Newlife
Changing lives of disabled children

EARLY EXPLORERS

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE TOYS IN YOUR PLAY POD

STARLIGHT PROJECTOR

What is this toy?

This is a small light projector that shines stars onto the walls and ceiling. It can help make a room feel calm, cosy, and magical. Your child can watch the lights, relax, and use their imagination.

How this toy can help your child

- **Feeling calm and settled (sensory regulation)**
  The gentle lights can help your child feel calmer when things feel busy or overwhelming. This is known as sensory regulation, which means helping the body and mind feel more settled.
- **Using imagination (imaginative play)**
  The starry lights can turn the room into space, a night sky or a story world. This helps your child use their imagination and pretend during play.
- **Quiet time and relaxing (mindfulness)**
  Watching the stars while breathing slowly or listening to calm music can help your child relax. This can be useful at bedtime, after a busy day or during quiet time.

Extra support if your child needs it

- Use the projector in a darker, quieter space if your child finds bright or busy rooms difficult. Try short sessions first and let your child look away or take a break if they need.

Ideas for playing together

1

Star story

Use the stars to make up a simple story together.
You could say:
"What can you see in the sky?"
"Shall we go on a space adventure?"

2

Calm music and movement

Play soft music while the stars are showing. Encourage your child to sway, stretch, or move slowly like they are floating in space.

Find online:
Search the code **3STLP** on **specialneedstoys.com**

TACTILE 3D PUZZLE

SHAPES AND FEEL FARM ANIMALS

Find online:
Search the code **4TFFM** on **specialneedstoys.com**

What is this toy?

This is a fun farm animal puzzle with big, easy-to-hold pieces. Each animal feels different - some are soft, some are bumpy and some are smooth. Your child can explore, play and learn using their hands.

How this toy can help your child

- **Using little hands (fine motor skills)**
  The big pieces are easy to pick up and hold. Your child can practise grabbing and placing them - this is known as fine motor skills, which help with things like holding a pencil later on.
- **Exploring how things feel (sensory skills)**
  Your child can feel soft, smooth and bumpy surfaces. This helps them get used to different textures - this is called tactile (touch) sensory skills.
- **Learning to think (problem-solving skills)**
  Matching the animals to the right place helps your child learn to think and figure things out - this is known as problem solving.
- **Learning new words (language skills)**
  Talking about animals, colours and textures helps your child learn new words - this supports their language development.

Extra support if your child needs it

- Use simple words, pictures or cards to help your child communicate.
- Show pictures of animals or colours to help them share what they see and feel.

Ideas for playing together

1

Texture hunt
Ask your child to feel a piece.

You could say:
"Can you find something soft?"
"Which one feels bumpy?"

2

Animal sounds game
Match animals to their sounds.

"This one feels fluffy... what sound does a sheep make?"

3

Helping hands (under-hand support)
If your child finds it tricky, place your hand gently under theirs.

This helps them feel supported while still being in control.

4

Hide and find
Hide pieces in rice, paper or fabric.

Your child can search and find them - this helps with curiosity and learning that things still exist even when hidden.

Find online:
Search the code **6TBLCS** on **specialneedstoys.com**

CONTRAST TUMBLER

What is this toy?

The Contrast Tumbler is a wooden wheel with a clear dome full of balls inside. When your child gives it a gentle spin, the balls move, swirl and tumble around. Your child can watch, reach, turn and explore what happens.

How this toy can help your child

- **Using little hands (fine motor skills)**
  Turning the wheel helps your child practise reaching, holding and moving their wrist. These are fine motor skills, which help with things like feeding, drawing and using toys.
- **Feeling calm and settled (sensory regulation)**
  Watching the balls move slowly can feel calming. This may help your child settle during quiet time or when they need a gentle sensory activity.
- **Learning what happens next (cause and effect)**
  Your child can learn that when they turn the wheel, the balls move. This is called cause and effect, which means learning that one action can make something else happen.

Extra support if your child needs it

- Use simple words, pictures or cards such as “spin”, “stop”, “fast” and “slow” to help your child communicate.
- If your child has limited movement, place the tumbler at a comfortable height and let them use their hand, arm or supported movement to turn it.

Ideas for playing together

1

Watch and follow
Place the tumbler where your child can see it during tummy time, seated play or supported standing.

You could say:
“Can you watch the balls move?”
“Where did they go?”

