

Messy Play

Your child has become very wary of food being put into their mouth. To help them gain confidence and pleasure with food these ideas for play involving food are often helpful.

Play these games with your child. Make them fun! Involve other members of the family. Try not to worry about the mess – a plastic bib, a large sheet of plastic for the floor and the bath may help.

Imaginative Food Play



Most children begin to show pretend play between their first and second birthdays – cuddling a doll, brushing teddy, using a toy telephone. Encourage pretend play with food. A toy tea set is useful.

- Giving a pretend drink to teddy.
- Giving a pretend drink to parent.
- Stirring the cup and later pouring the tea.

Show your child how to do it, and invite them to join in, praise any small attempts to play. Be as imaginative as you like.

With small pieces of safe food encourage your child to handle the food, pour it into different bowls, pots etc. – have 2, 3 or 4 containers – children like moving things from one place to another. Later you can try letting them finger feed you with safe pieces of food – they feed you first – later see if they will allow you to feed them. Accept refusal with a smile – no pressure.

Nuala O’Kane – Chair
David Stout –Chief Executive

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Food Art



food to make pictures – older children may like to join in, things to use

- Pasta shapes
- Rice (be careful if you think he/she may eat them)
- Cornflakes

Handprints in tomato sauce, chocolate mousse, face painting with foods.

Water Play



In the bath or in the garden if it is fine and warm with a bowl of water or the paddling pool. Show your child how to pour liquid from one container to another – encourage him to imitate. Try little gentle patting and moving of water at first well away from him, then near their feet, gradually move towards their face let them splash you – always watch their face and stop at the slightest sign of anxiety or stress.

Pudding Car Wash

For children who can't tolerate the feel of purees, learning to play in a consistently smooth puree, like chocolate pudding, is the first step to eventually playing in more textured foods, like mashed cauliflower.

You will need:-

- Baking sheet
- 2 large bowls—one filled with water and soap bubbles and the other with clean water
- Small toy cars
- Chocolate pudding (e.g. chocolate mousse)

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Paediatric Speech & language Therapy
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Dump some “mud” (chocolate pudding) on the baking sheet and you now have a “muddy run raceway” to drive through till the cars are coated! Pushing a toy car through the mud is much easier than just playing in the mud with a bare hand. The bigger the car, the easier it is to tolerate the sensation, because less mud gets on your child’s hand. Allow your child to put the car in the “wash” (the soap bubble water) and then fish it out. Put it in the clear water and begin again.

The water adds a bit of relief for the children who really dislike the texture, but the fun of driving the cars through the mud provides the reinforcement for getting messy.

Variation: Use plastic animals and wash the entire zoo!

ALWAYS GO AT YOUR CHILD’S SPEED. IF YOU TRY TO HURRY THINGS ALONG THEY MIGHT TAKE FRIGHT AND REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE FOR A TIME.

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