

10 Simple Sensory Play Setups

10 quick, low prep activities using 1-2 ingredients for busy parents

Easy 15 minute play using everyday items



Low mess options included
No special equipment needed

Before You Start

A few simple things to know:

- These activities are designed to give you simple ideas for play with your toddler using things you probably already have at home.
- Every child is different, so use the ideas as a starting point and adapt them to suit your child's age and stage of development.
- There is no right or wrong way to play! Follow your child's lead and have fun exploring together.
- Each activity includes a quick set-up, ideas for extending the play and a little explanation of the skills it can support.

Safety First

Adult supervision is required for all activities.

Please check that each activity and all materials are suitable for your individual child before starting. Some activities include small or loose parts which may present a choking hazard to young children. Never leave a child unattended with small objects or materials.

Check materials before use and remove anything that becomes damaged or unsafe. If your child is likely to put objects in their mouth, choose larger, age-appropriate alternatives instead.

Use your own judgement and follow appropriate safety guidance for your child.

A Note About Development

The developmental information included with each activity is intended as a general guide, not as a developmental assessment or professional advice. Children develop at different rates and in different ways. The most important thing is that your child is safe and enjoys the activities.

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Oat Scoop & Pour

A great first sensory set up



1 ingredient



5-15 minutes of play



Low mess



Ingredients

Dry oats

Directions

1. Pour oats into a shallow tray.
2. Add cups or spoons and let your child scoop and pour.

Top tip

Use a baking tray with a lip and place on a towel to catch spills. Oats are low mess compared to rice and vacuum easily.

Extend Play

Add a second container and encourage transferring from one to the other. Introduce simple words like full and empty.

Why This Supports Development

Builds early hand control and coordination. The dry texture gives clear tactile feedback without overwhelm. Not suitable for mouthers

Foam Cloud Wash

A quick high interest messy play



2 ingredients



5-10 minutes of play



Medium mess



Ingredients

Shaving foam

Water

Directions

1. Spray foam into a bowl.
2. Add a small splash of water and mix to loosen texture.
3. Let your child explore.

Top Tip

Do this in the sink or bath to reduce clean up time. Rinse hands after play to avoid irritation.

Extend Play

Add a spoon or brush for spreading and simple “washing” actions. Add toys, e.g. cars for a car washing station. Don't have shaving foam? Whisk up some washing up liquid instead

Why This Supports Development

Offers strong tactile input and supports sensory tolerance to unfamiliar textures. Not suitable for mouthers.

Colour Ice Melt

A simple temperature play activity



2 ingredients



10-20 minutes of play



Low mess



Ingredients

Water

Food colouring

Directions

1. Freeze coloured ice in advance.
2. Place cubes in a tray and let the child explore melting and colour mixing.

Top tip

Use a shallow tray with a towel underneath to manage water.

Extend Play

Add warm water in a small cup to speed up melting. Freeze the water with lolly sticks to make “paintbrushes” and try painting designs onto paper.

Why This Supports Development

Introduces temperature contrast and visual change. Supports cause and effect understanding.

Jelly Dig

A high engagement sensory dig



2 ingredients



10-20 minutes of play



High mess



Ingredients

Jelly or vege-gel

Small toys

Directions

1. Make the jelly according to instructions.
2. Set with small toys inside.
3. Once firm, place in a tray and let the child dig out.

Top tip

Use a chair or outdoor space. This can be a high clean up activity.

Extend Play

Ask the child to sort toys once found or count them. Add in a bucket of water.

Why This Supports Development

Encourages tactile exploration and problem solving, as the child retrieves hidden objects.

