



Top tips for messy play

Messy play is one of our most popular activities at the Museum of London and Museum of London Docklands. Activities include creating London landmarks out of cereal, and mixing herbs and spices to make paints.

Using messy materials provides a sensory experience for families, which is crucial to many areas of development as recognised in the Early Years Foundation Stage, such as Expressive Arts and Design.

Here are our top tips for running a successful messy play session:

- Inform parents in advance including information on how to prepare eg wearing old clothing – we send an email to families who have booked onto our sessions
- Use safe ingredients and materials that are unlikely to cause allergies or might be unsuitable for some families, eg we try to use gluten free flour
- If you are using edible material, have packaging available on the day for parents and carers to check in case of allergies
- Let them get really messy! And prepare to get messy yourself too!
- Have aprons available so that families feel comfortable in taking part but don't force families to use them – the whole point is to get messy!
- As babies are likely to put materials in their mouths, try to use edible ingredients
- Get creative with suitable alternatives to traditional messy materials eg we make our own paint for babies using yogurt and food colouring
- Buy materials from a reputable source so that you know they are safe for families

Early Years toolkit

- Use washable ingredients – try to buy washable paints
- If you find that some parents and carers are reluctant to get involved in messy play, try to explain to them why it is important – we created a messy play handout to give to parents attending messy play sessions for the first time
- Think about the space you use – if using your galleries, think about how you will protect the displays
- Position the activity close to washing facilities or provide a washing up station or lots of baby wipes
- Make your tidy up easier by managing the mess from the beginning – cover tables or the floor in paper and use paper plates as containers for materials, that way it can all be put into the recycling bin at the end of the session.

