



Messy Play Activities to do with your child

Messy play activities are a great way to share fun experiences through observing, experiencing and exploring messy play textures. They can help your child to:

- Learn to tolerate new textures
- Use all their senses to learn about their bodies and environment
- Develop fine and gross motor skills

- ✓ Try to make messy play fun and exciting for you and your child.
- ✓ You may have to show your child how to play and that you are having fun.
- ✓ Encourage your child to join in but do not make them – at first, they may just enjoy watching you.
- ✓ When your child is ready - encourage them to touch, smell, look and feel.
- ✓ If your child likes to put things in their mouth, be careful when selecting activities and instead use only edible messy play textures.
- ✓ Do not worry if the activities do not work or your child does not want to play - you can try something else from the list below.
- ✓ See if your child is sometimes happy to play without you showing them what to do or to explore the messy play themselves.
- ✓ Try to find a space where you can make mess and it will be easy to tidy up afterwards.
- ✓ Messy play can be challenging for some children - if your child dislikes messy play, start slowly and gently and let them go at their pace. In this way, they will develop trust in the activity.
- ✓ If your child only puts the tips of their fingers in the messy play, this is fine, the next time, they might put their whole fingers or hands in.





What you need

Basic equipment:

- A large tray, plate or bowl.
- Different sized straws, cutlery, brushes, toy tools etc.
- Pouring jugs, containers to hold various ingredients.
- Favourite toy(s).
- Paper-towel, wet wipes or towel.

How to do it

- Find a **space** where you and your child can sit or stand (table or a mat on the floor).
- If using a table, place a plastic sheet or towel under the table so that it is easy to clean up afterwards.
- Keep **wet wipes or towels** near so that your child can clean their hands quickly if they need to.
- Start with a texture or activity that you know your child likes.
- **Start with dry textures** and then gradually move onto wetter textures if / when your child is ready.
- Explore the messy play **yourself**.
- **Show enjoyment** by smiling and stay calm as you explore.
- Show **different ways** of exploring the messy play, e.g. dipping your fingers in, prodding, using one finger to make marks etc.
- Keep your actions **slow and rhythmic**, especially if your child dislikes messy play.
- Make **sounds** to show your child that the activity is fun, e.g. 'splat', 'wheee', 'pop'.
- If your child joins in, smile and **praise** them.
- If your child does not join in, try to think of ways of helping them explore without having to use their hands. You could try using spoons, tools, toys etc.
- As your child becomes more confident in exploring the messy play, gradually increase the challenge by changing the texture.
- If at any time during the messy play, your child becomes upset wipe their hands immediately and move away to do something completely different.





Texture / Activity	What you need	How to do it
<p>Dry textures ~ start with dry textures if your child does not like to touch wet messy play.</p>		
<p>Everyday objects</p> 	<p>You can use any of the following: Pom poms Cotton balls Feathers Soil Old corks Twigs / leaves / grass / bark Tinsel Ribbon Buttons Shredded paper Old coins Stones Shells Cut up straws</p> <p>The following tools can be used to explore the textures: Spoons Whisks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place your chosen items in a tray, bowl or on the floor on a mat. Explore the textures with your hands and using the tools. Show and encourage your child to explore the texture through: Pouring Scooping Picking up Touching / rubbing 
<p>Dry sand</p> 	<p>Sand and tray to put sand in.</p> <p>Toys to explore the sand with, e.g. spade, spoons, sieves.</p> <p>Toys to pour the sand into, e.g. cups, bowls, colanders, pots.</p> <p>Toys that you are happy to put into the sand, e.g. cars, balls, dolls, plastic letters, numbers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up the sand tray. Place one or two tools into the sand. Start to explore the sand using the tools, toys and your hands: Pour Scoop Pat Swirl Sprinkle Draw shapes See if your child will join in ~ for children who love sand, let them put their feet in it and pour the sand over their feet. Place toys in the sand for your child to try and pick out.



