

Graduated Introduction to Messy Play and Sensory Experiences for Sensory Avoidant Children

Lots of children enjoy messy play, experiencing varied materials and exploring how they feel and behave. Some children avoid these types of activities and are daunted or scared by the prospect of touching varied materials. This can be for several reasons but some children who consistently avoid experiencing messy or sensory play may need support to see that this play is fun and a valuable learning experience.

Below are some general steps that you can use to encourage sensory avoidant children to participate in messy play. You may not need to start at step 1, and you may not need to complete all steps, but if the child is resistant, respect that choice and continue to offer opportunities for them to experience messy play at a level that they can enjoy and access. To move a child onto new experiences it is highly likely that you will need to use their favourite item to encourage them to access the messy play e.g., hiding a small part of their car under shredded paper.

Rules:

- Make it safe, think about whether the child is likely to eat the materials.
- Make it fun, smile, do not use negative language when experiencing the materials.
- Respect the child's decision, do not force them to take part in an activity they do not want to do.

Points to Remember:

- Play must be enticing and fun.
- Add motivators to messy play.
- Start at the most appropriate stage, do not be scared to go backwards.
- Take your time within each stage.
- Preparation is key, have all resources and visual boards ready before you start.
- Be consistent with your use of visuals and reduced language.
- Allow children to be familiar with the resources without pressure to play with them, have it available every day.
- All staff need to be familiar with and using the resources in the same way.

Children to be exposed to, and see adults and children positively playing with messy play activities without any pressure to join in.



Child tolerates their favourite toy e.g., a car to be driven next to the 'safe' messy play items e.g., shredded paper



Child to experience dry items in a contained accessible tray e.g., dry pasta, shredded paper, cotton wool using long-handled tools e.g., barbecue tools, tongs, wooden spoons.



SEND SERVICES GUIDES

Children experience new materials locked within a Ziploc bag or sealed laminating pouches. These materials will be a range of squashy items e.g., sponges, cooked pasta, coloured liquids of varying thicknesses, crunchy items e.g., rice crispies and bags with a mixture of sensations e.g., hard items inside the liquid.



Child to experience dry but smaller and/or crushable items e.g., rice crispies, cornflakes, and uncooked rice with long-handled tools. These need to be materials that will not stick to your hands.



Child to experience wet or squashy but not sticky items using short, handled tools e.g., play-doh, water



Children to experience stickier items using long-handled tools e.g., paint, gloop, wet sand



Children to experience stickier items using short, handled tools e.g., paint, gloop, wet sand



The child to experience items again using the dry-wet-sticky progression using hand under hand technique, adults' hand under the child's hand or using a different body part e.g., feet.



The child to experience items again using the dry-wet-sticky progression using the hand-over-hand technique, the adult's hand over the child's hand



Child to use their hands to access and experience a variety of sensory experiences with adult encouragement.