

Activity Mats for Sensory Needs

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****For Dementia, Toddlers or other Special Sensory Needs such as Autism.****

Need: Soft Lap/Table Mat from Placemats, Shams or upcycled Quilts cut into lap pieces, or make your own from 20" to 30" square or rectangle. Be sure edges are either hemmed, serged or have blanket binding/bias tape. Larger ones may be made from Table Mats for patients who like to share.

To make reversible: Recommend smoother back side, see "**Final Touches**" section for ideas. Make back side first, or two mats you stitch together because it's hard to stitch through larger items on front.

Be sure your mat can pass 3 tests:

- Will it hold up to the entire mat surviving a **Washer and Dryer** every day?
- **Smooth and Tug test:** nothing sharp, no pieces easily pulled off, or fraying off, to put in mouth.
- **Circulation test:** 4" max strings - can any string be wrapped around finger to cut off circulation?

Tips from the Nurses who say "100% functional, 0% 'pretty' contest":

- Velcro is great only for textures, not for closures due to the repeated washings. Kam snaps are ok!
- Anything metal and stone fall apart and hurt washing machines. Jean buttons or rivets, or bra hooks/extenders are great because they have small, coated metal that is designed for washers/dryers. NO glitter; very serious hazard, but metallic-thread fabric is fine.
- Anything noisy like bells (but crinkle fabric is ok) are not only annoying to staff monitoring patient groups, but also dangerous because they need to hear cries or other 'bad' sounds from patients.
- Real home décor fringe is not recommended because it easily falls apart when washed repeatedly. Be sure all knots, that are meant to stay knots, are securely sewn shut.
- Ribbon loops allow for attachments that can be removed like loofahs with a loop that is pulled through on itself to stay attached until washing. Just remember these items will be washed by hand and is more work for staff to attach/detach. Secure ribbons by stitching under items like pads/appliques. Don't use ribbons of craft paper quality or with metal in them for shaping.
- If one is made for someone you personally know, creating a theme around their hobbies, favorite songs/people, career, or printed fabrics to include their loved ones or pets, are great for memory retention. Images of music, nature, and everyday objects around home or work are great.
- Avoid Soft plastics and vinyl (often cat toys/squishable plastic) - melt in dryers and are easily torn.

Top 10 List of Suggestions:

Try to add all of these items securely, in any creative fashion to stimulate with TEXTURES AND COLORS. Try layering these. Be sure to WAIT until the END with the **Final 'Touches' of Sensory Tracing Appliques.**

Lay out your design before stitching it down. It is easier to think of it in a grid fashion. Imagine a 2x2 grid, with at least 4 quadrants. Each quadrant will have at least 1 of 4 activities and then you can add the smaller items around or ON TOP OF others. For example: the pocket/pet pad/ button can be under the Fabric Book; zipper can be on top of the Memory Game. Add multiples of the Top 10!

Quadrant (or Larger Section) Items:

1. **Fabric book:** 4" or larger pieces of fabric, double-sided. Most machines can stitch through 3 or 4 layers easily. *Be sure edges are either hemmed, serged or pinking-cut (zig zag scissor cut) to avoid fraying.* If you want double the pages, make twice as long, stitch down center and iron folded over in half (like a book.) Pages of book ideally include Textures like flannel, minky, home décor, brocades, satins, corduroys, AND Designs that are very realistic prints and familiar to be named like animals, nature and food items, sports, etc. Remember stereotypical 'masculine' items too like tools and sports –nurses complain about mats that have *only* stereotypical feminine items.
2. **Pocket** secured on 3 sides, 4" x 8" works well. Or "finger-size" **Tunnel** secured on 2 sides. Home décor fabrics like denim are best. Use actual upcycled pockets from clothing! Soft items that can 'swing' in and out of pocket on 4" max string can be fun. Avoid buttons for easy play.
3. **Petting Pad:** section that is heavily secured around edges to avoid fraying. Use faux fur / minky. Stuff with fiberfill to turn into raised pad. Many people miss petting their pet animals. Comforting!
4. **Oversized Button with Ponytail Holder**, or elastic loop to wrap around button. 1.5" with texture or interesting shape, larger is best, super secured down. Attach button first. Test loop stretch to be sure just long enough to loop button – stitch down until NO HAND can slide into ponytail holder.

Now, along your 'grid lines' (like a plus sign, a vertical line down the middle and horizontal line across) and your four borders, ADD (multiples of) these items that take up less space:

5. **Zippers.** Larger tooth the better. Use candle wax to coat for smoother slide. If zipper pull has a hole, add ribbon for easy pull. *Your pillow case may have a zipper built in, just fold over to expose.*
6. **Three strings** 5" total length, then stitch 1" down, leaving 4" long, *right beside each other* for tying knots or braiding. Be sure tips are hemmed, serged or shoestring tips. Can be more than three!
7. **Slider:** secure one string of shoestring, stitched bias tape, cord, grosgrain, non-fray ribbon, and place empty (*hard plastics*) spool/bobbin/rings to slide across string 2" in both directions. If long string, multiple sections can be stitched down for multiple other sliding objects in those sections.
8. **Flip cover or Ruffled Skirt.** Surprise and reveal by covering any item or applique.
9. **Ribbon loops.** Use durable fabric ribbon for sewing, NOT craft ribbon (feels like paper), or grosgrain, shoestrings or entire section of jean belt loops. These loops are for attaching and detaching items on clips rings like loofahs, light-up balls, etc. *Ribbon loops often placed around the Pet Pad or Pocket to maximize use of space. Avoid ribbon with metal (craft-shaping ribbon).*
10. **Fringe Memory Game: Along one of your borders, have a long strip of fleece at least 3.5" tall and as wide/long as you desire, stitched only across the top.** Our strip that was 11" x 3.5", 1/2" stitched at top and sides, sliced every 2" apart, created 5 flaps. Under each fringe 'flap' sew in a surprise fun applique. Fun game of memory: *What's under this one?*

Add Mending Souls LABEL and Sign Your Name in Permanent Marker!

Fill in FINAL 'TOUCHES' AKA Sensory Finger Tracing Appliques (Option: Back Side): Think contrasting textures and colors for finger tracing! Fun hand-eye coordination games like "*can you follow the yellow string?*" Use strips of **Lace, sequins, rick rack, elastic pulls** with max stretch 4", different colored **shoe strings** in wave, circular or zig zag patterns that (are stitched down), or stuffed fiber fill 'speed bumps/pillow pads.' Use appliques or fabric markers for objects, letters, and numbers. These great fussy-cuts or appliques can fit around, or on, the activities.

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#1/#8 Textures/Prints



#2 Pocket + #7 Slider



#3 Petting Pad



#4 2" button w/ ponytail



#10 Memory Game with Zipper / Lace on top w/ appliques underneath

#2 Pocket w/ Pull Out #9 Loops



#3 Pillow pad, #6 strings, #5 zipper



Ex. All 10 items layered on Mat



Examples of all 10 placed on 1 activity mat – using embroidery appliques, stuffed animals, towels, etc.

