Inn Farm Private Day Nursery

**A FINE MESS!**

As parents, we tend to think of ‘messy play’ as an untidy, nerve-wracking and daunting activity to carry out at home. Before we know it, we hear ourselves saying, “Don’t make a mess!” which defeats the point of the task in hand. The word ‘messy’ often gives a negative association resulting in the activity being undervalued. This is a shame considering it is such an important part of children's learning, and plays a key role in the development of early writing skills.

Messy play involves children using all of their senses in the process of exploration. It offers an abundance of opportunities to mould and manipulate different materials in a way that is not adult-directed. This allows the child to explore their creativity without a need to make or produce something specific. Through doing this, children can explore all sorts of possibilities. It taps into their natural curiosity about the world around them and encourages their desire to find out more.

Messy play is also fun! Remembering back to being a child and making mud pies or rose petal perfume, conjures up happy memories for many people. We only have to look at children’s faces when playing with water, soil, paint and sand to realise the enjoyment they are getting. So come on parents, join in the endless opportunities for fun and get the ‘messy play’ out!

Firstly, put suitable, protective covering on the floor and table so you don’t get too worried about it going on the floor and furniture! The next step is to decide from an endless list which messy play material to introduce your child to first. Will it be paint, water, shaving foam, cornflour mixed with water, jelly, custard or bubbles to name a few? Put whichever you choose into a tray or bowl and let your child use their hands and fingers to investigate! Sit back and watch the look of fascination on your child’s face as they explore the new tactile experience. Please remember: never to leave your child alone with these activities, as inevitably everything will go in their mouth and they could choke if unsupervised. It is extremely rewarding, and often amusing, watching their first encounters. Don’t be put off if the messy play material doesn’t go down well the first time - just try something different next time. If you are brave enough to join in the fun it will encourage the most reluctant child to have a go! By talking to your child about the marks and patterns they have made, you are showing them the value of what they are doing, thus promoting their early writing experiences.

The outdoors also offers a wide range of wonderful possibilities for messy play, especially at this time of year. For example, children can dig deep in sand and soil, explore mud (mud pies are always a favourite!), splash in puddles or move water around using guttering, watering cans, buckets and pipes. The opportunities are endless - so, go on, have a go and encourage your children to ‘make a mess’ and engage in the process with them. Enjoy!