A Shared Vision
Partners in Pediatric Blindness & Visual Impairment

Let's Build a Snowman



It's imperative that children with a visual impairment use their senses to learn about the world around them, including nature and the outdoors. When it's too cold and snowy to go outside, you can bring the snow inside and build a snowman with your child who is blind or visually impaired. Your child can still experience snow with all their senses while learning important concepts like "cold," and "wet," sequencing skills while you build a snowman, and predicting what happens when the snow melts. Put a towel on the floor just in case your floor gets wet!

Duration

This activity will take 10 to 30 minutes depending on your child's mood and interest.

Materials Required

- Real snow, enough to fill your container
- A plastic bin, rimmed baking sheet, or large bowl to put the snow in. A colored bowl will provide more contrast with the snow. If siblings or other family members are going to play with the snow, use a larger under-bed storage bin

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- Measuring or stacking cups in different sizes
- Spoons
- Ice cream scoop or melon baller
- Mittens for both you and your child depending on your child's tactile skills and preferences
- A towel or washcloth to dry off wet hands and a larger towel on the floor around your play area to catch drips or snowballs

Activity Steps

1. Start this activity by talking about the weather. "It is cold outside, brrr!" Go to the door and open it together so that you can feel the temperature. If it is snowing, stick your hand out or step out to feel the snowflakes hitting your hands, arms, or body. Explain that snow falls from the sky. Stick your tongue out and taste the snow. "The snow feels cold on your tongue! What does it taste like?" If it isn't too cold, consider bundling up and going outside to touch the snow. How does it feel? Talk about the temperature and the white color of the snow. Listen to the snow crunch if you walk on it.

2. To save time, have some snow ready in the container you will be using. If you haven't pre-filled your container with snow, invite your child to help you scoop some into the one you are using. "Even though the snow comes from outside, we can play with it inside. Let's have fun with the snow!"

3. Choose a seat that is comfortable for your child and gives them proper trunk support so your child can use their hands to play with the snow. A highchair or a bumbo seat might work well. Cue your child so that they'll know they will be sitting down to play with the snow. Invite them to touch the chair while saying, "Let's get in your seat." You can also hold your child in your lap so that they can touch the snow with either their hands or their feet.

4. Make sure you have a towel under you to catch drips and a dry towel handy to dry off wet hands or feet. Depending on your child's tactile skills and preferences, your child might want to wear mittens.

5. Encourage your child to touch the snow by tapping the bowl or snow. Use hand-under-hand if your child isn't ready to touch it independently. Never force your child to touch the snow if they don't want to. You can make handprints or footprints in the snow. You can use a pointer finger to poke in the snow. You can pick up the snow and make a ball or taste it. Verbally describe what your child is doing. "Your finger poked a hole in the

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snow. The hole is deep." You can try covering the hole with snow or pat it down. Play and have fun! **Caution! Little hands will get cold very quickly! Check your child's hands often during this activity and take breaks from touching the snow to let their hands warm-up.

6. Protect little hands by using spoons, measuring cups, stacking cups, and other utensils to scoop and dump the snow. Label the utensils and describe what you do with them as you model or use them hand-under-hand. "This is a melon baller. Let's use it to scoop and pat the snow." Enjoy playing with and exploring the snow using the utensils.

7. Try making a ball of snow. Using hand under hand form the snowballs together or make one for your child to touch. Count the balls out loud as you make them. As you stack the snowballs, use narration to describe how you are stacking the balls together to make a snowman. "Let's put the little snowball on top of the big one!" Talk about body parts such as head and body. Invite your child to touch their body parts and/or your body parts. "Here's your head!" "Let's find the snowman's head." "Let's add some twigs to make arms. Where should we put them?" Sometimes you may only add twigs for arms and not get to the face. Depending on your child's interest level, you can add eyes, mouth and a nose using raisins, chocolate chips, pebbles, broken off twigs, etc.

8. As the snow begins to melt, point out that it's turning into water and talk about the texture change. You may say something like "It's warm inside, so the snow is melting!" This might be a cue to indicate that the activity is all done. "The snow is melting! We are done playing with the snow."

Tips

1. Verbal descriptions make this experience come alive. Children who are visually impaired cannot rely on visual information alone to understand the world around them. Verbal descriptions from an adult or peer are important tools to give meaning and context to the experience a child is having in the moment. For young children, simply labeling what they are doing gives valuable information. "You are making a snowball, it's round." Emphasizing words to identify sensory information is also helpful, "The snow is *cold*, it's a good thing you are wearing your mittens!" Pair words with objects or activities happening in the moment to make your descriptions meaningful. "You found your spoon. You can scoop the snow!"

2. You might let your child touch the snow with their feet. Sometimes children with visual impairment are more comfortable using their feet to touch new things before using their hands. You can let them touch the snow with their socks on or by taking the socks off. This depends on your child's preferences.

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Extension Activities

1. **Make a snow sensory bin** – You don't have to build a snowman to experience snow. You can just make a snow sensory bin. Fill a rimmed cookie sheet, plastic bin, or a large bowl with fresh snow. Add a mini shovel, spoons, and small cups or containers in bright colors for scooping and dumping the snow. An ice cream scoop, melon baller, or ladle is also fun for making snowballs. Don't forget mittens to keep little hands warm and a towel or washcloth for drying hands off afterwards.

2. **Play in a snow pool** – Depending on your child's interest level and ability, you could also fill a plastic baby pool with snow and let your child sit in it with their scooping toys, cars, or trucks. Dress your child in a snowsuit, boots, and mittens so they don't get cold.

3. **Paint the snow** – Older children with low vision can try painting a bin of snow with food coloring mixed with water or a mixture of water and food coloring in a squirt bottle. The bright colors "pop" on the white background. This could get messy so make sure your play area is protected.

4. **Throw snowballs** – After you've made some snowballs, practice throwing them into a laundry basket or a bucket. Does the ball stick together or does it fall apart?

5. **Make handprints or footprints** in the snow. Trace some letters or shapes with your fingertip. Cookie cutters are fun for making snow cookies when the snow is dense and wet.

6. **Taste the snow**. Go outside and catch snowflakes on your tongue or serve a scoop of snow in a cup. Is it cold? What does snow taste like?

7. **Bag the snow**. Sometimes it's easier to introduce new tactile experiences to your child if the object you're exploring is in a plastic bag. Put some snow in a gallon Ziploc bag so your child can feel how cold it is and squish the bag. With a Sharpie draw some eyes, a nose, and mouth for a snowman sensory bag.

8. **Listen to the snow falling**. What do you hear? Sometimes it feels quiet while it's snowing. Listen for the snowplow, people shoveling their sidewalk, or snow falling off a tree branch with a "thump." Do you hear the snow "crunching" when you walk on it?

9. **Sled in the snow**. If your child likes to go outside in the snow, pulling them in a sled lets them touch the snow up close. A sled with a back provides support, or you can build a supportive seat for your child with blankets. Some children will like the movement of being pulled in a sled.

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10. **Where does snow come from?** What is it made out of? Sometimes it's dry and powdery. Other times it's wet and heavy. Use verbal descriptions to give meaning to the snowy experience your child is having. Label sensory information, e.g.," You're touching the snow. The snow is cold! Good thing you're wearing your red mittens to keep your hands warm."

11. **Make an experience book** about your snowy day and when you read it out loud to your child, remember all the fun you had together.

12. **Read about snow in some of these classics.** Ten Sparkling Snowflakes, Ten on the Sled, The Jacket I Wear in the Snow, The Snowy Day Board Book, The Mitten, and All You Need for a Snowman.

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