

Marvellous Messy Play

Messy play, also known as sensory play, offers a wealth of benefits for children's development and is highly valued within our provision at Hambledon Nursery School. We are passionate about offering a huge variety of malleable play provision which is provided daily at the nursery school. The malleable materials that we make available for the children are changed between the morning and afternoon sessions for those children that stay for the whole day, so that what they experience is fresh and exciting and captures their interest.

At Hambledon Nursery we support messy play as research has shown that children who experiment with messy play are developing cognitively; the wires in the brains are making special connections. So, it is important that we give children at Hambledon every opportunity to experiment with those substances that are messy and is the reason why we are passionate about the benefits of messy play at Hambledon Nursery School.

Messy play activities primarily support a child's physical development, that all important hand eye coordination, dexterity, fine manipulative skills, all of which aid the development of muscles within the hand, aiding in their development towards gaining pencil control. Malleable activities include, water play, sand, playdough, dry rice, pasta, and shaving foam and offering utensils and vessels are very important within this learning zone that the children can access freely and choose to select from under their own initiative.



When we observe and support children engaged in messy play, we try to give them an enormous amount of freedom. Freedom to explore, experiment and discover. Sometimes we ask ourselves, how far can this play go? We have instances of whole-body swimming through shaving foam, especially if it placed on the floor as a sensory walk where the children are invited to explore not only with their hands but with their feet and between their toes!



Let's dive deeper into understanding some of the advantages of messy play:

Fine and Gross Motor Skills Development: Messy play encourages children to use their hands, fingers, and whole body to explore different textures, substances, and materials. Whether it's squishing playdough, finger painting, or digging in sand, these activities help develop both fine motor skills (such as finger dexterity) and gross motor skills (such as arm movements).

Sensory Exploration and Stimulation: Engaging in messy play allows children to experience various sensory inputs. They can feel different textures (smooth, rough, sticky), hear sounds (like squishing or pouring), and even smell different scents (such as scented playdough). This sensory stimulation is essential for brain development and helps children understand the world around them.

Creativity and Imagination: Messy play encourages creativity and imagination. When children are given the freedom to explore and create with materials like clay,

water, or sand, they can invent their own stories, build imaginary worlds, and come up with unique ideas. It's a great way to foster creative thinking.

Language and Communication Skills: During messy play, children often engage in conversations with peers or adults. They describe what they're doing, ask questions, and express their thoughts. This interaction helps improve language skills, vocabulary, and communication abilities.

Emotional Regulation and Confidence: Messy play can be both exciting and challenging. Children learn to manage their emotions when faced with new textures or unexpected outcomes. Since messy play is not about a finished product, children who may be sensitive about "making a mistake" or performance can build confidence in this process-focused activity. Over time, they gain confidence in handling different materials in different situations and become more resilient.

Social Interaction and Cooperation:

When children engage in messy play together, they learn to share, take turns, and cooperate. They negotiate roles, collaborate on projects (like building a sandcastle), and develop social skills that are crucial for later life. We notice at Hambledon Nursery how the messy play area is universally loved by children whether they are good communicators, or not yet so at their specific age and stage of development. Messy play can be a great ice breaker in this way, children are simply drawn to playing around the tuff spot together, deeply engaged as they explore using their senses and they become engrossed in what they are doing. Messy play can also aid with settling a child in who may be feeling a little 'wobbly' that day. Playing with sensory materials fosters a bonding connection as children discover aspects of the material together, or with an adult.

Cognitive Development: Messy play involves problem-solving. Children figure out how to shape clay, mix colours, or build structures. They learn cause-and-effect relationships (for example, pouring water into sand makes it wet) and develop cognitive skills.



The materials used in messy play can be worked and reworked endlessly, meaning a child can create something and recreate it over and over. Unlike painting a picture - which requires a new blank page if you change your mind- sensory play is malleable and ripe for reinvention.

So, our strong suggestion would be to go ahead, let yourself and your child dive into a muddy puddle on a rainy-day, or throw and catch fallen leaves in the woods and play in the sand on a beach and watch their development bloom by exploring, discovering, and having fun with marvellous messy play!