<p>Mark making</p> 	<p>Zip lock bag filled with 1 of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talcum powder • Sand • Soil • Hair gel • Shampoo • Conditioner • Salt scrub • Fairy liquid foam <p>Paint brush or tool.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill the bag with one of the products from the list and lay it flat on the floor or table. • Using a paintbrush or your fingers or another tool, make marks on the bag (as you press, the messy play inside the bag will move and create patterns). • Encourage your child to join in with the actions through using fun sounds, e.g. 'squish'.
<p>Dry / Damp textures ~ these are slightly more challenging than dry textures.</p>		
<p>Clever sand</p> 	<p>Clever sand ~ see recipe below Sand tray Tools and / or toys</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start by using tools to explore the sand. • Make patting, tapping, pushing and squashing motions ~ make the sounds as you do. • Scoop the sand into pots and press and release to make mini sandcastles ~ make exciting sounds as you lift up the pot, e.g. 'wow' ~ your child might like to use one of the tools to knock the castle down. • Encourage your child to join in ~ offer them a spade or scoop to dig, scoop, fill and pat. • Hide toys or bury your hand in the sand to encourage your child to pick the toys or your hand out.
<p>Playdough</p>	<p>Playdough ~ see recipe below or use your own commercially available playdough if you have it. Rolling pin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out some playdough. • Demonstrate a range of actions, e.g. prodding, pressing, rolling,



	<p>Forks Spoon Plastic knife Toys to hide</p>	<p>cutting, scoring, pinching, squeezing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use different tools to create marks in the playdough. • Mould into different shapes, e.g. press and poke. • Hide favourite objects inside for your child to find. • Stretch and pull in different ways. • Throughout all of the above, encourage your child to join in.
<p>Soap flakes</p> 	<p>Soap flakes Tools and cutlery such as whisks, wooden spoons and spade Toys to hide Water</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use different tools and cutlery to move the flakes around. • Scoop, whisk, stir the flakes. • Pick up a handful and sprinkle them into the bowl ~ encourage your child to catch them. • Hide toys in the flakes. • Add water to see what happens ~ sound excited as you add the water. • Encourage your child to join in – especially using a spoon, see if they are happy to stir the flakes when you add in water.
<p>Wet textures, e.g. water. This is the next step on from dry / damp textures.</p>		
<p>Washing e.g. washing cars / babies / dolls / plastic animals</p>	<p>Bowls Water Washing up liquid Washing up brush Sponges Pouring tools - cups Toothbrushes Towels Cars</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a bowl of water. • Show your child as you squeeze soap into the bowl ~ make fun sounds, e.g. 'SQUEEEZE'. • Encourage your child to help you squeeze in the soap.



	<p>Babies Animals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place objects into the water and encourage your child to wash – using a washing up brush sometimes can be helpful.
<p>Mixing bubbles</p> 	<p>Bowls Soap Water Mixer / whisk Spoons to scoop Plastic toys to hide in the bubbles Food colouring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a bowl of water. Put the soap in with a little bit of water and mix with a mixer. Encourage your child to help put the soap in and / or mix. Watch the bubbles build. To make it exciting, whisk quickly – encourage your child to keep whisking. Put toys in to scoop out. Encourage your child to scoop them out.
<p>Ghost bubbles</p> 	<p>Plastic bottles Kitchen cloth Washing up liquid Water Elastic bands Food colouring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cut a plastic bottle in half and using the top half only cover the bottle in a kitchen cloth with an elastic band. Dip the bottle into water and washing up liquid and blow through the hole at the top that is made to drink out of. Show and encourage your child to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach for and touch the bubbles Squish the bubbles through their fingers Pop the bubbles Blow bubbles through the bottle.
<p>Volcano activity</p>	<p>Tray Bottle of fizzy drink Mentos original (mints)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place the bottle of drink in a tray with the lid open. Slowly add three mints into the fizzy drink and



- watch what happens.
- You should see some foam appear and spill over like a volcano.
- Encourage your child to watch the reaction and when the fizzing reduces, they can touch the foam.
- Next time encourage your child to put the mints into the bottle.

Wet and silky textures ~ these are the next step on from water because you can see them clearly on your hands and they are slightly harder to wipe off.

Paint



Paints, sponges, brushes, trays, rollers etc.



Objects to use for printing, e.g. leaves, vegetable cuttings (carrot tops).

- Pour a small amount of paint into a tray ~ encourage your child to help you.
- Using a brush, roller or sponge, pat, brush, roll the paint, name the actions as you explore the paint.
- Encourage your child to join in throughout.
- Make marks in the paint.
- Print using different objects.
- Push / pull objects through paint.
- Mix the colours.
- Finally, dip your fingers in the paint and dot them around the tray.
- Make marks in the paint with your fingers ~ see if your child copies.
- Encourage your child to join in.



