

Encouraging Creativity Through Sand and Water Play

by Sherron French, Child Care Aware® Region One

Play with sand and water is a sensory experience that appeals to children of all ages. Sand and water play not only tantalizes the senses, it also promotes development in all other areas.

To get started, a simple dish pan can serve as the sand or water tub; make the size manageable for the children and for the adults to help with clean up. In considering the size of container, keep in mind that if multiple children are involved in the play the area will need to be large enough to support adequate play space for all, this can be done with one large container or several small containers.

Sand and water play includes materials and tools that promote scooping, dumping, swirling, pouring and sifting. Many household items are perfect for this play.

Scooping: measuring cups, serving spoons, measuring spoons, shovels and trowels.

Dumping: variety of buckets or small containers; this is perfect for the recyclable containers you have collected.

Swirling: whisk, spoons of all sizes and varieties; include slotted spoons, small food strainers.

Pouring: measuring cups, plastic cups of various sizes, bowls, small and large pitchers.

Sifting: colander, plastic sifter, flour sifter or a small screen.

Enhancing water play can be fun! Add a few drops of extract, food coloring or liquid soap to add extra sensory experiences. Sand play can be extended by adding muffin tins, molds, cars, trucks and people. Children enjoy extending time with sand through dramatic play.

Water and sand play are supportive of small motor development, social skills and language development. Parents and providers should encourage children to explore both sand and water separately and then mixed together. Experiences with sand and water build the child's small motor skills through the various wrist and hand movements of pouring, dumping, swirling and sifting. These skills are essential for writing in later years.

Children learn to use social skills in sand and water play; the children should be encouraged to share the materials and to build with one another when age appropriate. This time is fun and meaningful for all involved. The language of children is enhanced through sand and water play through the use of words such as: *grainy, sprinkle, shallow, swirl, sieve, flow, pool, foamy* and *sift*.

Play with sand and water is a yearlong activity! Take the water and sand experiences outdoors in warm weather. The reflections of nature in the water add to the experience of children. When using an outdoor sand area, change out the materials located in the area every few months to keep the interest of the children and to continue to build new skills.

In cooler months plan water experiences indoors; the use of a plastic tarp or vinyl table cloth can protect the floor from getting wet. Change up the water experience by adding ice to the container and build ice sculptures. Children will be challenged and engaged by this new experience!

Sand and water play challenges children in all developmental areas and provides a great experience for all involved.

Remember that these experiences need to be closely supervised and an adult should be with the children at all times. Take the time to connect with children through sand and water play today!

