

Help! My child loves being dirty!

5 ways to support sensory play



What is sensory play?

Have you ever seen a child who just loves getting dirty from head to toe? Covered in muck, paint, food- whatever comes to their hands? Are you constantly running after your toddler trying to clean them? Is your toddler enjoying sticking fingers and hands into their food, water and paint? The good news is that your child is not just being messy but is engaging in sensory play and getting a sensory stimulation!

Sensory play helps the children to understand the world around them, provides the stimulation of the senses such as touch, smell, sight, helps them to create connections in their brain that help them to perform complex tasks, it helps with fine and gross skills development and also has great calming effects. During sensory and messy play a child learns so many different concepts about mass, weight, texture, volume etc it helps them to understand some math concepts and helps them with abstract thinking.

So instead of giving out to your child for being messy, let's provide them with safe opportunities to experience a sensory play that has so many benefits!

Here are some ideas that you can do at home to give your child opportunity to learn and develop by using their senses.

1. Sand and water play



One of the most popular messy play ideas is sand and water play. You don't need a big sandpit or going to the beach everyday (although that would be really good!)

A plastic container and a bag of sand from Tesco will do the job. Let your child to play with the sand, use spoons, jars, sieves and funnels so your child can experiment with the sand, can feel its texture, work those fingers practicing fine motor skills and also if you add water that will provide a completely different experience. Allow them to put their bare feet to the sand and play with it the way that feels nice to them.

2. Different types of dough

Experimenting with different types of flour and creating different types of dough is so much fun and so easy to prepare! You can do any type of baking, you can prepare home made playdough or you can get adventurous and prepare gloop. This is my personal favourite when it comes to sensory stimulation. You will need potato flour/starch and some water. When you mix them together you will get the type of dough that changes consistency when you touch it, it becomes hard and then it goes runny again. It's fascinating even for adults to play with and very calming!



3. Rice, pasta, lentils

The beauty of sensory play is that you don't need to go and buy anything special. you can use anything that you have in your food press! Pasta, rice and lentils are great materials for making sensory bins! You can use them dry or cooked, pop a big amount into a plastic container and hide something inside- little figurines, balls- anything. Give your child spoons, containers, jars and ask them to dig in, look for whatever treasure you've hidden. You can also dye rice or pasta with food coloring for more sensory stimulation. There are plenty ideas of how to do it on the internet



4. Foam play

Foam is a nice material as its very soft and delicate. You can use foam made out of wiped washing up liquid, bubble bath foam or shaving foam (just make sure it's not toxic and suitable for your childs skin). Let the child experience the texture of the foam, blow it, put it on their hands and arms if they want to, you can do a foam play in the bath not as a bath time just as an idea for a sensory play it will be easier to clean up after, you can put shaving foam on a tray and ask your child to draw shapes in it- there are so many options!



5. Ice play

Ice play is brilliant! There are so many things that you can do with that! I take an ice cube tray and add some food coloring or few drops of paint, sometimes glitter (if I feel brave enough) and hide a small lego figure or a shell in each box on the ice cube tray. I let it freeze over the night and then pop all the ice cubes into a plastic container. The children can then touch the ice cubes experiencing the coldness, watch the little treasures inside, they can try to break them or figure out how to melt them to retrieve the treasures. They can pour water over them and watch them melt. It's a great activity when they not only experience the sensory play but also learn some basic concepts of science. For older kids I would freeze a big block of ice and let them dig it with spoons. Hours of fun guaranteed!

