

Benefits of S.M.A.R.T. Activities

Many of the S.M.A.R.T. program activities may appear to be typical of those found in other schools and childcare centers. S.M.A.R.T. developers draw from the latest brain research and a variety of developmental programs and activities in order to create a purposeful, enriching environment. The organized and structured program provides a frequency and intensity of stimulation greater than what occurs routinely in normal child development.



Examples of S.M.A.R.T. activities and the related academic issues addressed are:

Activities:

- **Balance Beams** – used in classrooms and on playgrounds. **Primary purpose:** to encourage balance and body awareness. When a child walks slowly across a balance beam, his/her body is developing balance and learning where it is in space. **Classroom relevance:** Body awareness helps children sit still and remain seated in their chairs. Additionally, this skill leads to understanding one's own left and right and, in turn, having the ability to read from left to right. Children who have problems with body awareness may fall out of their chairs; have a short attention span, reverse letters or words.
- **Rebounders** – similar to trampolines. **Primary purpose:** to encourage development of the Proprioceptive system. When a child jumps on a rebounder, the muscles, joints, ligaments, bones and tendons in the body are stimulated. This helps the child's body understand the orientation of the body parts and movements. **Classroom relevance:** A matured Proprioceptive system is necessary for a child to perform in the classroom. This skill teaches the child's body how much muscle tension is needed to sit in a chair properly and how to grade muscle movement appropriately. Children who have problems with Proprioception may sit in a chair with poor posture and may respond to touch with too much or too little force.
- **Overhead Ladder** – similar to Monkey Bars. **Primary purpose:** to encourage eye teaming. When a child is moving across the bars, he/she must look at and grasp the rungs one by one. In doing so, the child's eyes must work as a team to fuse together the image seen by each eye into one single image, or the child misses the rung and cannot get across. **Classroom relevance:** Eye teaming is an extremely important skill for reading. When reading, the eyes must also work as a team to fuse the image seen by each eye or the child will see the text as double. Children who have problems with eye teaming may fatigue easily, show a decline in comprehension when reading and even avoid academics entirely.
- **Spinning** – known as Helicopter Spins. **Primary purpose:** to encourage body awareness. When a child is spinning, the fluid in the inner ear is moving and sending information about where the child's body is in space. At the same time it is stimulating the same part of the brain that popular impulse control medications stimulate. This produces a calmer, more focused child. **Classroom relevance:** Body awareness helps children sit still and remain seated in their chairs. Additionally, this skill leads to understanding one's own left and right and, in turn, having the ability to read from left to right. Children who have problems with body awareness may fall out of their chairs; have a short attention span, reverse letters or words.

- **Auditory Activities** – include phonemic awareness, blending and auditory discrimination. **Primary purpose:** to encourage auditory skills vital to reading. When children are exposed to S.M.A.R.T. auditory activities, they hear many repetitions of same/different/similar sounds and blends in a game-like fashion. The auditory system stores that information in the language area of the brain for later use, i.e. when they learn to read. **Classroom relevance:** The ability to recognize, discriminate and blend sounds and then words is crucial to reading. The child must have the ability to recognize sounds in order to later match sounds to letters. He/she must also have the ability to discriminate between similar sounds, especially vowel sounds and finally then blend sounds together in order to begin to learn to read. Children who have problems with these auditory skills cannot follow directions or fail to complete their work, impulsively blurt out answers to questions and avoid or dislike academics entirely.

Skills:

- **Eye-hand Coordination** – also known as visual motor integration. **Primary purpose:** to integrate vision with the motor system to reproduce complex patterns. This means handwriting. Eye-hand coordination activities include ball and beanbag games as well as many board and paper pencil games. **Classroom relevance:** Eye-hand coordination is the motor component for learning language. Children who have problems with eye-hand coordination may have poor handwriting, drawing, cutting, and other fine motor tasks.
- **Visual Acuity** – also known as clarity of sight. **Primary purpose:** to improve or fine tune visual clarity. Many visual activities are used in the S.M.A.R.T. program, several of which involve the focusing and relaxing of eye muscles and lenses. By doing these activities, the child is able to see more clearly both in the distance and at a near point, or reading range. **Classroom relevance:** Visual acuity is extremely important for academic success. A child working at a desk must be able to see the work clearly and maintain that clarity for the duration of the assigned time. He/she must also have the ability to see the chalk/white board clearly and finally shift the focus from the board to desk quickly and accurately. Children who have problems with visual acuity may squint, blink or rub their eyes, complain of headaches, take longer than necessary to complete assignments or avoid reading assignments entirely.
- **Fine Motor Skills** – also known as pre-writing skills. **Primary purpose:** to develop small muscles in the hand and fingers in preparation for holding writing tools. Fine motor skills are enhanced and developed as a child works with his/her hands to manipulate small objects. Additionally, sensory stimulation on the hands through the activity of crawling opens the hands and lays the foundation for good fine motor skills. Gross motor activities like crawling and fine motor activities like lacing cards and stringing beads develop this skill. **Classroom relevance:** Fine motor skills are a prerequisite for writing. The child must be able to hold the pencil properly to produce or reproduce the necessary information. Holding the pencil properly involves the proper amount of tension and the proper hand placement on the pencil. Children who have problems with fine motor skills may have poor handwriting, drawing, cutting, and other fine motor tasks.
- **Spatial Relations** – include bilateral coordination, left right awareness and directionality. **Primary purpose:** to develop normal internal and external spatial concepts that are used to interact with and organize the environment. These skills are necessary for a child to build an awareness within his/her body of concepts such as left and right, up and down, and front and back, as well as to make judgments about the location of objects in reference to other objects and to the child's own body.

Classroom relevance: Spatial relations are essential when learning to read and write. When a child reads he/she must read from left to right. In order to do so the child must first have an understanding of what is left or right on his/her own body. Once that is accomplished, the child can then project that understanding onto an inanimate object like a book or worksheet. Children who have problems with spatial relations may confuse similar letters or words, misalign digits, reverse letters or words and have improper spacing between letters and words.

- **Reflexes – Primary purpose:** to integrate retained reflexes, which in normal development are expected to be integrated by the end of the first year of life. Activities related to these reflexes require only two minutes per day throughout the school year and children who are then able to integrate these reflexes enjoy the freedom of writing with ease and sitting comfortably in their chairs. **Classroom relevance:** Retained reflexes can influence how the child holds a pencil and whether or not he/she has the ability to sit in a chair. Children with retained reflexes can display a range of difficulties in the classroom including using too much pressure when writing which causes the lead of the pencil to break, holding material to one side when reading or writing, the need to sit with legs straight and arms bent or leg bent and arms straight and even hyperactivity.