Flour Mark Making

An easy pre-writing activity



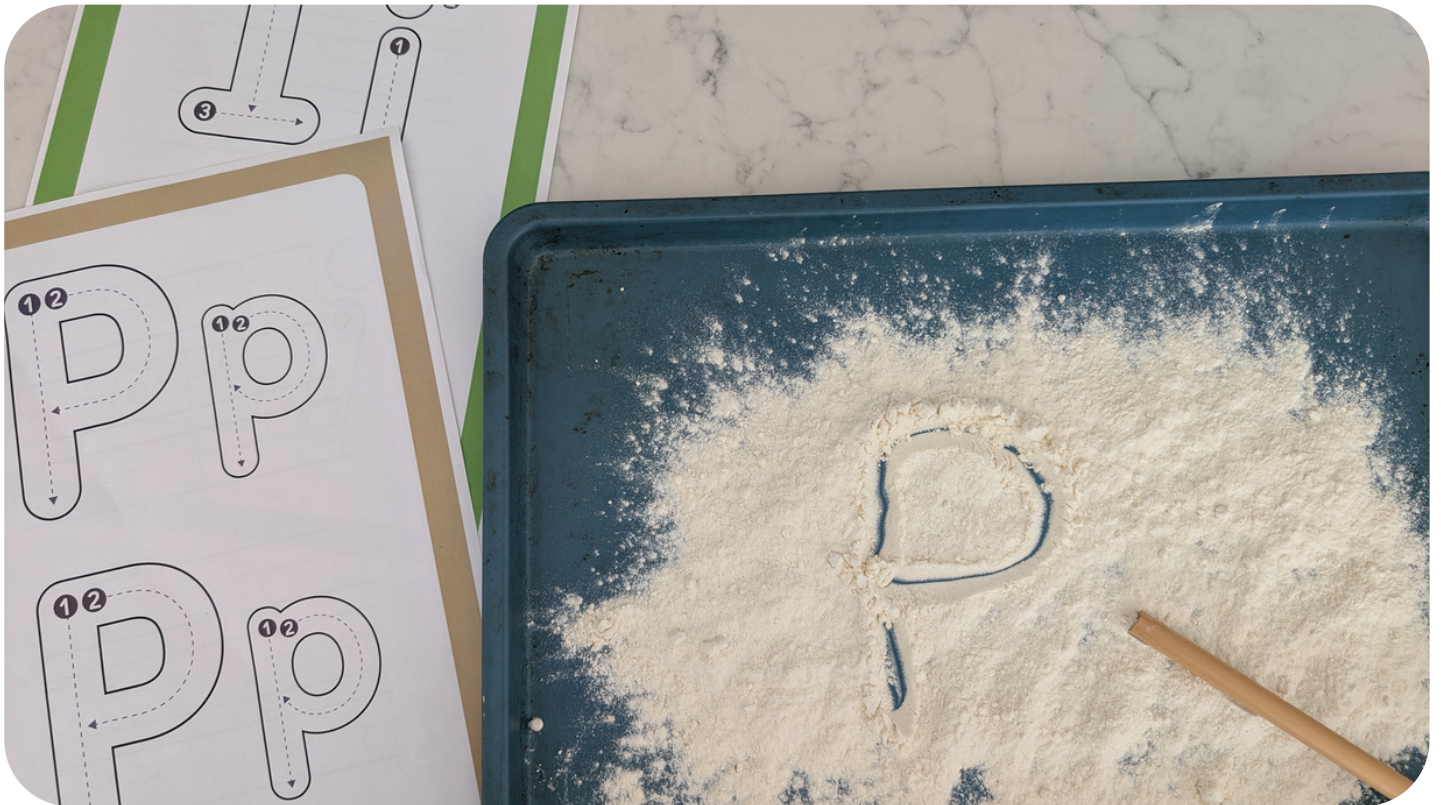
1 ingredient



5-10 minutes of play



Medium mess



Ingredients

Plain flour

Directions

1. Spread a thin layer of flour in a tray.
2. Let your child draw lines and shapes with fingers.

Top tip

Keep the flour layer thin to avoid airborne dust.

Extend Play

Model simple shapes or letters and invite copying. Leave out straws or sticks to practice writing.

Why This Supports Development

Supports early writing skills through movement and visual feedback. Not suitable for mouthers.

Citrus Water Squeeze

A simple smell and squeeze activity



2 ingredients



5-10 minutes of play



Medium mess



Ingredients

Water

Orange or lemon halves

Directions

1. Fill a bowl with water.
2. Add citrus halves and let your child squeeze and explore.

Top Tip

Wipe hands before touching eyes to avoid irritation.

Extend Play

Add a spoon and encourage scooping and pouring alongside squeezing. Make mystery water (2-3 tbsp of cornstarch and food colouring) to turn into a hide and find game.

Why This Supports Development

Combines smell and touch, alongside helping develop hand strength. Supports sensory integration

Pasta Threading

A focused fine motor task



2 ingredients



5-10 minutes of play



Low mess



Ingredients

Dried pasta with holes
String or shoelace

Directions

1. Show how to thread pasta onto the string.
2. Let the child copy.

Top tip

Tape or tie one end of the string to stop the pasta falling off.

Extend Play

Create simple patterns using different pasta shapes if available. Hand colour the pasta or put into a ziplock bag with paint and hand sanitizer and let dry, to turn into a colour matching activity.

Why This Supports Development

Builds hand-eye coordination and concentration. Not suitable for mouthers.

Basic Mud Kitchen

A classic outdoor sensory mix



2 ingredients



10-20 minutes of play



High mess



Ingredients

Soil or coconut coir

Water

Directions

1. Mix soil or water in a container.
2. Provide spoons or sticks for mixing.

Top tip

Dress for mess and define a clear play area before starting. Wash up when done.

Extend Play

Add simple containers for pretend cooking or pouring. Collect leaves or flowers to make potions. Add in kitchen utensils e.g. whisks or sieves.

Why This Supports Development

Rich tactile input and open-ended play. Encourages experimentation. Not suitable for mouthers.

