



Sensory exploration and play activities



Messy play gives children the opportunity to:

- Learn about textures, consistencies and how materials can change.
- Experience a range of sensations.
- Provides required or sought after sensory feedback
- Have the freedom to explore for themselves where there is no right or wrong.
- Gives them a feel for the use of hands, fingers and feet.
- Lets us observe if their reactions change when feeling different materials
- Is visually stimulating even if they do not want to touch

Messy ideas
Clean ideas

Especially good for children with Autism because it:

- Stimulating the brain, creating neural pathways and improving sensory processing systems
- Improving social skills such as communication and cooperation
- Improving coordination, as well as fine/gross motor skills
- Calming children down when they are agitated

Messy ideas

Clean ideas

Note

- Sensory play and exploration is good for children of ALL ABILITIES.
- Try to involve the children in creating/preparing the resources for use as well as the activity itself.
- Try to involve the children, even if in a limited way, with some of the clean up.

Scented playdough



Use the playdough recipe on the Bluebells website page. Make up a large batch of playdough and divide it into separate bowls.

Mix different ingredients into each bowl, to create easily identifiable smells, for example cinnamon, almond essence, lemon juice, vanilla essence, ginger and so on (you could also add food colouring).

While the children play with the dough they can enjoy the different smells and try to guess what they are.

Try 'Dough Disco' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-lfzeG1aC4> as a fine motor work out.

nB: Autistic children often like very strong and often considered unpleasant smells so be creative with your smells! Playdough is a great aid if your child enjoys smearing, both as a distraction but also a preventative measure.

Water play- make it more interesting



- Dye the water different colours using food colouring. Allow the children to put drops in different places and then mix it together so they see the change.
- Add scents to the water for different smells while they play.
- Add washing up liquid or bubble bath (particularly good when combined with food colouring). If your child can blow, including straws so they can blow larger bubbles is good for mouth tone and as a calming activity but also good fun! If they can't blow whisks create good bubbles and are good for improving wrist strength.
- Save plastic containers and use for pouring and transferring. Put holes in some so the water comes out of unexpected places, providing visual appeal and problem solving opportunities.
- Set up a washing station- with bowls of water, soap, sponges/brushes/cloths/towels and a selection of animals/plastic vehicles/dolls/safe kitchen equipment.
- Add water balloons (freeze them first to add a different texture) or ice cubes.

Disclaimer: Provided it's done outside and wet clothes still count as clean!

Slime- clean once made



- Cornflour slime- mix together cornflour and a LITTLE water- when you hit it or touch it quickly it's solid but when you scoop it or write in it with an implement it's a runny liquid.
- <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-make-slime> This website also offers suggestions on how to change and adapt your recipe to provide different textures and keep the exploration going.
- <https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/make-saline-solution-fluffy-slime/> This gives a fluffy slime.

Frozen toys



- Put a toy in an appropriately fitting container that will fit in your freezer (I've made this mistake before!) and cover with water. Freeze. Give the children spray bottles or a suckable water bottle you have to squeeze to make the liquid come out (or an old juice/milk bottle with a hole in the lid) of warm water and get them to use that and their hands to melt the ice.

Variations

- Dye some water a different colour using food colouring and part cover the toy, freeze, repeat using different coloured water and freeze until you have a toy encased in different layered coloured ice.
- Add glitter or food sprinkles to some layers of ice.
- Freeze sweets in plain water- smarties and skittles are especially good as their colour runs as the ice freezes creating a good visual effect and the sweets are still safe to eat but a harder texture to normal (needs supervision as the sweets are a choking hazard!)

Sand play



- Provide different containers for tipping and pouring,
- Make the sand gradually wetter or half wet/half dry to explore different textures,
- Hide things in the sand,
- Add shaving foam and change the texture-**messy!**
- <https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/sand-dough-sensory-play-geometric-shapes-activity/> for the perfect sand to build sand castle, make shapes etc.

Bubble snakes



For this activity you'll need plastic bottles, socks and bubble mixture. Cut the bottoms off the bottles, and put the socks over the ends, pulling them all the way over the bottle and then folding them back so you have a tight fit. Dip the sock-covered end into the bubble mixture and blow through the top end to make lovely long bubble snakes.

Shaving foam



- Shaving foam on different surfaces. Cling film is a good one to avoid some mess- then you can wrap it up and bin it at the end when you've finished.
- Add a few drops of paint on top and watch as the children interact with it mixes in to form a rainbow or stir it around to form swirls.

Sensory bottles- clean once made



- Make them with the children and then if you glue the lid shut or put gaffa tape around it you can keep it for them to play with afterwards time and time again.
- Fill an empty bottle with some items to create shakers or safe ways to explore things like silver foil.
- You can add water to allow the children to explore how the items now move within the water. If you add glycerin the items will move slower and give a more memorizing effect.
- You can also add food colouring to the water and then add a layer of baby oil (clear, can also be coloured) or cooking oil to create a two tone coloured effect which when shaken will mix together and then return to two tone.
- You can add glitter glue or clear glue and glitter/beads/sequins etc. to make a home made snow dome effect.

<https://www.thechaosandthec clutter.com/archives/the-mega-list-of-sensory-bottles> gives a list of as many ideas as you could think of!

Sensory pouches- clean once made



- Make them with the children and attach them to the table or window with gaffa tape within reach for a continued sensory experience.
- Fill a ziplock food bag with some items (rice, sequins, glitter etc.) and add water and baby oil, seal the bag and the children can push the items around without getting messy.
- Add different coloured water and oil for a different visual effect.
- Add different colours of paint to the bag instead of water and children use their hands to mix them together- good clean way of exploring colouring mixing- what do red and yellow make? Etc.
- Add shaving foam and paint to the bag- a way to mix and explore with minimal mess.
- Try out different ideas from the sensory bottle page but in a bag instead!

Doesn't stay like this for long!! →

Dye rice or pasta



- Use paint or food colouring and vinegar to dye rice or pasta different colours.
- Good/easier to clean up alternative to sand.
- Use to hide objects for children to find.
- Use with containers to practice pouring and measuring skills.
- Use with weighing scales- can they fill a container to a certain number or scales- can they make them balance?

Edible



- Sugar free jelly- make together and then explore. Increase the fun by adding sprinkles or sweets into the mix when part solidified.
- Whipped cream instead of shaving foam- add food colouring drops and then mix to add visual stimulation.

The best of the rest



- Neat fairy washing up liquid squirted on a table or cling film/shower curtain (quick clear up) (put the shower curtain through the washing machine for easy cleaning).
- Paint on the outside of the window and then use soap and water to wash it off- children involved in both parts of the activity- good for gross motor skills.
- Draw or paint on different surfaces- food packaging is good. Crayons on sandpaper is good for increasing strength in fingers and wrist.