



Especially for Littles

Tips for Messy Sensory Explorations

- **Safety first!** With young children supervision is key. Even infants can safely explore many everyday objects with a grown up by their side. Be mindful that mouthing or tasting materials is a valuable way young children explore. Use non-toxic materials and be sensitive to potential allergens and choking hazards.
- **Set the stage.** The more preparation you can do in advance, the smoother your exploration will go. Try to anticipate the supplies you will need – What tools or toys would be fun to explore the materials with? Planning a wet or slippery exploration? Have a bunch of towels within reach. Getting messy? A nearby stack of pre-wet washcloths to wipe off the mess are helpful. Smocks are great, but sometimes an old t-shirt or bare skin is easier to clean.
- **Contain the mess.** A vinyl tablecloth or shower curtain spread out on the floor is a great surface for messy explorations. Simply fold it up when the exploration is over and wipe it clean at your convenience. Plastic tubs, shallow kitchen trays or pans, and kiddie pools are great for containing messy materials. *Pro tip: For extra-wet materials sub out the plastic floor covering for an absorbent towel.*
- **Follow their lead.** Free exploration takes time and may not happen all in one sitting. Notice how your child approaches the new materials. What are they curious about? How can you help them explore further? Are they showing interest in feeling textures, comparing and contrasting, measuring, sorting, imagining, or something else? What tools might be fun to use with the material?
- **Warming up.** Some kids (and adults) like to warm up slowly to new experiences and new sensations. If that's your family, you can always start small and search your kitchen and craft supplies for tools like spoons, whisks, paint brushes, spatulas, etc. so you don't have to touch the materials right away.



Materials

Many household items are fun to explore with our senses. Playing with sensory items are great learning opportunities for little ones and can be relaxing for adults as well. When selecting items, think safety first, and check that they are non-toxic and non-chokeable.

- Water, a few squirts of dish soap, and some stirring = foam!
- Shredded or torn paper (wrapping paper works well)
- Rice
- 1 cup Cornstarch mixed with ½ cup hair conditioner = Cloud Dough
- Condensed milk and food coloring = fingerpaint!
- Bowl or cup sized ice “cubes”
- Flavorless gelatin
- Natural materials (leaves, flowers, stones, snow, branches)

Tools

Look around the kitchen and play areas for items that would be fun and safe to use with your material. Think creatively, anything goes! Here are some of our Discovery Museum favorites:

- Sponge
- Washcloth
- Measuring cups
- Kitchen utensils (ladle, whisk, spatula, tongs)
- Cookie cutters
- Paint brush
- Colander
- Toy animals