Sponge Squeeze

A simple water transfer game



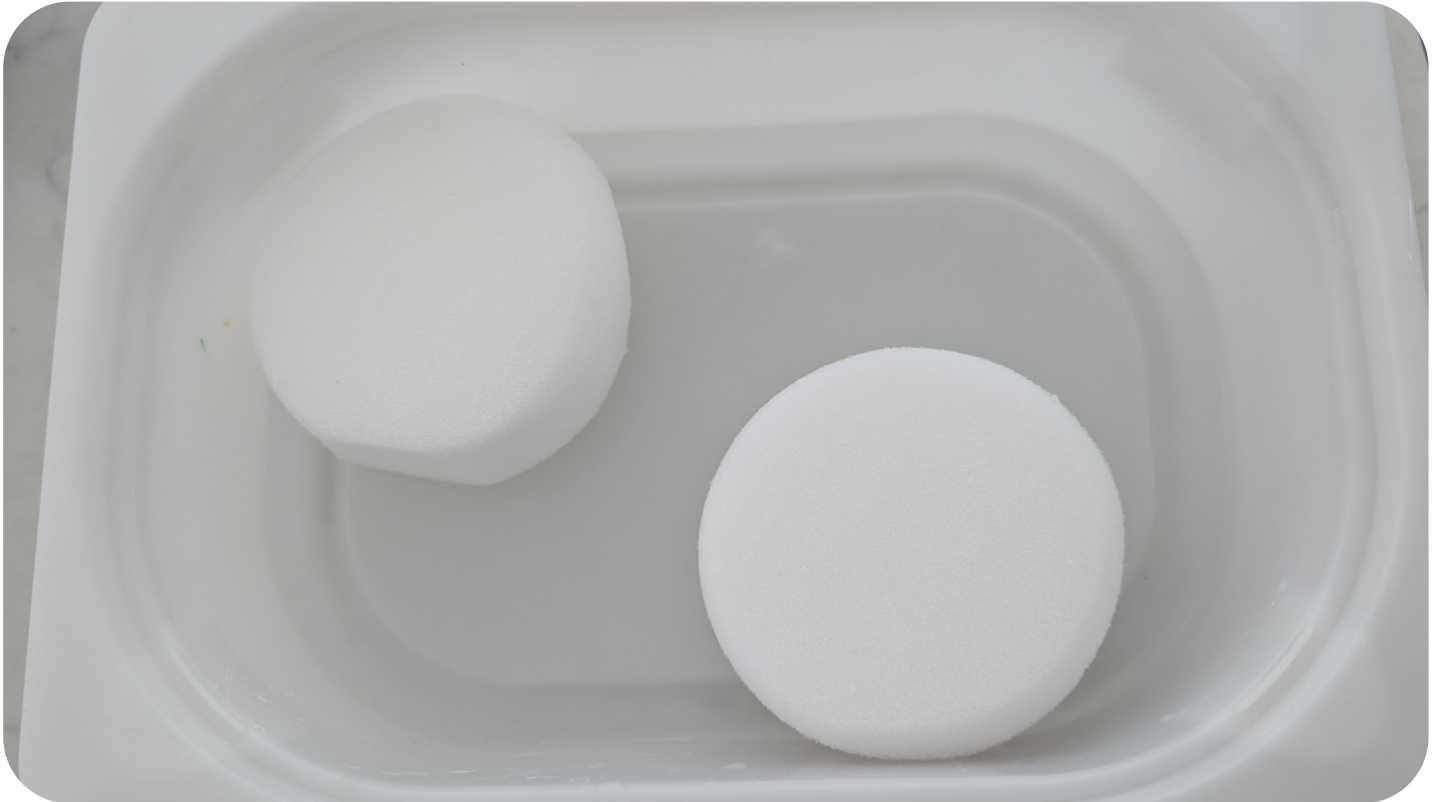
2 ingredients



5-15 minutes of play



Medium mess



Ingredients

Water

Sponges

Directions

1. Place 2 bowls and fill 1 with water.
2. Show how to soak and squeeze into the empty bowl.

Top Tip

Use a tray under both bowls to contain mess.

Extend Play

Time how long it takes to move all the water across. Add challenge by putting out smaller containers.

Why This Supports Development

Strengthens hand muscles and teaches cause and effect.

Bottle Shaker Play

A simple sound and movement activity



2 ingredients



5-10 minutes of play



Low mess



Ingredients

Empty plastic bottle with lid
Dry rice or lentils

Directions

1. Fill the bottle part way with the rice or lentils and secure the lid.
2. Let the child shake and roll.

Top tip

Tape the lid closed to prevent opening. Do not overfill as movement of contents is what creates sound.

Extend Play

Compare fast and slow and the sound different materials makes. If child is not mouthing, leave out the ingredients in a tray and let them build the shakers.

Why This Supports Development

Introduces auditory feedback linked to movement. Build cause and effect understanding and body coordination. Proceed with caution for mouthers.

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Simple ideas for busy parents

Adult supervision required at all times. Use age-appropriate materials and always check for choking hazards. Activities may be messy. Use protective surfaces where needed