

Messy Play – Ideas for Home

Messy Play is a fun and interesting activity for home and school.

Children can explore and learn about the world around them through a range of sensory experiences. For example, it can help with your child become familiar with different smells, and textures through touch.

Children may need time and support at this stage, be aware of them resisting or becoming sensitive towards certain textures.

It is important to join in with your child so they can copy what you're doing, or follow their lead and expand their play. Don't forget to stop when your child has lost interest; it is important never to force their play.

There are many different materials and ideas to use for MESSY PLAY ... here are a few.

Play using DRY textures:

(more suitable for sensory avoiders):



Create a farm scene:

Use a range of cereal and other dry textures:

- Coconut
- Broken up Weetabix
- Coco-pops
- Corn flakes/ bran flakes

Use tractors, diggers and animals to play with

Other dry materials include:

- dry rice, peas and lentils;
- dry pasta;
- sand;
- tinsel/cotton wool/toilet tissue;
- shredded paper
- chalk;
- pebbles or stones;
- crayons, pencils or pens;
- sawdust
- cereal



Play using SOFT/ WET textures:



Create a snow scene:

Use shaving foam, cornflour, custard, baby lotion, paint etc. with glitter and marshmallows, with toy cars, houses, trees.



Create a bug scene:

Cooked spaghetti, jelly, pasta and then mix with your children's favourite colour paint.

Other materials include:

- bread dough;
- play dough;
- wet sand;
- squishy balls/water beads;
- soft materials (for example, fur or velvet);
- sponges;
- balloons/bubbles;
- Ice blocks with glitter/toys hidden inside
- Wet mud

Useful websites for more ideas:

- Pinterest
- Your kids table <https://yourkidstable.com/messy-play/>
- Growing hands on kids <https://www.growinghandsonkids.com/importance-messy-play-children.html>
- You tube - 'The importance of messy play'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4t4JgpT4bM&feature=youtu.be>



Messy Play – Things to consider



For sensory avoiders:

(children who tend to avoid getting their hands dirty and become distressed by this e.g. they may have a fight, flight or avoid response to tactile input)

- Use a visual (e.g. a 'first, next' board or visual timetable) so that your child knows that the activity will end.
- If your child is very anxious, motivate them by having a favourite activity after the messy play
- Prepare your child's body prior to any messy play activities using proprioceptive (heavy muscle work) and deep pressure activities e.g. sensory circuits (see learning platform), hand/arm squeezes, making a firm fist with the hands and releasing, pushing hands together in a prayer position, squeezing a ball, rubbing hands together, crawling, rolling on floor, wheelbarrow walks etc. These can be calming for the nervous system and help to better prepare them for messy play activities.
- Use a timer to show your child when the activity will end e.g. a stop watch on phone, sand timer/time timer
- If your child is very avoidant, start with dry materials e.g. dry pasta, lentils, peas, spaghetti, sand, cereal etc. and very slowly introduce more wetter textures
- Give your child a choice in which materials they want to play with, this will help them to feel in control
- Reduce the expectation to use the hands if your child is very anxious e.g. use a spoon, fork, cooking utensils, rolling pin, paintbrushes
- Model how to play with the messy materials to your child and show them that it's fun and not dangerous (as they may anticipate it in this way)
- Do not pressure your child to touch any materials they are avoiding, give them praise for being near the materials and for any attempts they make to play. Let them explore in their own time.
- Allow your child to wash their hands e.g. at sink or have a bowl of water next to them during very messy activities.

For sensory seekers:

(children who love to get their hands dirty and seek wet textures)



- Your child may not want to end the messy play so use a visual (e.g. a 'first, next' board or visual timetable) so that your child knows that the activity will have to end.
- Motivate them to finish and transition to the next activity by having a favourite activity after the messy play.
- Some children who love messy play can become over excited by it and then dysregulated if the activity lasts for too long, so use a timer to show them how long the activity will last e.g. a stop watch on your phone, sand timer/time timer etc.
- If your child becomes over excited, use proprioceptive (heavy muscle work) and deep pressure activities after the messy play to help them to calm e.g. sensory circuits (see learning platform), bear hugs, squeezing a ball, ball squashes, calm music/dark den