide a squishy sculpting material, like play dough, salt dough, or air-dry clay. A material that dries hard is better than something like plasticene that does not harden because the decorative materials are more likely to stay in place.
- Offer a wide variety of accent materials that can be used for monster body parts, such as pipe cleaners, googly eyes, feathers, buttons, sequins, popsicle sticks, small clothespins, and more.
- This is a great way to use up leftover craft materials.

Salt dough fossils

- Dough is made using salt, flour, and water. Recipes can be found online.
- Have the children help make the dough.
    - For younger children, offer pre-measured amounts that the kids can pour into the bowl.
    - For older kids, provide measuring cups so that they can measure the ingredients themselves.
    - They can mix the dough with their hands or with spoons.
- Use toy dinosaurs or other creatures to make footprint impressions in the dough. Shells, leaves, or toy insects also make good impressions. You can also press small rocks, twigs, and leaves into the dough to decorate around the impressions.

Squishy bags



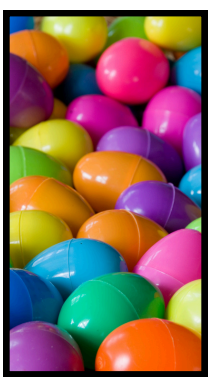
- These are great for neurodivergent kids who benefit from stimming and fidgeting, as well as kids working on developing their hand strength and motor skills.
- In a zipper sealed bag, pour a thick, squishy material, such as clear glue, baby oil, or plain gelatin.
- Add in sequins, beads, glitter, and other small objects.
- Reinforce the edges of the bag with strong tape, such as duct tape, so that the bag doesn't not split open. Using coloured or patterned tape can add another fun visual element.

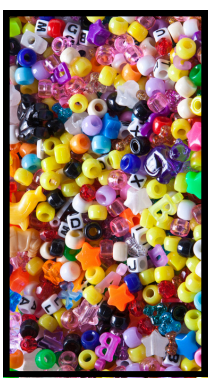
Process-driven and concept-based activities

Activities don't always need a finished product that the child can take home with them. Think of these as "takeaway" activities, rather than "take home" activities. The child is taking away a lesson or a skill instead of taking home a craft.

DIY shakers and sensory bottles

- These are accessible to a range of ages and abilities. They are a great way to engage multiple senses and are a versatile addition to many children's programs, including sensory storytime.
- You can either make the shakers ahead of time or have the children make them with you.
- Shakers can be made in recycled containers, such as water bottles, Pringles cans, plastic eggs, small cardboard boxes, and any other small container that is clean and can be sealed firmly shut.
- Use a variety of different materials in the shakers so that they make different sounds. Examples include beads, gravel, sand, and more.
- If you are using clear containers, such as water bottles, you can also add a thick liquid, such as baby oil, to make a visually interesting sensory bottle. You can add glitter, sequins, and small objects such as shells or small toys.



Tactile literacy activity: Mystery objects

- Place small objects into paper bags, small boxes, or other small opaque containers. Have the children try to identify the objects just by touch.
- This is a great way to help children, especially those with vision loss, develop their tactile literacy, which is the ability to identify objects, shapes, and textures by touch.
- Start off with more easily identifiable objects and things that the children are most likely to encounter in their everyday life, such as a spoon, a zipper, a glove, etc. Then move to more obscure objects.
- You can also do this activity with concepts, like shapes or textures, rather than specific objects. For example, use materials that are rough, slippery, bumpy, hard, soft, etc.

Group activity: Build a city

- Using cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, and other recycled materials, have the group work together to build a city.
- Children can work collaboratively or individually to design buildings, depending on their comfort level in group settings.
- Provide a variety of craft materials for designing the buildings, so that children can select their own materials.