

# Sand and Messy Play

PLAY  
IDEAS 9

ABOUT  
SAND  
PLAY



'Messy play' can involve sand, water, clay, mud, playdough, glues, paints, soaps, shaving cream and other interesting materials. Different textures and consistencies can help children get used to different sensations and get a 'feel' for hands and fingers. Messy play is very creative allowing children the space to explore their imagination and express feelings. It's also a fun way to learn different words, talk about new ideas and can provide hours of fun and discovery.



## MESSY PLAY AND DEVELOPMENT



### Babies

Finger feeding lets baby explore different textures such as the feel of banana, drippy yoghurt or mashed pumpkin. Once they are able to sit, babies can also enjoy the feel of sand - at the beach or in a clean sandpit. Constant supervision is required at this stage as your baby is likely to put everything into their mouth.



### Toddlers

Toddlers enjoy using tools and toys as part of play for poking, prodding, digging, pouring, tipping, hiding and finding toys. This is a good opportunity for your child to play alongside other children, although they are not yet ready to share or cooperate.



### Young Children

Young children enjoy messy play to build tunnels, create roads, make pretend cakes and pies or involve action figures. With developing hand skills, young children can make all kinds of detailed creations with mud or dough. This is a time of increased cooperative play - working together with other children, talking about and planning their play together.



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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Include messy play into everyday activities (baths, meals, cooking or gardening) as well as setting up special activities (a sand pit, playdough, art/craft activities).
- Allow your child time and space to enjoy these activities, supervising closely but loosely so that your child can be creative and relax.
- Provide a variety of 'messy play' experiences through the use of sand, water, clay, dough, shaving cream and paints. Messy play is more easily managed outside.
- Set rules before starting play such as "We only paint on the paper." "The sand stays in the sandpit". "The playdough stays on the table". Pack away when you notice children need a rest or a change. Encourage your child to help you clean up.
- Join in too, and show your child different things you can do such as make sandcastles, dig tunnels, draw pictures with your fingers, take turns to hide small objects that you can dig about and find.
- Some children may have a real dislike of the feel of sand, mud or other sensations - be sensitive to this, gently encourage play, but don't force it. Allow your child to work within his own comfort.

### SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- Always supervise your child when using water, and provide good shade/sunblock for outdoor play.
- Teach your child how to take care when playing with sand and to be careful not to throw sand into others' eyes or face.
- Have a cover on the sandpit to keep it clean when not in use. Check outdoor sandpits for spiders and check public sandpits for broken glass, etc.

## SOME ACTIVITIES TO TRY

- **Set up a sandpit** Buy clean white sand by the bag from gardening suppliers. Make the sandpit big enough for other children as well. Add some buckets, kitchen containers and funnels for pouring and tipping. On nature walks find shells and pebbles for the sandpit. Have some toys such as figurines, tea sets, plastic animals or miniature cars - that you don't mind 'losing' in the sand pit. Let the hose run into the sand for a short time, so that children can create canals, dams and lakes as part of their play.
- **Paint the fence or path** with water and a brush or a spray bottle. It dries clean.
- **Shaving foam** Squirt on to a plastic tablecloth or laminex bench, to be smeared and drawn in. It easily washes off with a damp cloth.
- **Painting** Have large sheets of paper and choose 3-4 colours (too much choice can be distracting for young children). Have a large paintbrush for each colour. Be prepared for mess - have paper on the floor, a plastic sheet on the table, a wet cloth for wiping hands and wear old clothes.
- **Make a butterfly painting** by dobbing different paint colours onto half a sheet of paper, then refolding and pressing the sides together. Open the paper and see the "butterfly".
- **Stamping** Use fruit and vegetable pieces to print onto paper. You can use an onion, potato, carrot, or apples. Or paint leaves, coins, hands or feet to make patterns.
- **Playdough/clay** Popsticks, plastic knives, a rolling pin, garlic press, and biscuit cutters are great modelling tools. Occasionally don't have tools, just use your hands and imagination.

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