

Messy Play

What is messy play? - Messy play allows children to explore different everyday materials through their senses: touch, smell, sight, sound and some children may use taste.

Why is messy play important? - Children love to get messy and learn through sensory play. This type of play gives children the opportunity to explore what they can do with different materials and how to describe what they feel. They develop their hand to eye control, fine motor skills and muscles. Children enjoy making marks and drawing in the materials and using tools in a variety of ways.

Getting started... Think carefully about where you can set up the activity to avoid damage to furnishings and fittings in your home, here are some steps to help you.



- Use the outdoor environment or bath time for wet messy activities.
- Wear aprons to protect clothing.
- To contain the mess indoors use clean trays or place them on a plastic tablecloth or old shower curtain.
- Let your child explore the wet/dry materials by scooping or squeezing with their hands, using large or small utensils to pour, plunging their hands and feet and make marks.

Equipment ideas

Household items such as spoons, spatulas, scoops and small pots or bowls can be used for transporting. Toy cars or animals, pegs and paintbrushes for mark making. Food containers, yogurt pots, plastic bottles for scooping and pouring.

Dry materials you can use—Rice, plain or coloured (use a few drops of food colouring and then dry the rice out on a baking tray in a cool oven). Lentils, pulses, cereals, pasta, oats, shredded paper, buttons or sand. Plain flour or you can add powder paint, spices, chocolate or milkshake powder for colour.

Wet materials you can use—Water, shaving foam, corn flour with water (gloop), cooked spaghetti, jelly, custard, baked beans, compost or wet sand.

Top Tips!

Not all children enjoy wet messy play activities and find them challenging. Start with putting the wet substance inside a laminated pocket or clear plastic bag (tied securely). The pocket can then be squeezed moving the substance around. Progress by placing a small amount of wet substance in a shallow tray for your child to explore. You can encourage your child to run a toy car or animal through the mixture to make tracks.

Do not hurry the play experience — Give your child reassurance through eye contact, gestures and language which encourages and praises them. Show an interest in what they are doing and have fun!



For safety reasons never leave your child alone with messy play activities, and always supervise their playtime.

Be aware of the child's food and or skin allergies.