

Messy Play

Messy play is important for young children, giving them endless ways to develop and learn. Messy play is inexpensive and open ended. Children will discover enormous numbers of opportunities for learning and play, through timeless and accessible messy play activities.

All types of play are crucial for children's development and early learning. Play helps children to; improve physical skills and co-ordination, work co-operatively and collaboratively, use all their senses to discover and explore their environment, and develop their imagination, creative thinking and ability to problem solve.

Painting - You don't just need brushes and an easel. Be inventive!

- ✓ Use sponges, fingers, hands, feet and other various objects to make marks.
- ✓ Roll out old wallpaper and encourage children to make footprints across – mix colours, compare feet sizes etc.
- ✓ Use washing up bottles filled with watery paint to squeeze and spray across paper.
- ✓ Flick brushes across paper to make patterns.
- ✓ Marble painting - Dip marbles in paint and roll them over paper in a tray to explore lines and patterns.
- ✓ Blow painting - Make up different coloured runny paint to drop onto paper, Use a straw to blow the paint in different directions. Watch what happens when two colours mix.
- ✓ Mirror image painting - Paint one half of paper, then fold it, press down and open to create a mirror image. This is good for butterflies and other symmetrical objects.
- ✓ Potato prints - Great effects can be achieved by printing with potatoes. Cut the potato in half and cut patterns into the flat side before you dip it into paint. This is great for encouraging repeating patterns.
- ✓ Magic painting – draw over white paper with a white candle. Make the picture appear by painting over with watered down paint.

Dough

Basic recipe for play doh:

1 cup flour, 1 cup water, ½ cup salt, 1 tbsp oil, 2 tbsp cream of tartar.

Put all ingredients into a pan over a medium heat until the mixture starts to bind, stirring all the time. Remove from heat.

You could try adding:

- ✓ Food colouring / Glitter
- ✓ Powder paint
- ✓ Uncooked rice / Oatmeal / Sand
- ✓ Food essences e.g. strawberry or mint

Keep in the fridge and change on a regular basis. Remember: Dough harbours bacteria – if in doubt, throw it out! Use with or without cutters and moulds. Encourage imaginary play such as rolling sausages for dinner or making cakes with decorations.

Gloop (cornflower mixed with water)

Mix an amount of cornflour gradually with water until it binds. Place in a tray or shallow container and try to pick it up! Vary the consistency occasionally and for more exploratory experiences, let the children make it themselves and feel the cornflour dry and mix it up themselves. Try adding food colouring or glitter.

You also could try exploring:

- ✓ Dry or cooked spaghetti, pasta or rice
- ✓ Cold custard / Jelly
- ✓ Shaving foam
- ✓ Shredded paper
- ✓ Scents such as cinnamon or lemon juice

Drawing

Drawing doesn't just have to be with a pencil and paper. Messy play offers valuable pre-writing skills. There are many ways to make marks from patterns in the gloop with your finger to lines in the sand with a lolly stick. Try some of these suggestions:

- ✓ Use coloured pencils/crayons/pens on different papers
- ✓ Use paintbrushes and water to 'draw' on the pavement – watching the marks disappear on a sunny day
- ✓ Use paint to make marks with brushes/fingers to make marks
- ✓ Use twigs, lolly sticks or rough surfaced materials to make marks

Collage

Cutting and sticking is always a favourite. Getting used to using scissors will really help improve co-ordination. Encourage your child to use the hand most comfortable to cut with. Children can cut out their own shapes and have some pre-cut shapes they can use. It's good to use a range of materials such as paper, card, magazines, felt, foam shapes, feathers, glitter, natural materials such as twigs, leaves and shells. Encourage your child to talk about their creation and praise them.

Sand and Water play

If using sand remember to only use play sand and sterilise with hot water regularly. Use various bottles, jugs, scoops, sieves, funnels, tools and containers. Filling various containers with water or dry sand gives children the experience of feeling different weights. Pouring from one container to another introduces the relationships of capacity and volume. Children love to explore floating and sinking. Damp sand feels different to dry sand, let your child explore both. Remember water play can be explored in the bath! You could try adding:

- ✓ Baby bath for bubbles to your water tray
- ✓ Rice/pasta in sand or water
- ✓ Animals, cars, dinosaurs etc
- ✓ Shredded paper in the sand
- ✓ Damp sand is good for building – lolly sticks make great slicers.
- ✓ Spades, buckets and trowels
- ✓ Shells and other natural objects

Junk modelling

When children work out how to balance one box onto another they are problem solving.

- ✓ Let children choose what they need from: packets, cardboard tubes, yogurt pots, different sized empty boxes and paper.
- ✓ If using cardboard egg boxes ensure there are no remnants of the egg in the box – if in doubt microwave the box.
- ✓ Use sticky tape as well as glue.
- ✓ Decorate with paint, glitter, stickers etc.

Messy play in the home

It may take a bit more time and thought when planning messy play activities but it is well worth the effort. Here are some helpful suggestions when planning messy play at home:

1. Giving children craft aprons to wear will prevent getting their clothes messy. Or use big old t-shirts pulled together at the back with hair/bulldog clips for total cover.
2. Take as much outdoors as possible (weather permitting!)
3. Use dust sheets over furniture to protect them. Use plastic tablecloths or shower curtains on the floor depending on the activity.
4. If you are playing outside, make tidying up a fun activity by letting the children wash away the chalk/paint etc on the patio using soapy water and brushes.
5. If you are very anxious about the mess...think small. Messy play could just be a simple activity. E.g. a bowl of water and different containers, scented play doh or finger painting.
6. The key thing to remember is to allow your child to become fully engaged with their activity and let them lead it. You can support their learning with vocabulary, posing questions and showing that you are interested and value what they are doing.