2

Reach and turn
Place the tumbler just within reach and encourage your child to stretch, reach or move their hand towards it.

If needed, support their arm gently so they can still be part of the movement.

3

Spin and stop game
Take turns spinning the tumbler, then wait for the balls to slow down or stop.

You could say:
“Ready, steady, spin!”
“Shall we stop and watch?”

LIGHT AND SOUND CAMERA TOY

What is this toy?

This is a colourful camera toy with buttons, lights and fun sounds. Your child can hold it, press the buttons, pretend to take photos and explore what happens when they play.

How this toy can help your child

- **Using little hands (fine motor skills)**
  Holding the toy and pressing the buttons can help your child practise grasping, hand strength and hand-eye coordination. These are fine motor skills, which help with everyday activities like feeding, drawing and playing.
- **Pretending and talking (language and imaginative play)**
  Pretending to take photos can encourage your child to copy adults, take turns, share attention and use simple words during play.

Extra support if your child needs it

- If your child finds it hard to hold the toy, place it on a tray, cushion or the floor so they can press the buttons more easily.
- Use simple words, pictures, or cards such
- as “press”, “light”, “music”, “again” and
- stop” to help your child communicate.

Find online:
Search the code **3TMCAM** on **specialneedstoys.com**

Ideas for playing together

1

Pretend photo game
Encourage your child to take pretend photos of familiar people, toys or objects around the room.

You could say:
“Can you take a photo of teddy?”
“Cheese!”

2

Button press and listen
Sit with your child and explore the buttons together. Pause after each light or sound so they can notice what happened.

You could say:
“What happened?”
“Can you do it again?”

3

Mirror or face play
Use the camera during face-to-face play or near a mirror. Encourage your child to look, press the buttons and notice the lights and sounds.

This can support looking, shared play and body awareness.

Find online: Search the code **3TASRM** on **specialneedstoys.com**

TWIST AND SHAKE RAINMAKER

What is this toy?

This is a bright rainmaker toy with colourful beads inside. When your child tips, twists or shakes it, the beads fall and make a gentle rain sound. Your child can watch, listen, move and explore what happens.

How this toy can help your child

- **Exploring sound and movement (sensory skills)**
  The soft rain sound and colourful moving beads help your child notice sounds, colours and movement in a gentle way.
- **Watching with their eyes (visual tracking)**
  Watching the beads fall helps your child practise following movement with their eyes. This is called visual tracking.
- **Listening carefully (auditory awareness)**
  Your child can listen to the gentle rain sound and notice when it starts, stops, gets louder or becomes quieter. This supports listening skills.

Extra support if your child needs it

- If your child finds it hard to hold the toy, rest it against a cushion or use it during supported floor play.
- If your child is sensitive to sound, start with slow, gentle tipping so the sound stays soft and predictable.

Ideas for playing together

1

Watch and listen
Gently turn the rainmaker in front of your child and encourage them to watch the beads fall and listen to the soft sound.

You could say:
"Can you hear the rain?"
"Where are the beads going?"

2

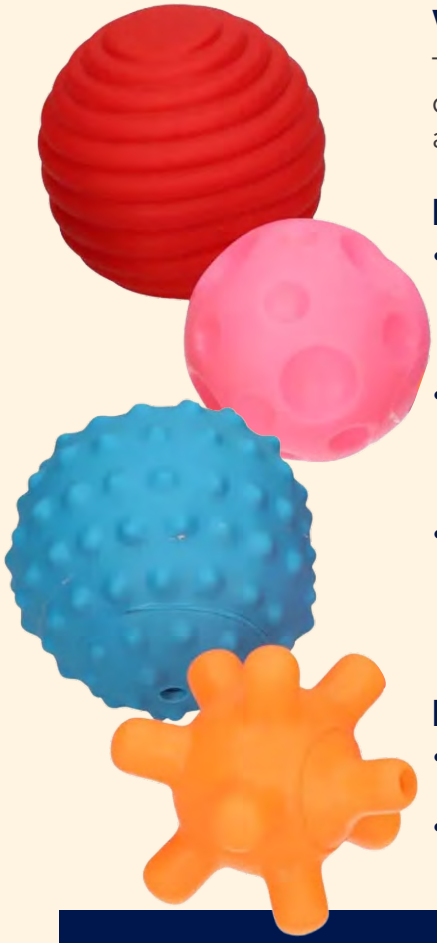
Twist, shake, pause
Show your child how to twist or shake the rainmaker, then pause and give them time to copy or take a turn.

