

Bear Park from Home

Dear Parents of Bear Park,

At this time it is important to remember us as well and realise that it is good for our children to be able to play/create/draw/write on their own, being inspired by their own imagination and creativity. So as suggested by The Parenting Place

"Allow time in the day where kids know it's their turn to come up with their own entertainment and are free to choose their activity. Supervise, check-in and show interest absolutely, but feel free to leave them to it – allowing our kids space for unstructured and independent play is of benefit to the whole household."

Stay well and enjoy this glorious weather.
Sue & the Bear Park Team

Playdough without tools

"The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences"
Loris Malaguzzi

For young children to develop an understanding about form and shape and how to represent an idea or an object three-dimensionally clay or plasticine is a great medium.

If you don't have clay or plasticine you can utilize play dough of perhaps make your own. (There are plenty of recipes on line) If you are offering plasticine or play dough I suggest choosing one neutral colour such as black, white or perhaps browning. The idea is to focus on sensory experiences and perhaps crating forms and shapes without the distraction of colour.



Working with children and clay I noticed that offering tools such as rolling pins and spatulas were often evoking ideas about flattening, cutting and cooking. While these are valid ideas I asked myself: "How can I extend children's strategies to explore this medium's full potential? How can I encourage children to utilize its three dimensional possibilities and to create in more sculptural ways?"

So I would suggest you invite your child to use his/her hands. Especially for children in the infant and toddler age. "Our hands are the best tools," I often explain. By encouraging children to just use their hands will support them to explore the medium through their senses. It will encourage children to come up with authentic ideas. They will develop ideas of how to create shapes by rolling, pinching, twisting, turning and attaching.

When you notice your child is very confident in creating shapes, ask something that will extend three-dimensional thinking such as "Can you make it standup?" Or if you think your child is ready to work towards a specific idea try to suggest to work towards simple three-dimensional objects such as a tower, a tree or a tree.

Through these experiences children will be able to create deeper sensory relationships with moldable materials. They will perhaps challenge and extend children's thinking from two dimensional into three-dimensional.

Although at Bear Park we use clay as an expressive language it is not always so easily found in homes so two easy alternatives are:

Easy no cook Play dough recipe



2 cups flour

1/2 cup salt

2 tablespoons cream of tartar

2 tablespoons oil

1 - 1.5 cups boiling water

Add peppermint or lemon oil to scent, or lavender sprigs from your garden

Cloud Dough Recipe

1. Measure and pour four cups of flour into a large tub.
2. Add half a cup of baby oil.
3. Mix with a wooden spoon.
4. Using your fingers, squeeze and press the cloud dough to blend the oil throughout the flour.
5. Store in an air tight container.

The consistency of Cloud Dough can be powdery like flour and also mouldable, a bit like damp sand. It is perfect for moulding, shaping, squeezing, pressing and sculpting into different shapes.

Cloud dough has a silky smooth texture and scented by the baby oil. It provides a great hands-on sensory learning experience for children.



The Post is Essential

We know that children learn best through being able to understand things in context. That is why in our preschools we always search for ways for literacy to be woven into their learning in a way that holds real meaning to the children. Understanding that the letters we see and are practising to write come together to form words that communicate messages ideas and stories to others is the foundation for a love of literacy.

Wondering how you can provide meaningful experiences for literacy while in lockdown? We are lucky in that NZ Post is an essential service, meaning that we have an opportunity to reach back in time and experiment with analog forms of communication. This is a brilliant chance to engage children in early literacy skills in a way that holds real meaning.

Perhaps you have a friend you used to see for playdates, or a family member who is not part of your 'bubble'. Reaching out to someone through a letter, or even perhaps establishing a someone outside of your bubble as a pen-pal could also promote a spirit of positivity by having something to look forward to, and spending time taking note of the things your child may wish to include in their letter. Imagine the joy of a friend or family member receiving a hand written letter in their mail box!

You may wish to sit down with your child and craft your letter together, including creative touches such as illustrations. Perhaps you would even like to make your own envelopes using recycled materials.



Activities like using scissors, glue or sellotape all support the development of fine motor skills and the all important pincer-grip, essential for learning to write. You can offer opportunities for your child to have a go at practising certain words or letters, over time building their confidence in the skill of written literacy while supporting their understanding that their thoughts and ideas are meaningful and worthwhile sharing with others.

Online Resources - Books

Children learn to love the sound of language before they even notice the existence of printed words on a page. Reading books aloud to children stimulates their imagination and expands their understanding of the world. It helps them develop language and listening skills and prepares them to understand the written word. Some very good links that our staff have shared with us are as follows so do have a look.

1. www.getepic.com for online books. They run a 30 day free trial, and after that it is \$7.99 per month
2. David Walliams has a short story every day: <https://www.worldofdavidwalliams.com/elevenses/>
3. Radio NZ kids stories: <https://storytime.rnz.co.nz>

A Mini Investigation

An investigation is Bear Park's way of approaching sustained learning over a period of time. Some investigations are long term, while others may only last a few days or weeks.

Generally we know when an investigation has reached a natural conclusion when our hypothesis or intent has been realised. An idea for a mini investigation at home could be to look at the idea of growth and transformation. Embracing the natural world and looking for ways to be actively sustainable is a part of Bear Park's culture, the children will already be familiar with some ideas about nature and sustainability from their time in the preschool. Why not continue to foster this at home with the simple suggestion of vegetables? Many of you will be preparing more home cooked meals, probably with eager junior chefs to support you. Next time you are prepping your vegetables, save the offcuts and perhaps pose the question "What could we do with these instead of throwing them in the trash?"

You may be surprised at some of the suggestions. Take note of these, perhaps even create a mind map of them and then plan to test out each theory. You could also make your own suggestions. For example many vegetable offcuts can be grown with nothing but sunlight and water. This process is fascinating to observe and offers up many pathways of discovery.

"The best and easiest vegetables to regrow are spring onion, celery, lettuces and cabbages, leeks and onions. However you can have success with most vegetables (and even fruit) once you get the technique right! The simplest way to do this is to cut an inch or two off from the top of the vegetable, and then leave to sit in a bowl/tub of water. Once your vegetables begin to sprout, simply place them in soil to continue growing!"

- for further information refer to www.ruralsprout.com/regrow-vegetables



A crucial part of Bear Park investigations is ensuring that our children are offered a variety of languages to express their ideas. You could draw your growing vegetables, adding details each day as you notice them, document their progress with photographs or even create a dramatic story or dance to convey how it might feel to be a new spring onion, growing from the offcuts of an old one.

If you choose to embark on a mini investigation, please share you process with us on StoryPark! The teaching teams will love to see what you're up to and will be happy to offer tips and suggestions for how to enrich your mini investigation!