



# Messy Play

*YOUR PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SENSORY PLAY AT HOME*



# INTRODUCTION

## SO WHAT EXACTLY IS MESSY PLAY?

"THERE ARE MANY BENEFITS OF SENSORY PLAY, OFTEN TERMED "MESSY PLAY", ESPECIALLY FOR BABIES, TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN. THESE EXPERIENCES STIMULATE THE SENSES AND ASSIST WITH LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF HAND EYE COORDINATION AND FINE MOTOR SKILLS.

CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF GRAVITY, THE BEHAVIOUR OF LIQUID AND SOLID OBJECTS BY PLAYING WITH DIFFERENT MATERIALS AND BEGIN TO DEVELOP A SENSE OF PREDICTION; FOR EXAMPLE ACTION VERSUS REACTION.

MESSY PLAY DOESN'T NECESSARILY REQUIRE LANGUAGE, THEREFORE CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES, NATIONALITIES, DEVELOPMENT, AND THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CAN PLAY ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER AND INTERACT ON THE SAME LEVEL.

CHILDREN ARE ACTIVE LEARNERS, AND MESSY PLAY MAKES IT SO MUCH FUN!

-ANLINA JONES, TLA COMMITTEE  
AN EXCERPT FROM HER ARTICLE "MESSY PLAY"

THERE ARE A WHOLE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES THAT FALL INTO THIS CATEGORY AND RANGE IN DEGREES OF MESSINESS.

THE FOLLOWING PAGES SHOULD GIVE YOU SOME IDEAS OF THINGS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO TRY WITH YOUR CHILD/ CHILDREN.

WE HAVE INCLUDED APPROXIMATE AGE RANGES, BUT EVERY CHILD IS DIFFERENT. YOU KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE WHAT YOUR CHILD IS CAPABLE OF DOING.

MOST OF THE ACTIVITIES WE HAVE DECIDED TO INCLUDE, ARE LOW COST AND SIMPLE USING ITEMS YOU MAY ALREADY HAVE AROUND YOU HOME.

WE HAVE INCLUDED SOME 'TESTED' RECIPES FOR THE MORE UNUSUAL ACTIVITIES. FEEL FREE TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS, AS YOU SEE FIT BUT REMEMBER TO MAKE SMALL CHANGES TO AVOID WASTED INGREDIENTS.

**0-2  
YEARS**

# FOOD

*YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO SEE THIS AS THE FIRST PAGE. THE SAYING "DON'T PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD!" SHOULDN'T APPLY TO THIS GROUP. FOOD IS FULL OF DIFFERENT TEXTURES, COLOURS, TEMPERATURES AND FLAVOURS. YOU CAN EASILY USE ALL FIVE SENSES WHEN DISCUSSING THE WAYS FOODS ARE DIFFERENT.*



*Rice Bubbles/  
other breakfast  
cereal mixes.*

*Great  
alternative to  
sand for hiding  
things and  
much more  
tasty to eat.*

**TIPS:**

**ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TRY NEW FOODS OFTEN, AND FROM THE VERY BEGINNING**

**FEEL FREE TO EXPLORE 'FOOD PLAY' OUTSIDE OF MEAL TIMES.**

**USE RAW AND COOKED FOODS**

**TRY NOT TO STRESS ABOUT THE MESS THEY MAKE AT MEALTIMES EITHER - REMEMBER, ITS ALL A LEARNING PROCESS!**



**0-2  
YEARS**

## **EDIBLE WATER BEADS!**

**EASY!  
ALL YOU NEED:**

**SEED TAPIOCA (SAGO)  
WATER**

**(OPTIONAL)  
FOOD COLOURING**

**FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE  
PACKET. BOILING SEEDS(SAGO) IN WATER**



**0-2  
YEARS**

# Sand.



**ONE OF THE THINGS THAT MAKES THIS SECTION GREAT - ITS FREE AND EASILY FOUND OUTSIDE MOST HOMES!**

**ANOTHER GREAT REASON TO TRY THIS - SIZE AND QUANTITY DON'T MATTER!**

**SEE THE 3-5 YRS SAND SECTION FOR A 'MOON SAND' RECIPE**

**WHETHER YOU ARE TAKING KIDS TO THE BEACH TO DIG BUILD SANDCASTLES OR PLAYING IN A SMALL TUB OF SAND AT THE TABLE**

**2 EASY WAYS TO CLEAN SAND OFF OF YOUR CHILD:**

**WET: (PACK A FEW 3L CONTAINERS, RISES MILK BOTTLES WORK WELL. LEAVE THEM AT THE CAR. WHEN IT IS TIME TO LEAVE, YOU CAN SIMPLE RINSE OFF WITH YOUR WATER JUGS.**

