



Play and Learning 9

Messy play

Messy play is creative, allowing children to explore their imagination and express feelings.

- **Messy play** can involve sand, water, clay, mud, playdough, glue, paint and more...
- Playing with **different textures** helps children get used to different sensations, and using their hands and fingers.
- Some children may not enjoy the feel of things like sand or may be scared around water. Be aware of this. **Encourage play, but go slowly and don't force it.**

When it comes to messy play:

- **babies** explore different textures as they start to finger feed. Once they can sit, they also enjoy the feel of grass and sand at the beach, or in a sandpit. Babies enjoy bath time, having fun with gentle splashes, watching floating toys, and hearing familiar words and songs.
- **toddlers** enjoy using tools from the kitchen for poking, prodding, digging, pouring, tipping, hiding and finding toys in sand. Toddlers will have great fun using household objects to fill and pour, as they talk about the water – 'all gone', 'splash'. Toddlers can enjoy messy play with other children, but remember that they're still learning to share.
- **young children** can be creative with sand. They can make roads and tunnels, build castles, or pretend to cook. Young children enjoy using water to wash their dolls, create rivers and lakes, jump in puddles, and run through sprinklers. They enjoy working together, sharing toys, and planning their play with friends.

What you can do

- **Include messy play in everyday activities** – baths, meals, cooking, craft and gardening.
- **Set rules before starting messy play** – 'We only paint on the paper' and 'The sand stays in the sandpit'.
- **Provide a variety of messy play experiences** – sand, water, clay, mud, playdough, paint.
- **Join in** – follow your child's lead and show them different things that you can do.
- **Be prepared for mess** – wear old clothes and have a wet cloth for wiping hands. Some messy play is best to do outside.
- **Pack away** when you notice your child needs a rest or a change. Encourage your child to help you clean up.

Some activities to try

- **Hide and seek box** – hide small toys in a box of rice, pasta or lentils.
- **Painting** – use fingers, brushes or sponges. Blob paint on one side of paper – fold and unfold the paper to make butterfly paintings. Use leaves or vegetable pieces as stamps. Make hand or foot prints.
- **Make playdough creations together** – pop sticks, a garlic press, and biscuit cutters are great modelling tools. Encourage your child to create something without using tools.
- Have fun **blowing bubbles**.



Some activities to try (continued)

Sand play

- **Play with toys in the sandpit** – figurines, cars, tea sets, buckets, containers, funnels.
- **Add water** – your child can feel the difference between wet and dry sand, and create rivers and lakes, as part of the play.
- **Visit the beach or set up a sandpit** – buy clean white sand from hardware stores. Cover when not in use.
- **Teach your child to be careful** not to throw sand into other people's eyes or face.
- **Check sandpits** for spiders, animal droppings and sharp objects.



Water play

- **Water play suits all ages** – it is a wonderful way to calm a tense or grumpy child, or to perk everyone up on a hot day.
- **Bath or shower time** – talk about different parts of the body. Play with sponges, plastic cups and sieves. Sing splashy songs. Blow soap bubbles.
- **Everyday water play** – let your child help wash up in the sink, wash vegies in a bowl, wash the car with a bucket, or wash some socks or toys in a tub.
- **In the garden** – run through the sprinkler, water the plants, digging and mud play.
- **Painting with water** – take a cup of water, some paint brushes and 'paint' the fence or path.
- **Rainy day play** – use an umbrella. Splash through the puddles. Look at the rain drops running down the window. Sing rainy day songs.



Keeping your child safe

- Supervise your child closely at all times especially around water, play equipment, or when using objects such as scissors, pencils, glue or paint. Avoid flammable or toxic materials.
- Babies, toddlers and young children can choke on small toys and objects. Regularly check toys to make sure they are safe and in good condition.
 - Toys should be bigger than a 20 cent coin.
 - Strings on toys should be less than 20 centimetres long.
- Do a safety check and make sure your home is safe for your child to actively explore..
 - **Be SunSmart** – make sure your child has adequate sun protection when playing outdoors.

Find out more

For more information on play, learning, and a range of other topics, visit:

- playgroupwa.com.au
- bringingupgreatkids.org
- raisingchildren.net.au
- cahs.health.wa.gov.au/childhealthresources

For more information about the metropolitan **Child Development Service** phone 1300 551 827 or visit cahs.health.wa.gov.au/childdevelopment

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