

Making the most of water play for 2 year olds

Capitalise on children's natural affinity for water to develop active, self-led learners, raise confidence and support higher levels of involvement and well-being.

Building confidence

There is no wrong or right way to play with water. With carefully chosen open ended resources, linked to children's interests and development, 2 year olds can be supported to investigate, explore and think, follow their own lines of enquiry and make choices independently and always get it right. In water play they can be the experts.

Why is water play important?

It's not just about splashing and getting wet. Water play fosters curiosity, imagination and experimentation and provides two year olds with opportunities to demonstrate all three characteristics of effective learning. If water provision both inside and outside is thoughtfully prepared where children have free access to a range of different resources that encourages exploration and curiosity, if water is routinely presented in different ways, through water trays, water walls, buckets, tuff trays, and there is plenty of water available, even better if there is free access to a tap, then children's levels of involvement will soar along with their language development.

Water play can be a catalyst for building confidence, language development and social and physical skills. With time and ample opportunities for water exploration, 2 year olds can develop new concepts, problem solving and thinking skills as well as mathematical and scientific concepts.

Water play supports:

- **Physical development** by developing fine and gross motor, hand eye co-ordination through squeezing, squashing, pouring, transferring, stirring, scooping. Children will develop increasing accuracy as they scoop and pour from large containers and scoops to smaller bottles and tubes using pipettes and smaller equipment.
- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development.** Water play is relaxing and fun. 2 year olds can play independently or collaborate with their peers where one child holds the funnel whilst another child pours. They make choices, self select resources and learn how to cooperate, share equipment and take turns.
- **Understanding of the world** where 2 year olds manipulate materials, explore how water runs, pours, drips, flows, splashes. They investigate how water moves, how different objects behave in water e.g. floating, sinking, water wheels moving.
- **Maths** Water introduces 2 year olds to concepts such as capacity -full / empty, more/less and supports them to make comparisons with quantity. 'I have more water in my bucket than you.'
- **Communication and Language** Water play presents opportunities to introduce a wide vocabulary e.g. sieve, bucket, funnel, tube, and describe actions 'pouring, splashing, emptying'
- **Expressive Arts and Design** water engages with the imagination and should be used in role play – fire stations, car wash, washing babies, plumbers.

Role of the adult

Be playful. Play alongside 2 year olds promoting language and ideas.

Listen. Tune into a child/ren's thinking, comments, observations and build on them.

Ask questions, make suggestions and extend thinking 'Tell me about... I wonder what will happen if... How could we do that?'

Know when to intervene in child's play and when to step back.

Provide interesting, challenging, puzzling materials that promote curiosity and active learning.

Observe what children do.

Top Tips when creating water areas

- Provide open shelving for 2 year olds to select their own resources when they want.
- Think less is more. Do not over fill resource boxes. How many sieves do the children really need?
- Items to fill, pour, empty and squirt including bottles of different sizes, funnels, pipettes, pipes, watering cans, tubes, wooden spoons, spades, scoops, whisks, bubble wands, water wheels
- Large buckets, containers, pulley systems and guttering to transport water and explore shape, capacity, weight.
- Natural materials – wood, logs, pine cones, sticks, pebbles, rocks, shells, acorns, cork
- Add bubbles, food colouring, ice cubes...
- Small world figures and vehicles – sea creatures, dinosaurs, mini beasts, cars with ramps and tunnels.
- Large paint brushes, rollers, sponges and cloths
- Tea sets
- Water should be available both inside and outside. Outside provision should provide opportunities for larger, messier, wetter movements where children can make puddles, create muddy areas, water plants freely.
- Sand and water can be positioned together and resources shared.
- Present water in different ways e.g. alongside the outdoor water tray, develop a water wall with guttering, tubes and funnels, a water pump, several large buckets of water and a builders tray with pebbles, shells and water placed on the ground close by.
- Provide as much space as possible for water play.

Make water exploration real and meaningful throughout the environment by

adding a real baby bath or small tub, towels, soap, sponges, washing lines, pegs and scrubbing brushes to bath babies, wash baby clothes and hang them up to dry.

Paint fences with large paint brushes, rollers and buckets of water.

Paint patterns on chalk boards, walls or ground with fine paint brushes.

Water the garden with child sized watering cans or spray bottles.

Wash toys or develop a car wash role play.

Sweep puddles with brooms.

Involving parents

Share the benefits of water play on child development and well-being. Explain what children are learning when they play with water.

Suggest water based activities that children can play at home.

Ask parents to provide spare sets of clothes and explain that it is ok for children to get wet when exploring water.

Ask if parents/ carers can donate resources e.g. wooden spoons, unwanted pots and pans, whisks, buckets.

A two year old needs to

explore

play with different materials

be active, move their whole body as well as refine hand movement and manipulation

explore sensory experiences,

be challenged

learn new words

Reflection: How effective is your water provision?

Can 2 year olds freely access a variety of water resources without asking an adult for help?

Are resources open ended, stimulating and supportive of active play and exploration?

Is the water provision inside different from the outside water provision?

Do adults play alongside two year olds, feeding language, modelling new skills and different ways to use resources?

Do adults ask open ended questions and encourage children to talk about and extend their ideas?

Do all practitioners have a solid understanding of skill development and know how to support language, investigation, exploration through play?