**DRY: USE BABY POWDER! SPRINKLE BABY POWDER ON SANDY AREAS AND THE GENTLY BRUSH AWAY THE SAND**

**TIP: WET IS EASIER FOR LARGE AREAS AS YOU MAY NEED TOO MUCH BABY POWDER**



# rocks and dirt

**0-2  
YEARS**

**YES, JUST GARDEN  
ROCKS AND DIRT  
MAKE EXCELLENT  
SENSORY PLAY  
EXPERIENCES!**

**DON'T STRESS,  
THEY WON'T LIKELY  
PLIT MUCH DIRT IN  
THEIR MOUTH, AS IT  
DOESN'T TASTE  
VERY NICE!**



**FEELING REALLY  
ADVENTUROUS AND  
MESSY, GO AHEAD  
AND ADD WATER -**

**MUD!**



**NOTE: IF YOU DO  
LOTS OF  
GARDENING, TAKE  
CARE NOT TO LET  
CHILDREN PLAY  
WITH SOIL THAT  
CONTAINS  
CHEMICAL  
FERTILISERS OR  
OTHER NASTIES  
THAT COULD MAKE  
THEM SICK**

**0-2  
YEARS**

# Waterplay

*THIS SHOULD BE SIMPLE, SO HERES SOME IDEAS, APART FROM BATHTIME, THAT MAYBE YOU HAVEN'T THOUGHT OF...*

**\*\*OF COURSE, CHILDREN SHOULD ALWAYS BE SUPERVISED WHEN THEY ARE AROUND WATER!!**

*\*ADDING A SPONGE AND SOME DISH SOAP TO A BUCKET, MAKES LOTS OF BUBBLES- MAYBE HAVE A 'CAR WASH'*

*\*A PAINT BRUSH, A BUCKET AND SOME WATER - ENOUGH SAID!*

*\*FUNNELS AND SCOOPS FOR POURING*

*\*FREEZE SOME SMALL TOYS IN ICE BLOCKS AND THEN FLOAT THEM IN WATER FOR THOSE HOT DAYS*



**0-2  
YEARS**



**TUB OF  
BUBBLES:**

**CONTAINER/BUCKET  
WATER  
SPONGES  
SCOOPS  
LIQUID SOAP**



**\*\*the more they squeeze the sponge the more bubbles they make!**

This sounds like a bath, right?! Well it certainly could be used for a bath OR just fun water play outside on a hot day



**2-3  
YEARS**

# PLAYDOUGH

THERE ARE A LOT OF DIFFERENT RECIPES - INTACT YOU CAN FIND HEAPS HERE ON THIS AMERICAN WEBSITE:

[WWW.PLAYDOUGHRECIPE.COM](http://WWW.PLAYDOUGHRECIPE.COM)

BUT THIS ONE IS OUR FAVOURITE AND IT LASTS FOR MONTHS IN AN AIRTIGHT CONTAINER. YOU CAN FIND THIS RECIPE ON THE SIDE OF THE MCKENZIE'S CREAM OF TARTAR CONTAINER.

**RECIPE:**

2 CUPS PLAIN FLOUR  
2 CUPS WATER  
1 CUP SALT  
2 TABLESPOONS  
COOKING OIL  
4 TABLESPOONS OF  
CREAM OF TARTAR

**\*\*ALTERNATIVE  
METHOD:**

MIX DRY  
INGREDIENTS IN  
A BOWL, BOIL  
WATER, ADD SALT  
AND OIL. POUR  
INTO BOWL AND  
STIR TO  
COMBINE.

