



The magical mess of mud play for children

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Mud, mud, glorious mud. There's nothing quite like it...and if you're a child at this child care centre near Newcastle, NSW, you can play in it every single day.

Toddle spoke with Clare Comedoy, Educational Leader at [Bluebird Early Education Fern Bay](#), about her centre's mud play area and why it's so popular with the little ones.



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Come and dive in!

'The mud pit is always an irresistible play invitation for learners and educators,' shares Clare. 'It's such a hive of activity and a joyful place to learn.'

Rather than being an optional play space for the children at the centre, the mud pit is always available for the children while playing in the outdoor space.

'As long as the child has a clean and dry set of clothes to change into, they are welcome to "dive on in" to the mud pit,' explains Clare. 'We have a shower too that we use if full mud immersion happens - which is often!'

Mindful water use

The centre is careful to be mindful about water use due to the current water restrictions in the area. 'We have involved our learners in conversations and planning around water restrictions and how we thoughtfully use water within the mud pit area,' says Clare.

'The children decided on rationing to two buckets a day and help to

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Getting the parents on board

Rather than seeing this type of play as mindless mess, the educators are quick to explain to the parents just how valuable it is as a learning opportunity for the children.

‘This really helps parents to feel excited and positive about the messy mud play that happens within our centre and additionally gives them permission to explore these ideas in their own backyard, knowing that it’s so full of rich learning opportunities,’ says Clare.

‘We make sure that parents understand the benefits and learning opportunities that the mud pit presents and tell them about the importance of making sure that all learners have the opportunity to fully engage in all learning experiences offered.’

Free play on their own terms

For the children, having the freedom to play in the mud kitchen and mud pit on their own terms is the best part. ‘It doesn’t come with a predetermined outcome or adult chosen intention,’ explains Clare.

‘The play belongs to them, they are the drivers and that makes it so special. It is empowering and full of exciting potential. The open-ended nature of the play space means that they are in control of the direction of the play, making it personalised, meaningful, rich and rewarding for our learners.

We trust that the children know how best to play and respect their choices in games. This idea often gets lost and adults find themselves choosing the games, rules and outcomes.

We see children as capable and confident learners, and that our role as Educators is to listen, observe, record and provoke further questions and opportunities.’

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learn about our world through our senses and mud play engages so many of them simultaneously.

The touch sense is engaged a lot though manipulating the mud but other senses are also involved. The smell of the mud mixed with the crushed leaves is so enticing and watching the mud drip through your fingers is incredibly hypnotising.

We've even had some of our learners explore the different sounds they could make squeezing the mud through their clasped hands. The opportunities are endless.'

Changing and evolving play

Clare explains that the [type of play](#) the children engage with in the mud play area changes almost every day.

'This is the best bit about mud play!' she enthuses. 'The games and play are always evolving and changing every time they come to the space. We are always delighted and surprised at the variety of play that happens.'

What if I don't want to get muddy today?

Not every child wants to squelch and squirch in the mud each day. 'Some children do not like the texture and feeling of the mud - which is okay!' explains Clare. But this doesn't mean they have to miss out on the fun.

'We encourage our learners to try and experiment with all our play experiences but also respect children's interests and preferences,' says Clare.

'Some might not like to touch the mud but would be okay with pumping the water, collecting resources to go in the area or even taking photos of the experiences.

We look at different ways in which they can engage with the space, in ways

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Who am I going to be today?

Clare explains that the children often play certain roles within their games in the mud.

- **Engineers:**

‘Lately, we have seen some young engineers building dams and making waterways through the mud, exploring the effect of gravity and motion. Communicating and coordinating with each other to test their theories and reach their desired results.’

- **Chefs:**

‘Creating cakes, chocolate ice creams and soups using the pots and pans. Using evocative, descriptive language to describe their creations and sell their meals to passers by.’

- **Scientists:**

‘Exploring concepts around cause and effect. What happens when I jump in the puddle with two feet? How high will the splash go? If I jump with a

friend what happens?’

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plopping rocks in, exploring the idea of displacement. Using the scales to measure out wet mud vs dry dirt- comparing the weight. Engaging with and exploring mathematical language to describe what's happening and why.'

- **Construction workers:**

'Filling, transporting and emptying dirt from one location to another in the dump trucks. Coordinating excavation digs and supervising dig sites. Working in teams and negotiating roles with others.'

- **Artists:**

'Pushing stones, sticks and leaves into patterns within the mud. Using paint brushes to paint the mud onto paper and the concrete wall. Making impressions and lines in the hardened mud to create pictures and impressions.'

Want to recreate this at home?

Clare explains that you don't need lots of fancy equipment to bring mud

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'You may even like to just start with a baking tray full of dirt or section off a bit of the garden bed. Some families have even filled an old tyre that helps to contain the mud in a smaller backyard.

Having old kitchen pots, watering cans, wooden spoons, cups, shells, sticks, matchbox cars and plastic animals are all great additions to your outdoor mud play.

Parents just need to be aware of the soil that they use, making sure it's free of animal excrement, and some store-bought potting mixes are not recommended as they may contain undesirable microbes.

We used clean topsoil at our centre, supplied by our local landscaper.'

Now if you need us, we'll all be out the back making some mud pies for lunch.

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Toddle is the most comprehensive child care finder in Australia, on a mission to make parents' lives easier.

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