

CARE & LEARNING SERVICE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVICE FOR MESSY PLAY

Benefits of Messy Play

- Develops imagination, creativity and exploration skills
- It encourages a positive approach to new experiences. There is no "right" way for children to do messy play. This builds self-confidence and self-esteem
- Provides multi-sensory experiences, which allows children to learn in different ways
- It can provide a non-threatening way of introducing new experiences, such as different foods, smells or textures
- It can be used to work on developing a range of skills including; turn taking, fine motor control and letter formation

Messy Play Ideas

Everyday activities

- Make the most of bath time. Tiles make a great "writing" surface for bubbles or shaving foam
- Cooking can provide a range of messy play opportunities, eg kneading dough
- Gardening, such as watering plants or filling pots with soil



Water play

- Add soap to the water table. Wash dolls, use containers or play with the bubbles
- Add ice cubes to the water table

Finger paint

- Add a flavouring, such as vanilla, to the paint
- Use more than one colour at a time
- Start with white paint and gradually add another colour or 2
- Add salt to the paint for a textured paint and a shiny result
- Paint with whipped cream



Playdoh

- Add things to the Playdoh to change its appearance, such as glitter, rice, peppermint extract, food colouring, etc
- Create a Playdoh environment using pebbles, shells, twigs and stones
- Add bits to it such as drinking straws, pipe cleaners and sticks to make Playdoh constructions
- Create Playdoh faces; you could add googly eyes and make hair using a garlic press
- Pretend cooking – provide rolling pins, plastic cutters and plates



Sand play

- Bury small objects such as shells or pretty rocks in the sand for children to find
- Add water to the sand to change the texture

Other materials

- Food stamps, eg potato or carrots dipped in paint
- Gloop, slime and paint can all be home-made
- Jelly
- Bubbles
- Novelty toys such as crazy foam or silly string



Minimising the mess

- **Set clear rules:** about what children can and cannot do with the material they are playing with, eg “the water stays in the container”, or “the Playdoh stays on the table”
- **Supervise:** Children making mess can get lost in the moment and forget the rules, they may need you to be nearby to remind them



- **Protect clothes and surfaces:** with aprons, table clothes or old clothes / material
- **Use water-based paints:** because they are easier to wash off skin, clothes and furniture
- **Play before bath time:** this reduces the amount of cleaning up needed afterwards