MIX THE INGREDIENTS IN A SAUCEPAN, STIR OVER MEDIUM HEAT FOR 3-5 MINUTES OR UNTIL THE MIXTURE CONGEALS (WHICH MEANS GETS THICK AND DOUGHLIKE)



**2-3  
YEARS**

**SO NOW YOU HAVE PLAIN WHITE PLAY DOUGH. YOU CAN CHOOSE TO GIVE IT TO YOUR CHILD AS IT IS, OR YOU CAN ADD MORE TO IT.**

**THE COMMON ADDITIVE IS FOOD DYE. LIQUID OR GEL COLOURING, ADD SMALL AMOUNTS AND MIX IN COMPLETELY UNTIL YOU GET THE DESIRED COLOUR.**

**YOU CAN ALSO ADD GLITTER OR A DROP OF ESSENTIAL OIL TO MAKE IT SMELL DIFFERENT**



**RATHER THAN REGULAR COOKIE CUTTER SHAPES AND ROLLING PINS, TRY GIVING YOUR CHILD SOMETHING FROM THE LIST INSTEAD AND SEE WHAT THEY CAN CREATE**

**\*ICYPOLE STICKS  
\*MUFFIN TINS  
\*ANIMALS FIGURINES  
\*BEADS  
\*STRING/WOOL**

**\*PIPECLEANERS  
\*SMALL TOY CARS  
\*DRY PASTA  
\*GOGGLY EYES**

**2-3  
YEARS**

# SHAVING CREAM

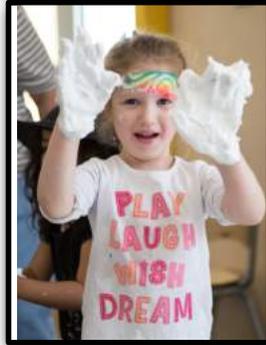


*THIS ONE IS SO EASY, JUST GET A CHEAP CAN OF SHAVING CREAM AND SPRAY ON A TABLE TOP OR OTHER FLAT SURFACE.*

*YOU CAN ALSO DO THIS IN A BATH OR SHOWER, FOR SUPER EASY CLEAN UP!*

*THEN YOU CAN DRAW PICTURES, SHAPES, LETTERS, ETC.*

*\*\*YOU MAY WISH TO TEST A SPOT FIRST TO MAKE SURE IT WON'T RUIN THE TABLE'S FINISH.*



*IF YOU WANT SOMETHING SIMILAR, AND YOUR CHILD ISN'T ALLERGIC TO DAIRY, TRY:*



*Edible bath  
paint:  
Whipped cream  
Food dye*

*Add whipped  
cream to muffin  
pans add  
coloured food  
dye mix and then  
paint*

# GOOP

OR AS DR. SUESS  
TERMS IT  
"OOBLECK"

**RECIPE:**  
2 PARTS - CORNFLOUR  
(CORN STARCH)  
1 PART - WATER

**\*\*OPTIONAL; ADD  
PAINT, FOOD DYE,  
GLITTER, ESSENTIAL  
OILS ETC.**



**DON'T STRESS IF  
YOUR CHILD ISN'T  
INTERESTED. JUST  
PUT IT AWAY AND  
TRY ANOTHER  
DAY. THIS ONE IS  
GREAT FOR THE  
3-5+ AGE GROUP  
TOO!**

**RECIPE IS SIMPLE,  
IF YOU USE ONE  
CUP OF WATER  
USE 2 CUPS OF  
CORNFLOUR.**

**ADJUST THE  
AMOUNT, BUT  
MAKE SURE YOU  
DON'T CHANGE  
THE RATIOS**

**ADDING GREEN  
FOOD COLOURING  
IS POPULAR, BUT  
ANY COLOUR WILL  
DO OR JUST  
LEAVE IT WHITE!**

**NOTE\* YOU CAN  
LEAVE THIS OUT  
TO DRY WHEN  
YOU ARE  
FINISHED. THEN  
JUST BREAK THE  
LARGE PIECE INTO  
SMALLER PIECES  
THAT ARE EASIER  
TO MANAGE AND  
STORE AWAY FOR  
LATER USE. WHEN  
YOU WANT TO  
PLAY AGAIN -  
JUST ADD WATER  
UNTIL DESIRED  
CONSISTENCY IS  
REACHED**

**2-3  
YEARS**

**2-3  
YEARS**

# Painting

**BEST PAINTING IDEAS FOR THIS AGE GROUP:**

**WATER PAINTING:**  
ALL YOU NEED IS WATER IN A CONTAINER, A PAINT BRUSH AND A PATCH OF CONCRETE OR BRICK WALL THAT NEEDS PAINTED

