



Why Messy Play Matters

Messy play, although difficult for many of us to embrace, can support a child's development in ways that other play may not. A toy car, for example, will often engage children in certain kinds of imaginative play, like rolling the car and saying, vroom, vroom. In comparison, when more unstructured materials are introduced (sand, clay, paint), the play is open-ended. Children begin to engage their imaginations more as they explore just what they can do.

Here are a few ideas for encouraging messy play with your little one:

Cabinet Adventure:

- Open a cabinet of pots and pans. Let your baby explore. This kind of play will support motor skills and early conceptual learning through making different sounds, interacting with shapes and concepts, such as circles and squares, large and small, and how things fit together.



Yard Safari:

- Go for a walk in the yard. Talk about all the different textures, shapes, and scents. You can use descriptive words like pointy, curly, pink, rough, soft, spongy. Doing this helps them expand their vocabularies and develop an appreciation for being in nature.

Food Fun:

- When introducing a new food, especially ones that you think your child may not like, empty some on the highchair tray. Encourage them to touch and taste it. Maybe add another colored food, let them mix the colors. Finger paint with it. Cheer them on. Have fun!



References: Butcher, Kittie. (2016, Dec. 15). Cognitive Development and Sensory Play. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/cognitive_development_and_sensory_play; Duffy, Bernadette. (N.D.). All About Messy Play. http://www.keap.org.uk/documents/eyfs_messyplay_bduffy.pdf; 5 Reasons Why Messy Play is Important and Benefits Children. (N.D.). <https://schoolhouse-daycare.co.uk/news/why-messy-play-benefits-children/>.