

Home for the Holidays Activity Book



AutismMONTARIO

Drawing Activity

Why are we suggesting this activity?

Drawing is a skill that allows children (and adults!) to express themselves in a fun and creative way. If your child struggles with fine motor skills (including hand strength, grasping skills, and eye-hand coordination), they may enjoy this opportunity to create a simple picture, then add more detail to make it their own. You can modify this activity to meet your child where they are at.

This activity is appropriate for all ages.



What will you need?

- Paper
- Drawing utensil: crayon, marker, chalk, pencil crayon, etc.

Instructions:

1. Help your child to draw three circles, one on top of each other (in the shape of a snowman).
2. Help your child to add detail to their drawing: a face, stick arms, buttons, or clothing items (e.g., scarf, buttons).

Tips for helping with your child's drawing:

- Try different writing utensils to see what works best for your child: options may include chalk, crayons, markers, pencils, or pencil crayons. If your child has a hard time holding a pencil or marker, sidewalk chalk or small/broken pieces of crayons may help to promote a more efficient grasping pattern.
- You can help your child by providing:
 - “Hand over hand” assistance: placing your hand over your child’s hand (if tolerated)
 - A picture for your child to trace
 - A model for your child to look at while creating their drawing (or drawing yours at the same time)



Bonus/extension activities:

- If your child likes exploring different touch sensations, you can use shaving cream as “finger paint” to practice your drawing.
- Try using dark coloured paper (blue or black) and white chalk to create a “snowy” look.
- Use a whiteboard or chalkboard.

Snow Tag

Why are we suggesting this activity?

It can be hard to find ways to get motivated to move our bodies when the weather outside is frightful! Adding a playful element can make getting active more fun and interesting. This game can be played with the whole family and modified for family members with limited mobility or other physical needs.

This activity is appropriate for all ages.



What will you need?

- Snow
- A large open space such as a yard, park, or field

Instructions:

1. Walk through the snow in a large circle to create a path.
2. Walk across the circle to create “short-cuts” through the circle (see photo).
3. To play, select one player to be “it”—they can chase the other players, but all players must stay in the pathways created.

Bonus/extension activities:

- Can you practice being open to new ideas by changing/adapting the rules?
- Can you create a “safe zone” or “time out”?
- Can more than one person be “it”?
- For those with limited mobility, can you use a sled or “snow coach” to enable moving through the snow?



Winter Sensory Bin

Why are we suggesting this activity?

We can set up a sensory bin to encourage exploring different sensations in a safe, controlled way. You may even consider bringing the outdoors inside if your child enjoys exploring snow but finds it too cold when playing outside for long periods of time. This activity can also build fine motor skills, such as using tools like tongs or kitchen utensils. This may also be an opportunity to build other skills, such as putting on and taking off gloves or mittens. A homemade sensory bin can also easily be adjusted to fit what works best for your child.

This activity is appropriate for all ages.

What will you need?

- Bin, tin, or bowl (a plastic dishpan used to wash dishes is a great choice if you have one available)
- Snow! (if your child doesn't like the feeling of snow, or you have no way of collecting snow, you can also use shaving cream or whipped cream)
- Small toys or winter-themed items (pinecones, tree branches, ice cubes, holiday ornaments)
- Tools (tongs, kitchen utensils, sand toys, etc.)
- Cloth/towel (for wiping hands and cleaning up)
- Optional: mittens or gloves

Instructions:

1. Fill your bin, tin, or bowl with snow, shaving cream, or whipped cream.
2. Add small toys or winter items (as suggested).
3. Your child can explore the snow while wearing mittens or gloves (a great opportunity to practice dressing skills!), or use tools to scoop or shovel the snow.
4. You can hide items inside for your child to find, or create a list for a scavenger hunt of hidden items.



Tips for creating your sensory bin:

- If your child is hesitant to get their hands messy or cold, you can demonstrate first, and/or have them explore using tools like a spoon or shovel.
- Have a wet cloth and dry towel available nearby for your child to wipe their hands if desired (they may want to wipe their hands, rest for a moment, then return to exploring).
- You can pair this activity with a walk outdoors: look for items during your walk that interest your child (small tree branches, pinecones, stones). Collect these items during your walk, then add to your sensory bin when you return home.

Snow Globe

Why are we suggesting this activity?

When autistic children are overwhelmed, upset, or over-stimulated, calming activities can help them regulate their emotions and calm their bodies. Snow globes are fun, easy to make, and can be used throughout the holidays to help your child manage their stress and calm their nervous system.

This activity is appropriate for all ages.

What will you need?

- Clear, plastic jar or bottle
- Clear glue
- Water
- Favourite character figurine
- Super glue or hot glue
- Add ins: glitter, sequins, “snowflake” glitter

Instructions:

1. Ensure that the jar you are working with is clean and dry.
2. Place your figurine on the inside of the lid to make sure it fits.
3. Use super glue or hot glue to attach the figurine to the inside of the lid.
4. Leave the figurine/lid combo to dry (it shouldn't take more than a couple of minutes).
5. Fill the bottom of the jar with glue (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup).
6. Have your child add in their glitter, sequins, and any extras.
7. Add water to fill the remainder of the jar; leave about 1 cm at the top to leave space for your figurine.
8. Use super glue or hot glue around the lid and screw it on tightly to seal in the water.



Tips for using your snow globe:

- Encourage your child to play gently with the jar.
- Show them how the glitter swirls and falls.
- When your child is upset, shake the bottle and see if you can shift their focus to watching the jar's contents swirl and settle.
- Depending on the size of your jar, it can be used as a “timer” (e.g., tell your child to wash their hands until all the glitter has settled).



Smell the hot cocoa

1 2 3 4 5

Blow to cool the cocoa

1 2 3 4 5

Repeat until you feel calm



Bonus/extension activities:

There are lots of calming activities available online. Some of our favourites are mindful breathing exercises. Here is one to try if you're having a warm drink over the holidays—it is called Calm Down Cocoa!

Movie Night

Why are we suggesting this activity?

Watching movies as a family and talking about the characters can help develop your child or youth's social-emotional awareness and development. Below are some discussion questions that can help them learn to identify their feelings and how they may feel in their body, connect their experiences with emotions, and learn ways to self-regulate. It is also beneficial to discuss helpful and unhelpful responses to big emotions.

This activity is appropriate for all ages.

What will you need?

- Favourite winter-themed movie
- Comfy place to relax and enjoy the movie as a family
- Optional: snacks



Discussion questions:

1. What did you like about the movie? Why?
2. What did you not like about the movie? Why?
3. What do you think the movie was trying to teach us?
4. Was there a time when one of the characters was sad?
 - a. What did they look like?
 - b. What did they do about it?
 - c. Was this a helpful or unhelpful response?
5. Was there a time when one of the characters was happy?
 - a. What did they look like?
 - b. What did they do about it?
 - c. Was this a helpful or unhelpful response?
6. Was there a time when one of the characters was scared or afraid?
 - a. What did they look like?
 - b. What did they do about it?
 - c. Was this a helpful or unhelpful response?
7. Can you think of a time when you felt sad, happy, scared, or afraid?
 - a. What did you look like? What did your body feel like?
 - b. What did you do about it?
 - c. Was this a helpful or unhelpful response?
8. When the main character was in crisis, who could they have asked for help?
9. When you're struggling or having a bad day, who can you ask for help?

Tips for getting the most out of your movie night:

- Do your best to “protect” this time as a family. This means putting away other technology and paying attention to the moment.
- Remember that this is supposed to be fun! If your child is not interested in talking during or after the movie, consider trying again at a different time when they may be more receptive, such as during breakfast or while in the car.