



# Play Dough: Kids Love Learning with Play Dough

Dough play is one of the most valuable kinds of play young children can do! For a young child, the joy that comes from working with dough is the feeling of being in control of a substance. There is no way to do it wrong. Children can pound, roll, squeeze or shape dough any way they like.

Dough play is another place where process, not product, is the watchword. A wise adult remains nearby to watch, to interact with the children and to enjoy each child's process of creativity and discovery. A finished product is usually not at all important to the young child. It should not be overly important to the adult, either! Many teachers, especially those of younger children, provide play dough each week as an activity in which children may participate.

## Tools and Rules

Give each child a fist-sized lump of dough. To enrich dough play, provide toy rolling pins, short lengths of dowel, craft sticks or plastic knives to flatten and cut dough. Seasonal cookie cutters can be an occasional addition, but it's usually best for children to make shapes of their own choosing.

As children work with dough, roll and play with the dough yourself, but avoid making representational items. This is a tough temptation for some of us; the artistically inclined have the urge to shape a cat and say, "Look! I made a cat." However, you have now created a model that some children will feel that they must copy in order to be acceptable. This makes the child dis-



satisfied with what he or she has made and uncertain about his or her own abilities. Make it your goal to help the children feel successful in what they can do themselves, not how well they can imitate an adult-made model.

One comment all children should hear often about any art or dough activity is "It's OK to make your art look any way you want it to be."

There are only three rules that apply to dough play: "We keep the dough on the table. We keep the dough out of our mouths. We share the dough and the equipment."

## **Before and After**

To make dough play easy to clean up, make a few simple preparations. Lay an old sheet (attach Velcro strips to undersides of the corners to keep it secure) or a large flannel-backed vinyl tablecloth under the dough table. (Newspapers still work in a pinch!) Provide a plastic place mat, sheet of waxed paper or a paper plate at each child's place. When it's time to clean up, invite children to take a small ball of dough and play "magnet," pressing the ball on small dough crumbs until they cannot see any more crumbs. This is a fun and effective way to get the majority of the table clean! Paper towels, premoistened towelettes or a no-rinse hand-wiping solution makes cleaning hands and table simple and easy. Store play dough in airtight containers and make a fresh batch after several uses.



# Salt, Flour and cornstarch Play Dough



## collect

- 1½ cups flour
- 1 cup cornstarch
- 1 cup salt
- Food coloring
- 1¼ cups warm water

## D6

Mix dry ingredients. Add food coloring to warm water. Slowly pour and mix colored water into dry ingredients until dough forms a ball around spoon. Knead dough on floured board. If dough is sticky, add more flour. If dough is too stiff, slowly add more water.

