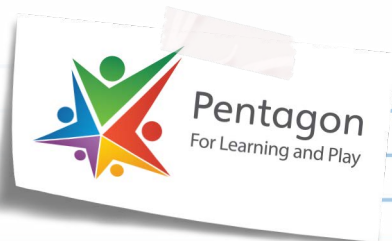


Messy Play is Ideal for SEN Learners



Improve children's physical development, personal and social skills

Messy play can help to improve a child's physical development while allowing them to develop their personal and social skills and explore and better understand their emotions. It can help children to foster positive new experiences and build on their self-esteem and confidence, as the great thing about messy play, is that there is no right or wrong way to do it. Children can practice fine motor skills and coordination with activities involving pouring, pinching, scooping, stacking, blocking, spooning, sprinkling, rubbing, scraping, lifting; the list goes on!

Overcome Handwriting Problems

Many children with sensory processing difficulties have handwriting problems. Their writing may be messy, they can't grip the pen properly or they press too hard or not hard enough, and their hands quickly become tired and sore. If their messages are not understood correctly, then handwriting along with other fine motor skills can become a stressful and frustrating task for them which they will want to avoid. Through messy play, children can work on the skills needed for handwriting without even knowing they are doing it. And such hands on tasks allow children to experience different textures that are rough, wet, shiny, slippy, soft, hard and smooth, all the time encouraging their imagination and natural curiosity. They can talk about what they are experiencing, how it makes them feel, what they do and don't like and how they can respond to it. They will learn to read social cues and how to respond to their peers. Children will learn to respect each other's personal space and develop an understanding of their own space and boundaries, taking turns and sharing resources.

Language, communication and mathematical skills

These skills are also encouraged as children are given plenty of opportunity to communicate throughout the activities. They can discuss what they are doing, responding to and talking about what they can see, hear, feel and smell. They can listen to others, ask questions and find their own words to describe what they are doing. They can plan and solve problems, count, measure and fill objects and play around with patterns, colours and shapes. And no two activities need to be the same as there are so many resources out there to get you going. There are no limits other than our own imagination and creativity!



Messy Play Ideas for your SEN Learners

So with all that in mind, it's time to get started! Here are some useful ideas for learning through getting messy:

Natural play ideas to get you started

Sometimes just a pair of wellies, a bucket and spade, a muddy garden and a little imagination will do! There is so much that children can learn from nature and the world around us, and who doesn't know a little

The benefits of Sand & Water Play

person that loves digging for worms and mini beasts! A little time outside getting mud on their hands and engaging with nature can have a wonderfully calming effect on many children including those who find it hard to concentrate and remain engaged.

Why not check out our Natural Play Equipment that includes a Bug Hotel, Recycled Composter, Wildlife Area and Planter Benches.

Creative mark-making ideas

You can get messy and creative with household items and scraps or materials that are no longer needed. Aluminium foil, paper plates, cotton wool, a few bendy straws and some paint, glue and glitter are good starting point for making greetings cards, collages and decorations. Cutting and sticking is great for encouraging creativity and imagination, developing concentration levels and improving manual dexterity. Or why not take some chalk or washable paints and large brushes outside and let the children make patterns and designs on the ground or a designated wall? It will always wash away in the rain or they can have fun trying to mop it up themselves!

Check out our Outdoor Activity Play Panels which are ideal for mark-making whilst getting inspired by the natural surroundings you find outside.

MUST READ: Ways To Facilitate and Promote Inclusive Play for Children With Special Educational Needs



Lots of messy ideas for your Tuff Spot Table



A Tuff Spot Table is a fantastic multi-purpose tool to manipulate messy materials on. A number of children can stand around the Tuff Spot Table at one time and the surface can be covered in pretty much anything you like. The raised edges help to contain the “mess”. Cover it in dry materials like sand, grains of rice, lentils, pasta shapes, bits of polystyrene packaging, sawdust and wood shavings, hay, straw, shredded paper or flour. Ask the children to make marks and patterns in the dry materials with different instruments such as their own fingers, twigs, chopsticks, or feathers.

