

CLAY

Clay is a natural, malleable material that engages senses and provides opportunities for exploration of texture, shape and form, supporting children to make connections with everyday life and nature.

Whilst clay offers distinct learning experiences from dough, both support children's imagination and creative expression, are open-ended, and allow for symbolic representation in two and three-dimensional forms.

Covering clay after use makes it possible for children to revisit their creations, intricately sculpt, and add to them over time. Clay also has the potential to be moulded into a permanent object.

CURRICULAR & DEVELOPMENTAL

Health & Wellbeing

Fine-motor development occurs as children manipulate clay and gain mastery over tools, enabling them to create more intricate designs.

Due to clay's resistant properties, children are required to work harder in order to manipulate it. This supports the development of core strength and gross-motor skills.

Children can engage with clay at their own level and pace, increasing confidence as they gain greater familiarity and comfort using the material.



Literacy

Children can explore vocabulary as they describe their clay creations to others.

Playing with clay provides opportunities to experiment with creating patterns, letters and shapes. The unique properties of clay make it possible for children to mark-make, easily erase it, then start again.

The resistant properties of clay foster the strengthening of children's hand muscles, wrists and forearms, supporting development of pre-writing skills.

The potential permanency of clay means that children can create characters which they can use in their storytelling of both imaginary and real-life experiences.

Maths & Numeracy

As children cut, scrape and draw into the clay, they explore concepts of pattern, shape and symmetry.

The exploration of balance, stability, weight and size when building clay models can support the development of problem-solving skills.

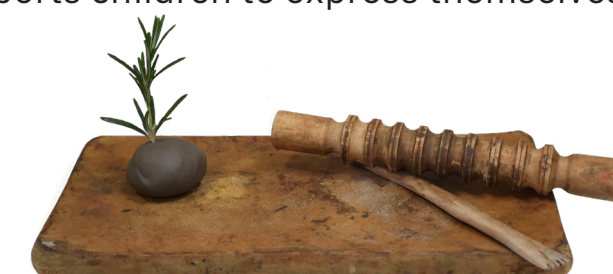
Children explore shapes by experimenting how they fit together through stacking, turning, joining and fitting 2D shapes together to make a 3D shape.

When playing with clay, children use mathematical language to describe and compare size, for example: small, smaller, smallest or big, bigger, biggest.

Other

When fully immersed in a messy tactile experience, children explore the properties of clay and develop an understanding that it is a natural material that comes from the earth.

Due to its unique properties, clay supports children to express themselves and their creative ideas through the exploration of texture, line and form.



ROLE OF THE ADULT

When introducing tools, practitioners should model techniques and use relevant vocabulary and terminology.



In order to support children to express their own ideas in both 2 and 3 dimensions, practitioners should model ways to manipulate clay by kneading, rolling and flattening before demonstrating how to join shapes of different sizes, thickness and length together to form a 3D object.

Practitioners should support discussion around the different properties of clay, comparing and contrasting with other malleable materials. Discuss the form, texture and feel of the clay, considering what happens when it is left to dry out or when water is added.

It's valuable for practitioners to understand the properties of clay, how to store it, how to reconstitute it, and effective ways to clean it up.

ROOM STRUCTURE & LAYOUT

As a resistant material that requires effort to manipulate, children need adequate space and a robust surface in order to press, pound, and roll the clay.

Clay, tools, and loose parts should be stored in an accessible and organised way that supports children's independence and creativity.

There should be space to display children's work and items made from clay that can provide visual stimulation.

Children should have access to a basin where they can remove excess clay before handwashing, preventing sinks from being clogged. This excess clay should be disposed of in a bin.



RESOURCE IDEAS

Air-drying clay or firing clay. Different textures that dry in different ways

Clay container: airtight bin/container or clay pot

Damp cloth: wrap clay in to keep moist

Separate cloth to wipe table

Visual stimuli: items made from clay, images of people working with clay

Loose parts: natural materials, shells, sticks, stones, conkers, flowers, corks

Clay modelling tools

Textured & plain rolling pins

Spray bottle

Small pot & paintbrush to create slip

Clay boards

Basin for children to rinse hands of excess clay

REFLECTION POINTS



- How can practitioners ensure that the clay area stimulates children's curiosity and remains visually interesting. Are real clay objects and photographs available that enable children to make connections and be inspired?
- In what ways do practitioners support children's skill development? Do practitioners role-model how to manipulate clay, use tools effectively, join clay together and store it correctly?
- Do children have the opportunity to revisit their creations and continue to build-on their designs? This can mean storing children's models in a way that allows them to add to them over time or allowing them to dry so that they can be painted and decorated.