<p>Soap foam</p> 	<p>Tray Soap foam Spoons Scoops Whisk Sieve Roller Cars / trains</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to help squeeze the foam into the tray. • Use different tools and cutlery to move the foam around. • Drive cars / trains through the foam. • Hide toys in the foam. • Squish it through their fingers. • Sweep through the foam to make patterns.
<p>Sticky textures ~ these can be the most challenging textures because they are not easily wiped off your hands.</p>		
<p>Sticking Papier Mache</p> 	<p>Glue Glue sticks and pots Items to stick such as scraps / strips of paper Balloons or boxes to stick the paper on to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At first, take a glue stick and use this to spread the glue onto the pieces of paper. • Encourage your child to help you with the glue stick. • Gradually, as your child becomes more confident to touch the glue stick, encourage them to dip the paper into the glue pot or to press the paper onto the balloon or box.
<p>Cooking</p> 	<p>Cooking ingredients and utensils and equipment to make simple recipes such as Rice Krispies cakes and simple biscuit dough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to help set up for cooking. • Allow them to explore the cooking tools, e.g. the bowl, spoon etc. • As you go through the recipe, encourage your child to join in with actions: Mixing Stirring Rolling Pouring • Encourage your child to dip their fingers into the bowl or to use their



<p>Oobleck If you pour it – it is a slimy liquid but if you squeeze, it becomes solid</p> 	<p>See recipe below.</p> 	<p>hands to roll out the dough.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to join in as you make the Oobleck by pouring and stirring. • Model these actions: Pouring through your fingers Squeezing it into a ball and then letting it fall through your fingers. • Let it spread in the tray and press your hand into it to create a handprint ~ encourage your child to push your hand to help create a handprint. • Encourage your child to dip their fingers in to the mix.
<p>Home-made slime</p> 	<p>See recipe below or use your own if you have a commercially available slime.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show and encourage your child to: Use cutlery or tools to move the slime around Drip and drag the slime from their fingertips Squeeze it with their fists. • Hide a toy in it and encourage your child to find it.
<p>Cloud fluff</p> 	<p>See recipe below.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to help you make the cloud fluff, pouring and stirring. • Show and encourage your child to: Smell the fluff Mould it into shapes Stretch it into lengths Roll it into a ball Squeeze it and press objects into Make a handprint in it.



Messy Play Recipes

Home-made slime

You will need:

- 75g cornflour
- 120ml baby shampoo
- Food colouring

Directions:

- Put the cornflour and baby shampoo into a bowl and mix together until smooth
- Add the food colouring and mix again



Cloud fluff

You will need:

- 250g cornflour
- 175ml baby hair conditioner

Directions:

- Put the two ingredients into a bowl and mix – the dough will take a minute to come together.
- Knead for a further minute until smooth

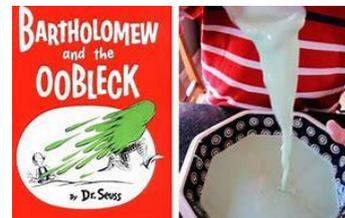
Oobleck

You will need:

- 300g cornflour
- 225ml water
- A few drops of green food colouring

Directions:

- Put the cornflour in a bowl and pour over the water and food colouring.
- Mix until there are no lumps – you'll have to mix slowly so it stays liquid



Clever sand

You will need:

- 1 litre play sand
- 110g cornflour
- 1 tbsp baby shampoo
- 200ml water

Directions:

- Put the two ingredients into a bowl and mix – the dough will take a minute to come together.
- Knead for a further minute until smooth

You can also add food colouring to the water before mixing to make different colours.



This can be stored in an airtight container for another day – spray on a little water if it dries out between plays.

Playdough

You will need:

- 2 cups of plain flour
- ½ cup of salt
- 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons of cream of tartar
- 1 – 1 ½ cups of water
- Food colouring/ Paint– optional

Directions:

- Pour flour into bowl
- Add salt into the same bowl
- Add vegetable oil into the bowl
- Add 2 tablespoons of cream of tartar
- Pour water in gradually to the bowl, checking for consistency as you may not need all water. If you have food colouring or paint, please add to the water before pouring.
- Mix together with hands or wooden spoon until it moulds together to create a spongy consistency

This can be stored in an airtight container for another day – spray on a little water if it dries out between plays.

To find out more / Useful links

- https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-for-parents/things-to-do-with-your-child/messy-play/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIjd-U1b_L6AlVy9DeCh0Cig-AEAAYASAAEgILOPD_BwE
- If your child is known to Occupational Therapy and has a sensory programme, consult the programme when using these Messy activities or liaise with your child's Occupational Therapist. A link to the Occupational Therapy service in Hounslow is below:

<https://fsd.hounslow.gov.uk/kb5/hounslow/fsd/service.page?id=jyDrHDY26Bw>