**FINGER PAINTING:**  
LETS ADMIT, THEY ARE GOING TO GET THEIR HANDS IN THERE ANYWAY, WHY NOT JUST EXCEPT IT!

**STAMPS OR SPONGE PAINTING:** GIVES CHILDREN A LARGE TOOL TO GRIP

**SMOCKS ARE GOOD TO HELP KEEP CLOTHES CLEAN BUT MAKE SURE YOU WEAR PLAY CLOTHES, JUST INCASE.**

**A 'DROP CLOTH' OR 'SPLAT MAT' IS ANOTHER GOOD IDEA WHETHER THEY ARE STANDING OR SITTING**



*OPEN ENDED TASKS ARE BEST, AND DON'T EXPECT PAINTINGS TO 'LOOK LIKE' ANYTHING.*

*THOSE BEAUTIFUL MASTERPIECES WILL COME LATER, JUST BE PATIENT AND LET THEM CREATE WITHOUT WORRY OF THE FINAL OUTCOME.*

**2-3  
YEARS**

*WHY NOT TRY MAKING YOUR OWN PAINT? THERE ARE COUNTLESS RECIPES ON THE INTERNET BUT THIS HAS THE EASIEST INGREDIENT LIST*

**Materials Needed:**

- 2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 1/2 cups cold water
- 2 cups boiling water

**Instructions:**

\*\*Don't let kids use this paint until it cools completely.

Mix the 2 cups of flour with the 2 teaspoons of salt.

Add the 2 1/2 cups of cold water; stir until smooth.

Gradually add this mixture to the 2 cups of boiling water. Boil until the mixture becomes smooth and thick.

Add the food coloring, a little at a time, until you get the



**3-5+  
YEARS**

# Painting

*CHILDREN IN THIS AGE BRACKET ARE DEFINITELY DEVELOPMENTALLY ABLE TO PAINT SPECIFIC THINGS. YOU MAY WISH TO WRITE:  
A DATE AND A BRIEF DESCRIPTION  
WHEN YOUR CHILD EXPLAINS IT - MAKES IT EASIER TO REMEMBER LATER (MAYBE*



*SAVING ARTWORK  
IT WILL GET HARDER AND HARDER TO SAVE EVERY SINGLE MASTERPIECE THAT COMES HOME. ONE SPACE SAVING IDEA IS TO PHOTOGRAPH ART AND HAVE IT MADE INTO A BOOK. EASY TO LOOK BACK ON WHEN THEY ARE OLDER.*



# (continued)

3-5+  
YEARS

***PAINTING WITH DIFFERENT ITEMS CAN BE A FUN WAY TO CHANGE THE ACTIVITY FOR THIS GROUP. EXAMPLES OF THINGS TO TRY INCLUDE:***

***MARBLE/GOLF BALL PAINTING:  
PAPER FITS IN A OVEN TRAY WITH SIDES,  
BALLS DIPPED IN THE PAINT ARE THEN  
DROPPED ON THE PAPER AND THE OVEN  
TRAY IS TIPPED TO MAKE THE BALLS ROLL  
ACROSS THE PAPER***

***COTTON BUD PAINTING:  
YOU COULD EVEN TIE IN A MULTICULTURAL  
TWIST AND BRIEFLY EXPLAIN ABORIGINAL  
ARTWORK WITH DOTS!***

***POTATO PRINTS: GROWN UPS CUT A  
POTATO IN HALF AND CARVE A SHAPE ON  
THE CUT END. VIOLA, TWO HOMEMADE  
STAMPS***

***SPRAY PAINTING:  
SPRAY BOTTLES ARE FILLED WITH WATER  
DILUTED PAINT AND SPRAYED ONTO A  
CLEAN WHITE SHEET. (\*\*BOTH BOTTLES  
AND WHITE SHEETS CAN BE SOURCED  
FROM THE \$2 SHOP OR OP SHOP, TO  
COSTS DOWN AND RECYCLE)***



**3-5+  
YEARS**

# CLOUD DOUGH

*AKA MOON DOUGH -  
AN ALTERNATIVE  
PLAYDOUGH RECIPE*

Recipe:

1 cup conditioner  
2 cups cornstarch

**\*\*Of course conditioner, cornflour and cornstarch can vary between brands and from country to country. If you find your dough crumbly or it's too damp and sticky, you may need to tweak the recipe slightly. Always add small amounts, until you get the results you want.**



***KEEN TO TRY THIS WITH A YOUNGER CHILD?  
HERES A 'TASTE FRIENDLY' ALTERNATIVE  
THAT WON'T MATTER IF IT ENDS UP IN  
THEIR MOUTHS***

8 cups of flour  
1 cup of olive oil

Mix and enjoy!  
Store in air tight container

# KINETIC SAND

3-5+  
YEARS

## Recipe

- 7 cups of clean sand
- 2 cups of corn flour(cornstarch)
- 2/3 cup of water
- 2 tsp dishsoap

Mix ingredients in a container. Add more sand or cornstarch if the mixture is too wet/ sticky and more water if it is too dry.