You could say:
"shake", "stop", "again" or "listen" to help build understanding and early communication.

3

Floor or tray play
Place the rainmaker on the floor or on a tray so your child can roll, tip or tap it without needing to hold it all the time.

TEXTURED MINI BALLS



What is this toy?

These are small, soft sensory balls in bright colours. Each ball has a different bumpy or raised texture for your child to feel, squeeze, roll and explore with their hands, feet or body.

How this toy can help your child

- **Learning to sort and choose (thinking skills)**
  Your child can sort the balls by colour, size or texture. This helps them notice similarities and differences, which supports early thinking and problem-solving.
- **Moving the whole body (gross motor skills)**
  Rolling, throwing, catching or kicking the balls helps your child practise bigger movements. These are gross motor skills, which support balance, coordination and body awareness.
- **Using little hands (fine motor skills)**
  Squeezing, holding and passing the balls from one hand to the other helps strengthen your child's hands and fingers. This can support everyday skills like feeding, drawing and playing.

Extra support if your child needs it

- If your child is unsure about textures, let them explore through socks, gloves or a soft cloth first.
- Use simple words, pictures or cards such as "roll", "stop", "squeeze", "soft", "bumpy" or "choose a colour" to help your child communicate.

Ideas for playing together

1

Rolling games

Roll the ball along a table, tray, or floor so your child can watch it move and reach for it.

You could roll the ball into a large hoop, box or basket instead of throwing it.

If hand use is tricky, your child could explore the textures using their feet.

Try rolling the ball slowly back and forth to help your child practise waiting, watching and taking turns.

2

Calming sensory roll

Slowly roll a ball over your child's arms, hands, legs or back if they enjoy this type of touch.

This can give gentle pressure and help your child notice where their body is.

It may feel calming during quiet time or when moving from one activity to another.

3

Scoop and move

Give your child a large spoon, scoop or small container and encourage them to move the balls from one place to another.

This helps with hand-eye coordination, wrist control, focus and practising using both hands together.

4

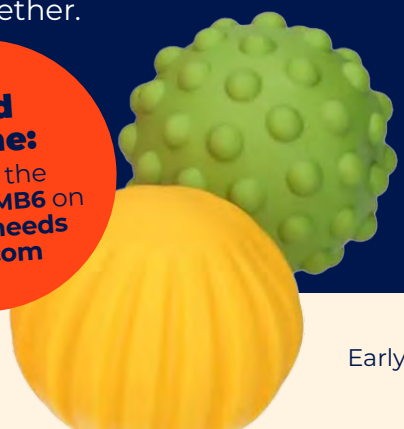
Pass the ball music game

Pass or roll a ball while music is playing.

When the music stops, whoever has the ball can do an action such as clap, stretch, tap or wave.

This helps with turn-taking, listening and joining in with others.

Find online:
Search the code **9KTMB6** on **specialneedstoys.com**



USEFUL RESOURCES

PECS UK - Specific information and resources for the Picture Exchange Communication System
www.pecs-unitedkingdom.com/pecs

PECS UK (Free Materials) - Practical / free PECS resources that families can use alongside play and communication activities
www.pecs-unitedkingdom.com/free-materials

Communication Matters - Broader information and support around AAC, including finding appropriate AAC assessments / services
www.communicationmatters.org.uk/about-aac-systems

Ace Centre - Information, advice and support around assistive technology and AAC, including practical guidance for families and professionals
www.acecentre.org.uk/services/advice-information

Makaton - Free resources using signs, symbols and speech to support communication, language development and understanding in everyday activities
www.makaton.org/TMC/TMC/Resources/Free_resources_.aspx

Scope Communication Aids & AAC - Family friendly AAC explanation and different communication methods
www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/communication-aids-and-aac

Autism Central NHS (Sensory Differences) - Understanding sensory needs
www.autismcentral.nhs.uk/guidance/sensory-differences

National Autistic Society (Sensory Processing) - Information about sensory processing, sensory overload, support strategies and professional support
www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/about-autism/sensory-processing

Scope (Inclusive Play) - Wider accessible and inclusive playgrounds
www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/lets-play-fair-16ef55/playground-accessibility-map

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Need support?

Visit our online Support Hub – it contains helpful articles, practical tips and links to other services and support for families of disabled children, making it easy to find the right information at any time.

newlifecharity.co.uk/support

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