

**Disclaimer: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.**

## Top tips: Self-service play dough

**A self-service play dough station is a great way to encourage children's creativity and problem-solving, enhance fine motor skills and promote independence.**

The self-serve nature of the activity encourages children to make choices and decisions about ingredients to get a desired consistency, which colours/scents to mix in, etc. allowing children to explore their own ideas, increase their understanding of cause and effect and encourage cognitive and creative development.

Although the emphasis is on the children's individual choices and experimentation, the activity can lead children to share ideas, discuss quantities, colours and collaborate.



- **Safety:** Ensure the ingredients and any tools are non-toxic and safe for children to use. Check for any allergies
- **Essential items:**
  - **Dry ingredient dispensers** - for the flour and salt. Some have a turning mechanism for dispensing, others may have a button. Write the number of turns/presses required for the dough recipe on the dispensers e.g. 2 on the flour and 1 on the salt. Alternatively, use suitable lidded containers and measuring cups, with the required number of cups needed written on each box
  - **A water container** – this could be a jug with a lid or a container with a tap, such as those used for camping
  - **Measuring container for water** – make a mark on a measuring jug or use whole cup measurements
  - **Colours and scents** – add colours and/or aromas to the area to provoke, stimulate the senses and inspire. Add fresh herbs, vanilla, peppermint or raspberry extract or natural oils such as orange or chamomile. Food colouring and natural food powders such as goji berry or pink pitaya give vibrant, vivid colour to the dough
  - **Mixing bowl** – large enough to hold all the ingredients and accommodate a spoon for mixing
  - **Tools** – offer a good variation of tools e.g. rolling pins, mixing spoons, cutters

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- **Organisation and accessibility:** Set up the station in an area that all the children can access easily and independently. Ensure tables are at child height and the materials are within reach
- **Modelling:** Model how to use the recipe, measures and so on to create the dough. Initially this may take a lot of maintenance, but as children gain confidence and control, it can become an independent offer
- **Storage:** The dough should keep for a few days if stored in an airtight container
- **Clean-up:** Set up close to a sink or offer wet/dry cloths for children to clean their hands and tools when they've finished and dustpans and brushes for clearing up the floor space
- **Time and space:** Resist the urge to intervene, give children the time and space to experiment and explore in their own way. Embrace the 'mess' and observe the wonder of the learning
- **Adaptation:** Listen to feedback from the children and other practitioners and make suitable adjustments and adaptations where necessary.

## NDNA products to support you with these tips

- [Continuous Provision](#) - online course

And more resources at [www.ndna.org.uk/hub/myndna](http://www.ndna.org.uk/hub/myndna)