



## Messy Play

### WHY MESSY-SENSORY PLAY IS IMPORTANT?

Messy play is important for children, giving them endless ways to develop and learn. All types of play are essential for children's development and early learning. Play helps children to develop and improve their gross and fine motor skills, coordination and concentration. Also how to work cooperatively and collaboratively, use all their senses to discover and explore their environment, and develop their imagination, creative thinking and ability to problem solve and experiment with solutions.

### 1. Scented playdough

Make up a large batch of playdough and divide it into separate bowls. Mix different ingredients into each bowl, to create easily identifiable smells, for example cinnamon, almond essence, lemon juice, vanilla essence, ginger and so on (you could also add food colouring). While the children play with the dough they can enjoy the different smells and try to



guess what they are.

### 2. Car wash

Set up a car washing station outside in the garden – with bowls of water, soap, sponges/brushes/cloths/towels and a selection of plastic vehicles. The children will love playing with the soapy water, scrubbing the cars clean and drying them off again.



### 3. Mud kitchen

If you have the space, it's really worth setting up a permanent mud kitchen as they are very popular, particularly with children who are drawn to sensory activities. You can buy readymade mud kitchens, or make your own by repurposing cast-offs or building from scratch. Make sure there are also plenty of utensils and tools available to play with.



### 4. Homemade musical instruments

There are lots of different musical instruments that you can make with young children, and creating them can be just as much fun as playing with them. Ideas include shakers (eg fill plastic bottles with rice or dried beans), rattles (eg thread buttons or beads onto some string), drums (eg

use wooden spoons to beat on plastic tubs) and chimes (hang up some bottle tops or shells).

### **5. Footprint painting**

For this activity you'll need a large roll of paper and some trays of paint, as well as paper towels and water on hand for cleaning the paint off the children's feet. You could try to create a particular scene (eg paint some circles and then get the children to make footprint petals around them), or just let them go freeform.



### **6. Tasting game**

In this game the children taste different kinds of food while blindfolded, and then guess what it is. Your choice of food will obviously depend on the likes/dislikes of the children, but bear in mind that this game can be a good way of introducing new tastes and textures. Your list might include things like yoghurt, cereal, jelly, rice cakes, bananas, bread, tomato sauce, satsumas and guacamole.



### **7. Cornflour slime**

This homemade slime is great to play with as it has unusual properties – it's a cross between a liquid and a solid. In a large shallow container, mix together cornflour and water until you have a slime consistency. If you punch the slime it instantly turns solid, but when you scoop some up and hold it, it will turn back into a liquid.



### **8. Frozen toys**

You'll need to prepare this activity a day or two ahead. Find a large plastic box that will fit in your freezer, quarter fill it with water, put some toys in and freeze. Add three more layers, and then turn out your ice block. The children then have to get the toys out of the ice, using a selection of tools (eg spray bottles with warm water in, toy hammers etc).



### **9. Sand table**

Sometimes the simplest activities are the best. Most children love playing with sand, so invest in (or build) a sand table, along with a good selection of resources for them to play with – buckets, rakes, moulds, sieves and so on.

### **10. Bubble snakes**

For this activity you'll need plastic bottles, socks and bubble mixture. Cut the bottoms off the bottles, and put the socks over the ends, pulling them all the way over the bottle and then folding them back so you have a tight fit. Dip the sock-covered end into the bubble mixture and blow through the top end to make lovely long bubble snakes.



### Heavy Work Activities

(i.e., proprioceptive input) are used for children with sensory processing difficulties to help increase attention, decrease defensiveness and modulate arousal. Proprioceptive input is the performance of tasks that involves heavy resistance and input to the muscles and joints, and is essential in helping our bodies assimilate and process both movement (vestibular) and touch (tactile) information.

Heavy work activities include:

- Whole body actions involving pushing, pulling, lifting, playing, and moving
- Oral actions such as chewing, sucking, and blowing
- Use of hands for squeezing, pinching, or "fidgeting"

### Some ideas:

- ❖ Pull laundry out of the washer and/or dryer
- ❖ Carry large bottles, boxes, etc. and sort recycling
- ❖ Load or unload the dishwasher
- ❖ Staple paper together
- ❖ Use a paper punch or hole punch to make confetti out of paper
- ❖ Rip paper or cardboard
- ❖ Vacuum
- ❖ Sweep or mop the floor
- ❖ Push, drag, or move furniture
- ❖ Rake the leaves
- ❖ Mow the grass
- ❖ Move garbage and/or recycling bins to the curb
- ❖ Push, move, or carry large rocks
- ❖ Push a wheelbarrow
- ❖ Build a fort
- ❖ Obstacle course
- ❖ Animal walks
- ❖ Pillow fight
- ❖ Play catch with bean bags
- ❖ Play catch with a large ball
- ❖ Crawl backwards using hands
- ❖ Carry bean bags
- ❖ Carry a pile of books
- ❖ Play statue
- ❖ Carry a bucket of water or sand
- ❖ Play tug of war
- ❖ Resistance cycling
- ❖ Push a door
- ❖ Hand pushing game
- ❖ Dig in the dirt, garden, or sandbox
- ❖ Do push ups
- ❖ Squish, knead, and play with play dough or silly putty
- ❖ Ride a scooter board on your tummy and use hands to move

### TACPAC



TACPAC is a sensory communication resource using touch and music to align the senses and develop communication skills.



To support you at home in these difficult times access to Tacpac's Set 5 is free for three months.

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