Sensory Exploration – Ideas for Home

Messy play is extremely important for a child's development. It provides children with an exciting tactile and sensory experience that inspires their curiosity, allows them to explore the world around them and enhances their learning, language and creativity.

Messy Play is also a fun activity for home.

For children with autism who experience sensory sensitivities, it can help them to become familiar with different smells, and textures through touch.

It is important to join in with your child so they can copy what you're doing, or follow their lead and expand their play. There are many different materials and ideas to use for MESSY PLAY … here some ideas.

Some children they may like to play using dry textures:

- dry rice, peas and lentils;
- dry pasta;
- sand;
- tinsel/cotton wool/toilet tissue;
- shredded paper
- chalk;
- pebbles or stones;
- cereal

You can also be creative and use a range of cereal and other dry textures to make a farm:





- Coconut
- Broken up Weetabix
- Coco-pops
- Corn flakes/ bran flakes
- Use tractors, diggers and animals to play with

Playing using SOFT/ WET textures:





- bread dough
- play dough
- wet sand
- squishy balls/water beads
- soft materials (for example, fur or velvet)
- sponges
- balloons/bubbles
- Ice blocks with glitter/toys hidden inside

Be creative!

Create a snow scene:
Use shaving foam, corn flour, custard, baby lotion, paint etc. with glitter and marshmallows, with toy cars, houses, trees.

Use Lego people &/ or animals to play in the snow.



Create a bug scene:
Cooked spaghetti, jelly, pasta and then mix with your children's favourite colour paint. Add some toy plastic bugs for you and your child



Useful websites for more ideas:

- Pinterest
- Growing hands on kids https://www.growinghandsonkids.com/importance-messy-play-children.html
- https://www.learning4kids.net/play-categories/list-of-sensory-play-ideas/
- You tube - 'The importance of messy play'
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4t4JgpT4bM&feature=youtu.be

Extra tips:

- Give your child a choice in which materials they want to play with, this will help them to feel in control.
- Reduce the expectation to use the hands if your child is very anxious e.g. use a spoon, fork, cooking utensils, rolling pin, paintbrushes.
- Model how to play with the messy materials to your child and show them that it's fun.
- Do not pressure your child to touch any materials they are avoiding, give them praise for being near the materials and for any attempts they make to play. Let them explore in their own time.
- Allow your child to wash their hands e.g. at sink or have a bowl of water next to them during very messy activities.

For sensory seekers**,** children who love to get their hands dirty:

- Your child may not want to end the messy play so use a visual (e.g. a 'first, next' board or visual timetable) so that your child knows that the activity will have to end.
- Motivate them to finish and transition to the next activity by having a favourite activity after the messy play.
- Some children who love messy play can become over excited by it and then dysregulated if the activity lasts for too long, so use a timer to show them how long the activity will last e.g. a stop watch on your phone, sand timer/time timer etc.