

# Sand Play for Two Year Olds

Sand play is often in danger of becoming repetitive, routine and low level – to capitalise on children’s natural affinity with sand play and ensure deeper levels of engagement we need to think creatively about how we offer our sand provision. Commonly sand is offered through the standard sand tray with plastic moulds, buckets and spades in overloaded resources trays and with minimal quantities of sand. By making a few simple changes to the sand provision settings can exploit the great benefits sand has to offer.

## Why is sand play important?

We know sand offers great opportunities for sensory play and often helps with negative behaviours and can calm down upset toddlers. Research tells us that sand play supports child development on many levels. As an inclusive form of play, sand play aids concentration and focus, motor skills, creativity and imagination, encourages social interaction where two year olds play together, communicate and begin to share. Effective links can also be made to all seven areas of learning in the EYFS.

Sand trays are busy areas where social interaction is inevitable. By making your sand provision communication friendly, varied, well organised, two year olds will learn to wait, make conversation and develop their attention span.

## Sand and sensory play

Toddlers use their whole body to discover and process the world around them. Sand feels different on hands, feet and shoes and offers a contrast to carpet, wood, grass and concrete. How many opportunities do you give your 2 year old’s to sit or lay in sandpits, shoes and socks off?

Did you know that repetitive behaviours offered through sand play such as pouring, scooping, filling, knocking down, transporting underpin cognitive development and strengthens fine motor control and hand eye co-ordination?

**Have you tried making gooey sand mouse with your two year olds?** Start off with sand and corn flour in separate bowls or two piles in the tuff tray, allow children to explore the textures. Add water together and mix to the desired consistency.

## Role of the adult

- **Present** sand in a variety of ways such as on the floor in tuff trays, large sit-down sandpits or make shift pits using tarpaulin, buckets, individual shallow trays at ground level or on a table.
- **Join** in the play. Sit barefoot in the sand with the two year olds, supporting language, encouraging peer interaction and follow the interests of the children.
- **Provide** heuristic resources to support tactile exploration - conkers, shells, wood, pebbles, twigs, leaves, cardboard boxes, tubes, large seed pods, sea sponges, driftwood.
- **Provide** open ended resources and loose parts to aid development of imagination, hand – eye coordination and critical thinking e.g. guttering, cable wheels, colanders, whisks, funnels, sieves, tea sets
- **Provide** resources that support different schemes such as filling, pouring, knocking down, transporting, throwing.
- **Allow** toddlers to sit bare foot in the sand to explore whole body experiences which will develop their spatial awareness.
- **Support** independence by offering carefully selected resources in an accessible way.
- **Let** children do things their own way.
- **Provide** for repetition to enable 2 year olds to practice, rehearse and develop learning and experiences.

## Top tips for an effective sand provision:

- 2 year olds are learning to share. Provide enough resources to support sharing and prevent possessiveness but remember not to overload the resource trolley.
- An inch of sand is not enough. Provide more, more sand and then a bit more.
- Offer experiences that builds on co-operation to develop social skills and a growing perception of other people by providing large sand pits indoors and outdoors.
- Remember the importance of movement on child development. Provide enough sand for children to push large vehicles, scoop and dig deep, filling and emptying larger sized buckets of sand and toddler sized wheelbarrows.
- Two year olds learn through all their senses. Set up experiences that encourage exploration such as mixing sand and water to investigate different textures of sand. Add natural resources to support tactile exploration.
- Ensure 2 year olds can manipulate the sand in the ways they like best – pouring, filling, knocking down, stacking, transporting, enclosing...

## Resources need to offer open ended play opportunities and invite experimentation to support a 2 year old's 'do it myself' approach to life.

Large sandpits in the garden and even indoors, brings calmness, high levels of engagement and endless exploration. With careful resourcing, two year olds will begin to engage in small world play and construct miniature environments. Twigs, pebbles, pinecones, leaves, sea shells, cardboard boxes and tubes will support tactile exploration and develop imaginations.

**Large sit down sand pits can easily be created by using large blocks and tarpaulin or by placing tuff trays on the floor.**

### Involving parents

Share with the parents the benefits of sand play and its calming effects on children. Sand in clothes, hair, between the toes is all ok as it offers great benefits to their two year old's physical, emotional, social and language development.

Provide less plastic, opting instead for adult sized wooden or metal resources in open, accessible storage that develops a 2 year old's independence and choice making.

- Wooden & metal bowls of all sizes
- Wooden & metal scoops
- Wooden spoons
- Metal measuring spoons
- Metal colanders all sizes
- Metal pots and pans – Small role play ones can be great if you're limited for space
- Metal cooking utensils

## Reflection

- Is sand provided for daily both inside and outside?
- Is there enough sand in the pit / tray to facilitate play e.g. digging, scooping, filling up of several large buckets?
- Is sand presented in different ways?
- Are resources open ended and freely accessible in ways to promote independence and free choice?
- Are practitioners tuned in to 2 Year old's thinking and play and get involved in the flow of child led ideas?
- Is language supported and extended by scaffolding and modelling?
- Are children encouraged to talk and listening to each other?