

WATER

Naturally fascinating, water captivates children, encouraging curiosity and experimentation whilst offering limitless open-ended play. It supports learning across the curriculum, including the exploration of maths and science concepts.

In addition to fostering cognitive, physical and social development, water affords a range of joyous sensory experiences, as children splash, guddle and play. For many children, this is highly therapeutic.

Children should have opportunities to play with water both indoors and outdoors, due to the different experiences each can offer.

The water tray should generally remain in its natural state. For alternative explorations and experiments, a separate container should be provided.



CURRICULAR & DEVELOPMENTAL

Health & Wellbeing

Water play creates opportunities for development of both gross and fine-motor skills. Lifting, filling and emptying large containers engages large muscle groups, whilst using and manipulating tubes, droppers, squeeze bottles and sponges strengthens smaller ones.

Hand-eye coordination develops as children explore waterplay resources, such as tongs, nets, scoops, whisks and eggbeaters.

Playing in water fosters social awareness, as children learn to share the space and resources, remaining considerate of other's needs. Even during solitary play, children develop awareness that they share the water.



Literacy

The water area supports extension of children's vocabulary. Children may name resources like sieves, funnels and jugs or use vocabulary to describe water's movement or properties: warm, cold, wet.

Children can share personal experiences relating to water, such as trips to the swimming pool or explore different uses for water: hydration, washing and cooking.

Water play creates possibilities for children to express and share thoughts and ideas during cooperative and imaginative play.



Maths & Numeracy

Playing with water encourages exploration of mathematical concepts, especially number and measurement, which include volume, counting and weight. For example, *"how many egg cups does it take to fill the jug?"*

Children can develop understanding of mathematical language, including empty/full and shallow/deep. Additionally, they can explore comparative language, for instance *"big, bigger, biggest"* when comparing different sized containers.

As children experiment and make predictions, such as guessing whether objects will float or sink, they can sort, collect, organise and display information.

Other

Water play supports exploration of flow, force and movement, such as how water flows through pipes at different heights, lengths and angles, or how the force of water can make objects move at different speeds.

As a vital, life-giving resource, children learn about water's vitality through feeding plants, learning where water comes from, and the types of animals that live in water.

Children can explore the changing properties of water, investigating freezing and melting.



ROLE OF THE ADULT

Children should be supported to exercise independence, plan their learning, select resources and practise self-help skills, such as putting on their own apron, managing risk and taking responsibility for spillages.

Water is a natural resource that children should learn to value and not waste. Practitioners can model this by reusing water to care for plants.

Remain mindful of schemas and offer alternatives for children to explore ways that water can change the texture of different materials. This should occur in a separate space to ensure the main water tray remains on offer to all children.

Possess knowledge and understanding of the ways that water play facilitates STEAM learning and exploration of concepts, such as estimation, capacity and displacement.

Practitioners should ensure that resources are open-ended, relevant to children's interests and capable of extending learning.



ROOM STRUCTURE & LAYOUT

The water tray should be in an area with easy-to-clean flooring, situated near a sink and preferably near the sand and art areas.

Ensure there is enough water on offer to explore a deep rectangular or square box type tray. This affords open-ended, unlimited play.

Thought should be given to providing accessible, well-organised storage that supports independent choice of inviting resources that promote curiosity and exploration.



RESOURCE IDEAS



- Deep water tray (preferably clear)
- Enough water to enable full exploration of concepts
- Containers of various shapes/sizes/materials: metal, wooden, high-quality plastic
- Spoons, ladles, measuring cups, jugs, buckets, watering cans
- Funnels, whisks, sponges, squeeze bottles
- Pipettes, corks, fishing nets
- Natural loose parts: shells, feathers, sticks and stones
- Appropriately sized guttering, pipes and hoses
- Resources to support imaginative play: boats, people, sea life creatures
- Relevant reference books
- Different types and styles of aprons
- Mop and bucket

REFLECTION POINTS

- Do children have opportunities to explore water concepts fully? Does the water tray hold an adequate amount of water for experimenting with concepts like floating and sinking?
- Is there a consistent approach towards play happening in this area? For example, whilst it's advisable for children to wear aprons, it's important to be mindful of each individual child's needs. Additionally, if children want to experiment with bubbles, this should be supported using a separate container.
- Do practitioners value and understand the learning that can occur in the water area? How often is water play detailed in Daily Responsive Planning?

