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## A Letter to Families About Sand and Water Play

Dear Families,

Although you're probably used to seeing your child splash in the bathtub and dig in a playground sandbox, you may not realize that we regularly play with sand and water at my home. We play with water indoors, using the kitchen or bathroom sink and small plastic tubs. We use sand in tubs and on trays. Outdoors, the children dig in the ground or use tubs filled with sand, water, and sometimes both!

When children pour water into measuring cups, they are exploring math concepts. When they drop corks, stones, feathers, and marbles into a tub of water, they are scientists, discovering which objects sink and which float. When they comb patterns in sand, they are exploring both math and art.

Children aren't always aware of what they are learning, so I help them talk about their observations. For example, I might say,

“Look how cloudy the water is with soap in it. You can't see the toys.”

“You made the wheel turn by pouring sand through the top.”

Sometimes I ask questions to extend the children's thinking, for example,

“How is wet sand different from dry sand?”

“How many cups of water do you think we have to pour into this jug to fill it?”

You can set up water and sand play for your child at home, much as I do. Here are some suggestions:

**Offer water play to children of all ages.** However, babies under 12 months shouldn't play with sand because they might swallow it.

**Prepare your home to make cleanup easy.** For water play, place a large towel on the floor and let your child use the bathroom or kitchen sink. For sand play, use a rubber dish pan placed on a towel on the floor. Your child does not need more than 2–3 inches of sand or water.

**Offer props to enrich play.** Give your child a baster, plastic measuring cups and spoons, a funnel, a sieve, plastic or rubber figurines and boats, a comb, pails and shovels, and squeeze bottles. These items will lead to many hours of enjoyment.

**Encourage your child to explore and experiment.** For a new experience, add soap flakes or food coloring to water. Try blowing bubbles by using different kinds of frames. Plastic six-pack rings, empty berry containers, or an eyeglass frame without the lenses can be used as bubble wands.

Sand and water play are a lot more than just fun. They are calming activities and important ways for children to develop thinking skills and explore math and science concepts.

Sincerely,

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