

CLAY - UKU

Most of us have an innate feeling for the earth and deep seated satisfaction when working with it, or growing things in it. To mould clay into shapes or fashion pots is a primitive art. Children derive intense joy from moulding a solid mass with their hands only as tools: a satisfaction, which cannot be expressed in words. The messiness of clay and its smooth, sticky texture releases a child from the many necessary restrictions of modern living. Sometimes a child just needs to get grubby.

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 provides children with many opportunities to be creative and expressive. Clay can be used to create long-lasting shapes by letting it air dry or even baking or firing. Children learn that clay has limits to which it can be stretched before it cracks and breaks.

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
- develop concepts of the earth

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
- sit and work alongside children, explore and talk about what you are discovering.
- suggesting ways to work the clay or dough e.g. rolling, thumping, smoothing, decorating
- experimenting with clay to know how best to use it.

Remember the process doesn't always lead to an end product and that the process is as important in itself.



eResource provided by Jude Mitchell - Early Childhood Team Leader

REAP WAIRARAPA

Masterton
REAP House
340 Queen St, Masterton

Pahiatua
Heartlands Centre
11 Mangahau Rd, Pahiatua

Contact Details

✉ PO Box 442
Masterton 5840

@ ecleader@reapwairarapa.nz

☎ 0800 WAI REAP

Early Childhood Staff

Jude Mitchell
• – EC Team Leader

Shirley Jones
• – Lifelong Learning Officer

Tracy Graham
• – Professional Support Officer

Clay-Uku Play Ideas

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. Damp sponges in cut down ice cream containers are useful to dampen hands when needed without over watering the clay. Provide a bucket of water and towel to wash and dry hands as needed.

Ideas for equipment

The great thing about clay is that you only need a damp sponge to keep the clay moist. Children's exploration, handling, poking, shaping and forming the clay can be quite enough 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)
- metal butter knives, rolling pins, wooden hammers.
- natural collage materials for decoration.
- pieces of card for children to take their work home on.

To store clay

Roll clay into soft ball size pieces, make a dent with your thumb and pour in a little water. Place in 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.

Other ideas for clay

- Roll soft clay into golf sized balls and throw at a target-paint easel, clear easels are fun when someone sits behind.
- Use clay in the mud kitchen.
- Water clay down to a slurry and use paint brushes to paint on paper, wood or concrete.
- Make 'seed balls' by adding gathered seeds to table spoon sized portions of clay roll and let dry. Then scatter around garden where you want things to grow. Great for native plant seeds, check that seeds are not poisonous to children.

Note: Clay can become contaminated from foreign objects and liquids like paint. When clay is at this stage, to dispose of it return it to the earth by digging it into the garden.

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. It also supports 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.

Adapted from Work and Play and Ministry of Education Playgroup Handout-Clay.

