

FILIORUM resource

From research to practice

FILIORUM Centre for Research in Early
Childhood Education and Care
University of Stavanger

U University
of Stavanger

Children's experiences of smells and scents

Odors change as the weather changes. Rain or sunshine, there are interesting smells, both outside and inside, to discover, explore and talk about together with children. All you need is your nose. Let your fantasy lead the way and discover the magic of smell together with the children.

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Illustrated by Tilde Hoel Torkildsen

Why is this important?

Smell is one of the most pervasive senses, but also one of the least understood. Did you know that humans can distinguish more odours than musical tones or colours? In fact, we can detect as many as one trillion odours! However, we only have a few words for them.

The research shows that smell can open up magical worlds by connecting our memories and emotions. The video presents several examples for stimulating children's sense of smell and why it is important.

The focus on children's sense of smell opens up new ways of understanding and supporting children's learning and development, including their self-regulation, language and engagement in play or literacy.

Professional development

Aim: By using this resource, the educators' awareness about why it is important to stimulate all children's senses with a specific focus on the children's sense of smell, and how this can be done will be raised.

Useful for: Educators in early years, e.g. at a staff meeting.

Recommended use of time: 30-45 minutes.

Tips for using this resource:

1. Watch the video.
2. Discuss the reflection questions, for example in groups with other colleagues.
3. Explore the activities together with the children (see Activity).
4. Share your experiences with each other at the next staff meeting.



QR-code to the
video and the
resource

Central elements in the video

In the study, the authors created story activities that engaged the children's senses. The analysis shows that the children engaged their senses selectively. The visual and haptic engagement was the most intensively engaged senses during the activity, while the smell, taste and hearing was the least intensively engaged.

The research shows that smell can open up magical worlds by connecting our memories and emotions. In the video, several examples of why the sense of smell is important is presented, and how children's sense of smell can be stimulated.

Questions for reflection

- How do you use activities which engage the children's experience with smell?
- How do you stimulate children's sense of smell?

Activities

When you are working with children's sense of smell – encourage them to think of the different memories and images to help them remember the scents. When you're exploring new smells – let the children respond in any way they want (verbally, with body language, drawing, taking a picture).

Take the children along on a "scent trail". Small objects can be collected and placed in a "smell box". The children can draw pictures of what they smelled on the trail and discuss what smells good and bad.

Early childhood research from FILIORUM

This FILIORUM resource draws on the results from the following research article:

Kucirkova, N. & Kamola, M. (2022). Children's stories and multisensory engagement: insights from a cultural probes study. *International Journal of Educational Research*.



QR-code to the article

Aim: To understand the central sensory elements that are important to children's storytelling

Research question:

- How do children integrate different senses into their activities?

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