Can they pick anything up with the chopsticks? How about gripping something with a pair of tweezers? Change the textures by putting wet materials and “goo” on the Tuff Spot Table such as baked beans, cooked noodles, shaving foam, squirty cream, cornflour mixed with water (you can add some food colouring too), or coloured paints. Splat paint all over the table and drive toy tractors through it to make tracks! Encourage the children to talk about what they are doing and what they can feel. When do they need to press hard and which materials are easy to manipulate? They can take it in turns to mark out their patterns and talk about them together.

The benefits of Sand & Water Play

Some mud-filled ideas for your Mud Kitchen

A Mud Kitchen in your outdoor play area is a wonderful tool to encourage children to get outside into the fresh air all year round. It's not just for making mud pies! It has large stainless containers which can be filled with all sorts of materials and used in a similar way to a Tuff Spot Table.



If any children are fearful of new experiences or just don't like the feel of some of the materials, you can start off using smaller vessels like yogurt pots, with smaller amounts in them, to give them a chance to get used to the different textures. They can just put a spoon or a finger in first before going the whole stretch! Starting off with smaller areas and fewer different materials, then working up to a larger area and more varied textures will help. If a child really does not enjoy playing with messy things or getting in a mess, it is even more important that you find fun, interesting and creative ways to introduce them to these items and to help them overcome their fears. Playdoh is usually popular and wonderfully familiar so it's a good place to start. It can be rolled out and cut or manipulated into all sorts of different shapes on top of the Tuff Spot Table. It's easy and cheaper to make your own too. Here's our favourite recipe:

* In a saucepan mix together 1 cup of plain flour, $\frac{1}{2}$ a cup of salt, 1 cup of water, 1 tablespoon of cooking oil and 2 tablespoons of cream of tartar. Add a few drops of any colour of liquid food colouring that you fancy and stir together over a gentle heat until the dough is malleable. Once the dough has cooled it is ready to be played with. You can store it in a sealed plastic bag or airtight container. *

Fun-filled play ideas with sand and water

Playing in sand or water provides essential but fun ways for children to experience tactile input, their ability to sense the world around them through touch. A Covered Sand Box or Sand Table, and a Covered Water Table can be filled with any of the substances we have already mentioned. And if you are using sand or water, why not add some glitter to it for a touch of magic sparkle!

You can hide toys or buried treasure in the sand for children to discover and explore. X marks the spot! Count how many coins they have found. Use spoons to fill up old gloves and socks with the sand and make a sand man. This is great for their motor skills. Add some water to it and you can mould sand pies or build a giant's castle.

Bring the seaside to your classroom and take them "fishing"! You can fill the Water Table with water and put toys, sand, shells, anything you like in it to discover what sinks and what floats. Transfer water between containers using different measurements. You can use warm or cold water, and even add ice cubes to it for different sensations. In the spring and summer time children love to make smelly "perfume" gathering lavender, flowers, petals and grass and adding it to the water table.

If you have an Outdoor Dig Pit you can enjoy all of these experiences outside on a larger scale, whether digging in the soil for "worms" or letting them create their own "beach".

The benefits of Sand & Water Play

How to build core skills with a Rope and Pulley System

A Rope and Pulley System with a suspended bucket for transferring messy materials is another great playground resource. Ask the children to fill the bucket with jelly for a bit of fun and get them to do a team exercise transferring the jelly to each other and then to another messy work station without spilling any. They can use other containers but nothing should hit the floor. Easier said than done! As well as building their strength and motor skills as they load up the bucket and pull on the rope, children will be encouraged to co-operate with each other and to learn social skills as they work out what needs to go where and how each child has a role to play.

These are just a few ideas as to how messy play can be used in your school, but we would love to hear how you have been getting messy! Please send us your thoughts and ideas to our Twitter and Facebook page.



If you feel that learners in your school would benefit from messy play, we would be more than happy to discuss playground options with you, just simply [Contact Us](#) through the website.

To look at other options for your outdoor learning environment, visit our dedicated [Mud, Sand and Water Play](#) page for more information.