

CLAY



When your child begins working with a lump of clay, it may appear that they are merely playing; however, what comes from this play can be very beneficial for children.

Children enjoy working with clay for several reasons...

Clay, like water and sand, has a natural appeal. Children enjoy working with these basic mediums because there is no separation between them and their work. Having direct contact with the clay allows for a completely different experience. This provides a good break from using markers, crayons, paint brushes, or other tools. A line with a crayon is unchangeable, however a long coil of clay can become a snake, then a bowl, then a snowman. The possibilities are endless and children enjoy this freedom to transform their creations.

Working with the clay becomes a whole body experience and encourages both large and fine motor development. Children pound, pinch, roll, flatten, poke, tear, squeeze, coil, stretch, squash, twist, and bend their clay into all sorts of shapes and sizes. When children stand to do these tasks, they engage their whole bodies. Working with clay, children learn the subtle ways to manipulate clay to create what they want.

Working with clay is also a multi-sensory activity. Clay can feel slimy and wet or it can be hard and dry. Different clays have different smells and colors. Children hear two unique sounds when they squeeze wet clay through their fingers and when they pound the clay onto the table. As children learn to pick up on all of these subtleties they are strengthening their sensory skills.

There is also evidence showing the therapeutic effects of working with clay. Like many other art forms, clay provides a means for children to express their thoughts and feelings in an appropriate way. While it may not be okay to punch a friend when a child is upset, it is okay to pound the clay into whatever he or she would like. "Since children live in a three-dimensional world, it may be easier for them to use clay to represent their world" (Schirmmacher 261). They are able to create clay families and friends who can interact. This kind of creation and play helps children work through their emotions and feelings.



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Your Child's Clay Making Stages...

Ages can vary

Stage 1: At about age two, children enjoy playing and experimenting with clay. They do not try to create specific objects, but rather are trying to understand what clay is and what they can do with it. They are picking up on all of the sensory experiences they are having and enjoy clay as a processing experience.

Stage 2: Around three years, children become more deliberate in their clay experimentations. "As scientists, they put clay to a series of tests by rolling, pinching, tearing, pulling, and poking it. By physically acting on clay they discover its properties. Clay can roll, but it cannot bounce or pour" (Schirmacher 260). Children will learn how to make simple coils, balls, and "flattened cakes," and use these shapes repeatedly.

Stage 3: Around age four year olds begin to take their scientific studies to the next step by bringing their clay forms to life. Rolled balls can become snowmen with feelings and thoughts of their own. While they are now making real objects and creatures, it is happening more by chance than actual planning.

Stage 4: At about five years children now have the confidence and ability to come to the clay table with an idea of what it is they want to make. For them, their challenge is to find the right processes and strategies to fulfill their ideas. This helps children learn to problem solve and to come up with creative solutions to their own ideas.

Schirmacher, Robert. Art and Creative Development for Young Children. 5th ed. Thomson Delmar Learning, 2006. 254-265.

