

## **Sensory Exploration and Messy Play**

Sensory exploration and messy play are useful for your child as they will help them to explore new things, interact with items using their senses and communicate (e.g. by expressing like, dislike, or choosing what they want to explore). If your child is a fussy eater, this may also help them explore and try new foods.

**You should never leave your child exploring food items unsupervised in case they choke. If you think your child might eat the food, only give them food that is safe for them, e.g. if your child has a pureed diet, you should only give them pureed foods.**

How to do messy play:

You will need: a tray basin or bowl to contain the items and may want an apron or old clothes for your child to wear, messy play items

- Put some of the food items in the tray
- Allow your child to explore
- You might need to show them what to do if they are not sure e.g. squashing, crumbling, drawing shapes with your finger
- If your child has difficulties moving, you might need to help them, e.g. move their hand so their fingers are in the tray
- Children generally learn to explore dry items (e.g. cereal) before they will accept exploring wet items (e.g. yoghurt), and some children may not like sticky items.
- You can offer your child choices of what they might want to explore. Hold out two items and allow your child to indicate what they'd like to explore by looking towards, pointing to, reaching out for the item they'd like.
- Your child might show you that they like something e.g. by tasting it, smiling, pulling the tray closer, reaching out to ask for 'more', signing 'more'.
- Your child might show you they don't like something by spitting it out, pushing the tray away, wiping their hands, making a face. This is okay. You can empty the tray and offer them something else.
- You can encourage your child to explore messy play in different ways by adding toys or containers e.g. a spoon and a cup so they can fill and empty the cup, toy cars to run through the food to make tracks, Duplo figures to hide in the food.
- Some children like to feel messy play on different body parts e.g. their feet.

Some popular messy play items in school:

- Water
- Cereal
- Pasta (dry or cooked depending on if your child may eat it)
- Shaving foam
- Yoghurt
- Squirty cream
- Jelly
- Crackers

**Don't worry if you are finding it hard to buy some of these food items. Look at the next page for ideas for non-food sensory exploration ideas.**

Sensory exploration involves feeling and exploring different things. Some children enjoy feeling items on different body parts e.g. hands, face, feet, arms, legs. **If your child might put the thing in their mouth or try to bite or chew it, you will need to supervise them carefully to keep them safe.**

What to do:

- Offer your child an object to explore
- If they are not sure what to do you could show them what to do e.g., touch it, rub it, tap or bang it with fingers, look through it, roll it
- If your child needs help to move, you can help them e.g. by touching the item to their skin so they can feel it, helping them to carry out a movement
- As with messy play you could offer your child a choice of items. Hold out two items and allow your child to indicate what they'd like to explore by looking towards, pointing to, reaching out for the item they'd like.
- Again your child may show you they like something, e.g. by smiling, pulling it towards them, repeating an action with it, signing 'more' or they may show you that they don't like it e.g. by pushing it away, pulling their hand away, tensing their body, or looking unhappy.
- Depending on what you offer you may need to put the item in a tray to contain it

Some things to try exploring:

- Shredded paper
- Bubble wrap
- Play dough
- Pots and pans and a wooden spoon for banging
- A sieve or colander (could try pouring water/flour/rice through it)
- A blanket
- A soft toy
- A brush
- Pipe cleaners
- A paint roller
- Tinfoil or a foil emergency blanket
- An empty tube from a kitchen roll or toilet roll
- Pompoms
- Leaves
- Sand

Some children prefer items of certain textures e.g. soft items rather than hard items. You could offer your child choices of items that feel different and are different textures.

