

Creating with play dough

Rationale:

Play dough is a wonderful sensory experience for your child. As he shapes the play dough into a ball or a snake, he is thinking creatively. At the same time, the squeezing, pinching and pulling movements strengthen his hand muscles and develop his fine-motor skills. Add some toy animals, shells or muffin trays, and you are providing him with the opportunity to extend his imagination.

Age range information

3-6 years

What you need

- Play dough – store-bought or home-made (see the recipes below).
- Utensils for cutting, shaping and making patterns – for example, ice-cream sticks, plastic knives and forks, rolling pins or cookie cutters.
- Other items for imaginative play – for example, plastic animals, toy cars, natural objects such as sticks and seashells, or play baking equipment like muffin trays or cake tins.

How to do it

Your child can play with play dough anywhere, but it is best to sit him at a table so he has a good work surface and the play dough is contained. You can use a plastic placemat if you want to keep the surface clean. Let your child experiment with the dough. Show him how to roll, stretch and flatten it. Talk about how the dough feels, and what he is making.

If you are making your own play dough, you might like to involve your child. You could let him measure, pour and mix. Encourage him to feel proud that he is making his own toy.

Here are some other ideas:

- Introduce objects that can be used to pattern the play dough – for example, a fork can make a pattern of dots. Try pressing a seashell into the dough or driving a toy car along it to make 'tracks'.
- Encourage imaginative play with muffin trays and play baking equipment. For example, your child might pretend he is making dinner or a cake with the play dough.
- Use plastic animals with the play dough. For example, your child might like to make a lake for the ducks or roll some play dough into balls to make apples for his horse.

- Create play dough people with your child. They are fun, because you can bend them into all sorts of poses. You can also squish them up and start again if you want to.

How to make play dough

Play dough is not a food. It is for play, not for eating, but sometimes children are tempted to taste some. If it is hard to stop your child putting things into his mouth, use salt-free play dough, which is safer.

Cooked play dough	Salt-free play dough
<i>This play dough keeps well in the refrigerator. Its high salt content makes it taste unpleasant. It is unsafe to eat.</i>	<i>This play dough is recommended for younger children. It will not last as long as the cooked play dough.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 cups of plain flour • 4 tablespoons of cream of tartar • 2 tablespoons of cooking oil • 1 cup of salt • food colouring • 2 cups of water <p>Mix the ingredients in a saucepan. Stir over a medium heat for about five minutes until mixture binds and congeals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 cups of plain flour • half a cup of oil • food colouring • water <p>Mix oil and flour. Add food colouring. Slowly mix in water until desired consistency is attained.</p>

Adapting for children of different ages

Your younger child might just want to enjoy the sensation of the play dough, or just to make shapes and textures. Your older child is more likely to want to make things from his world, such as animals or people. Follow your child's lead and let him use the play dough in a way that suits his interests.



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