**3-5+  
YEARS**

# PLANTING



*CHILDREN ARE NATURALLY CURIOUS.*

*WHAT BETTER WAY TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO EAT HEALTHY, THAN TO HELP THEM GROW THEIR OWN FOOD!*

*EGG CARTONS MAKE GREAT PLACES TO START YOUR SEEDS*

*PLAYING IN DIRT, WATCHING THINGS GROW AND WATERING PLANTS ARE ALL PART OF THE FUN OF GARDENING*



# AND GARDENING

3-5+  
YEARS



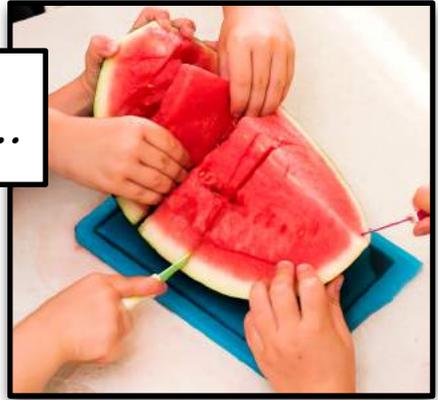
*PLANTS ARE A BIT LIKE PETS. THEY NEED YOU TO GIVE THEM FOOD AND WATER, PROTECT THEM AND CARE FOR THEM.*

*GARDENING IS A GREAT WAY TO GET CHILDREN HANDS ON LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND PLENTY OF 'MESSY PLAY' TIME.*

*YOU COULD EVEN TAKE THINGS A STEP FARTHER BY TEACHING/LEARNING TOGETHER ABOUT COMPOSTING VEGGIE SCRAPS AND/OR HOW TO KEEP A WORM FARM!*



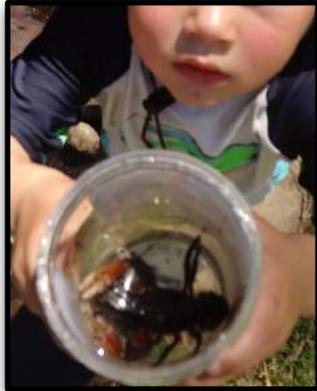
**HOPE YOU'VE  
ENJOYED OUR IDEAS...**



**NOW, BE ON THE  
LOOK OUT FOR OTHER  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
YOUR CHILDREN TO  
EXPERIENCE  
DIFFERENT THINGS.  
THE MORE THEY CAN  
EXPLORE THE MORE  
THEY WILL LEARN.**



**LOOKING FOR BUGS,  
SEARCHING FOR CREATURES  
IN THE CREEK,  
PLAYING IN THE RAIN,  
SPLASHING IN PUDDLES,  
BLOWING BUBBLES,  
BAKING OR COOKING  
SOMETHING TOGETHER**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE LEOPOLD TOY LIBRARY WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN THE PRODUCTION OF 'MESSY PLAY'

*A BIG THANKS TO THE 2015 LEOPOLD TOY LIBRARY COMMITTEE AND THE STAFF AT THE LEOPOLD FAMILY CHILDCARE CENTRE, FOR ALL THE TIME AND EFFORT THAT WENT INTO THE CREATION OF THIS PUBLICATION*



*THE FOLLOWING BLOGS ARE A GOOD RESOURCE FOR MORE SENSORY PLAY IDEAS*

<http://www.growingajeweledrose.com/>

<http://picklebums.com/>

<http://nurturestore.co.uk/>

<http://laughingkidslearn.com/>

[www.playdoughrecipe.com](http://www.playdoughrecipe.com)

\*\*The views of the above blogs do not necessarily reflect the views of the Leopold Toy Library. They have been provided as a *reference* for sensory play ideas only.

glitter  
rocks  
Sensory Play  
sand  
touch  
taste  
Messy hands  
dirt  
shaving-cream  
figurines  
sticks  
cups  
hears  
spoons  
bubbles  
lentils  
shells  
slime  
rice  
playdough  
water-play  
paint  
water  
beans  
senses  
dry-pasta  
cups  
food-dye  
pasta  
bottle-caps  
cornstarch  
dried-pasta  
scoops  
funnels  
straws  
buttons  
rolling-pins  
dried