

Clay

Uku



Clay is a natural resource that has no right or wrong way to be used. It can be cut, pinched, rolled, squeezed and moulded into different shapes and its texture can be changed by adding water. It can be reused and recycled when it is dry. Clay, like playdough, provides children with many opportunities to be creative and expressive. Clay can be used to create long-lasting shapes. Although clay is similar to playdough the different texture, consistency and smell means that children can produce different products and have different experiences when they work with clay.

Clay / Uku

Te Whāriki

Clay can be used to support learning across all strands of Te Whāriki. In particular, developing capability with clay supports the **Communication strand**, as children discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive, and also the **Exploration strand**, where children gain confidence in and control of their own bodies, including active exploration with all the senses and the use of tools, materials and equipment to extend skills.



Clay can help children to

- develop hand and eye coordination – squeezing, patting, pounding
- develop finger and hand muscles – poking, pinching
- be creative and learn about texture, shapes and forms
- manipulate through rolling, cutting, making shapes
- experience making 3-dimensional objects
- socialise with others
- express feelings and ideas.



Adults can support children by

- providing clay regularly so they become familiar with it and develop their skills
- working the clay until it is soft enough for small hands to work with
- making sure there's enough clay for them to play with
- suggesting ways to work the clay or dough e.g. rolling, thumping, smoothing, decorating
- experimenting with clay to know how best to use it.

Providing for Clay

Clay needs to be soft for children to work with and this means keeping it damp during the session. Clay is best used on a hessian-covered table or board to stop it from sticking. Roll the clay into softball-sized amounts and have a bucket of water by the clay area for children to keep the clay wet and to wash their hands as they want to.

Ideas for equipment

The great thing about clay is that little more than a damp sponge to keep the clay moist is necessary. Children's exploration, handling, poking, shaping and forming the clay can be quite ample on its own.

Sometimes the group might want to provide other tools including:

- something to cut the clay (a length of nylon fishing line attached to wooden toggles works well)
- collage materials for decoration
- pieces of card for children to take their work home on.

Cover clay with a damp cloth and store in a plastic bag in an airtight container. If the clay gets really hard, break it up with a hammer and soak it in water. Drain off extra water when the clay has softened. Turn the clay out onto a cloth and sit it on top of newspaper. Leave it to dry to a manageable consistency before using again. Children enjoy being involved in the process of breaking up and re-wetting dry clay.

Finding clay

Clay can be bought from just about any art shop or potters' suppliers or playcentre shop – or if there is an art school nearby, you could ask for offcuts or unused clay.

In some areas clay will be available from the natural environment. An expedition to dig clay can be a lot of fun.

