

What is Messy Play?

Here are a few examples of what children are doing when they are involved in Messy Play:

- **Digging** – in the sand pit or soil outside
- **Carrying** – woodchips in buckets or water to the sand tray
- **Mixing** – sand and water or corn flour and water
- **Squelching** – squeezing wet clay or splatting mud pies
- **Kneading** – dough or clay
- **Filling** – jugs in the water tray or leaves in baskets
- **Poking** - fingers in dough or sticks in mud
- **Sticking** – sequins or cut up paper
- **Discovering** – that bubbles burst when you touch them or that you can scoop up foam
- **Chatting** – about what they are doing or how they might make something happen



Why is Messy Play important?

Messy play supports all aspects of learning and development outlined in the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (a guidance document for early years practitioners). Here are some ways that messy play promotes development:

- **Safety and Cooperation** – children learn to think about their actions, such as not flicking sand, and they work together to make something happen, like holding a container steady while another child pours water into it.
- **Developing language** – children use descriptive words in messy play, such as ‘this feels really mushy’ and they talk through what they are doing, such as ‘I am going to put the woodchips in here and they will come out at the bottom’.
- **Solving problems** – children begin to find solutions to problems, like how to transport something from one place to another, or how to share out equipment fairly.
- **Exploring the world around them** – children use their senses during messy play, especially touch, and they learn how things change when they are added to other things, such as adding water to dry sand or water to clay.
- **Being creative** – children observe the patterns their hands make in corn flour gloop or when hand printing, or they might decorate mud pies with objects they find outside.
- **Getting physical** – children carry and lift as they transport buckets and boxes, and they poke and squeeze when they push buttons into dough or squelch paint between their fingers.



How we support Messy Play

- **Lots of resources** – we provide all kinds of messy play experiences for children, including water, sand, soil, mud, bark chippings, straw, leaves, paint, glue, corn flour, glitter, foam, clay and dough.
- **Messy areas** – we have a special area inside where messy play takes place, so that children can come and go as they please.
- **Outside** – lots of messy play takes place outside, giving the children freedom to move about and transport resources.
- **Adult involvement** – we get stuck into messy play as well, sharing and exploring with the children.
- **Easy access** – equipment is at an appropriate height so that children can collect what they want themselves without needing to ask an adult for help. This allows the children the opportunity to be in charge of their own experiences.
- **Covering up** – we encourage the children to wear appropriate clothing for messy play. Aprons are placed near messy areas for children to reach themselves.
- **Clearing up** – this is part of the messy play experience. We leave enough time for a good clean up, encouraging children to help and often making it fun by doing it to music.



- **Babies and toddlers** – very young children love to get involved in messy play. We provide them with safe and simple experiences such as splashing water, catching bubbles or smearing something gooey round their high chair tray.
- **Safety** – we choose resources without harmful chemicals and are alert to choking hazards with small objects.

Messy Play at home

Getting messy at home can be a daunting prospect!

Here are some fun and simple ideas to get you started:

- **Hand-prints** – squeeze paint onto plates and let your child feel the squidgy paint between their fingers. Show them how to press their hands onto paper to make a print. 
- **Finger-painting** – instead of using a paint brush, try using your fingers in the paint to make a picture. Or you could make finger prints dotted all over the page.
- **Sticking** – cut up paper and runny glue are great ways to get a bit sticky.
- **Play dough or plasticine** – provide a rolling pin and cutters or things to stick into the dough such as cut up drinking straws or buttons.
- **Bubbles at bath time** – put bubbles in the bath, or fill a washing up bowl with water and bubbles. Add some plastic cups and spoons for scooping the bubbles. 
- **Ice cubes** – put some ice cubes and water in a washing up bowl.

- **Outside** – make piles of leaves in the autumn, make mud pies with water and soil, play with buckets of water and jugs, make potions with plastic bottle and water coloured with food dye.
- **Things to remember** - cover surfaces with a plastic cloth or sheet; wear aprons or big old T-shirts; make cleaning up part of the activity; talk with your child about what things feel like and what they are doing;  HAVE FUN!

Come and join us

We always welcome parents and carers:

- If you have a messy play idea you would like to do with the children please let us know.
- If you are not sure about messy play and would like to see it in action then please ask us to arrange a time for you to stay and play.
- We often record messy play with photographs of the children having fun and learning. Please have a look at your child's special book to see what they have been up to.

We hope you have found this leaflet useful. Please ask a member of staff if you have any questions.

Why do we do messy play at



Messy play is not all about making a mess! This kind of play allows children to explore the world around them and to embrace new experiences. It is open-ended play that lets children follow their own interests at their own pace. We believe it offers valuable opportunities for children to learn and develop.

