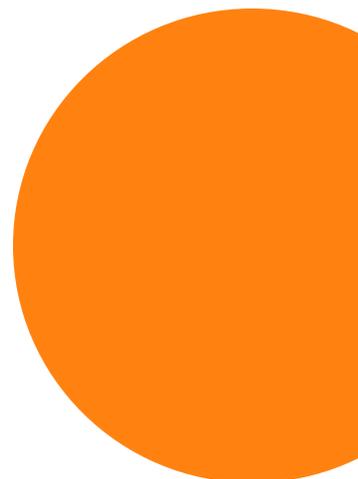


*Helping
you to help
your child*

Using Play Dough to Get Kids Talking

Simple, actionable ideas for parents, carers
and other supporting adults



Before we start, it's worth reflecting on what you're role modelling

Introduction

Play dough can work real magic when it comes to helping children to open up about how they're feeling. Most of us can't resist the feel, smell and general sensory appeal of play dough, so in the next few pages I've shared some ideas to use this to our advantage for times when you think the child you're supporting has some things they need to explore.

If you work with children, having a couple of tubs to hand can be helpful and not just when working with little kids either.

I hope these ideas are helpful and that you have fun adding to them.

Pooky x

Use it as a Distraction



Just having a tub of play dough to hand can act as a distraction, giving your child something to focus on other than the difficult conversation they're having.

They can squeeze it and stretch it to relieve tension and many will begin to talk more freely as they play with it. Some will choose to play with it for a few minutes before they begin to talk at all.

Giving them the time and space to do this will often help them to get ready to talk. Playing with some play dough alongside them may enable you to listen more closely and more easily resist the urge to jump in too...



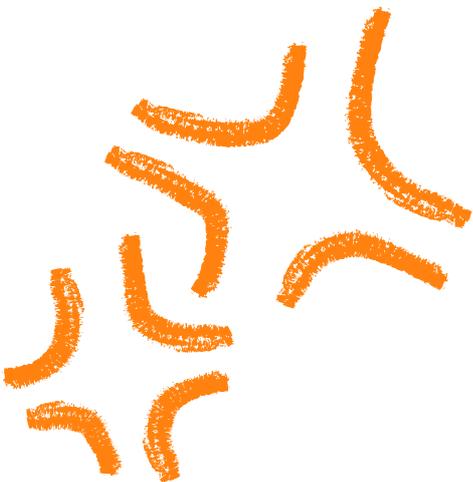
Smash it to Relieve Anger

-2-

If your child is feeling especially angry, making a big ball of play dough and inviting them to smash it can help them to feel a lot better and enable them to calm down enough to begin to explore how they're feeling.

You might then ask questions about who or what they were thinking of as they punched or smashed the play dough.

There is something super appealing to many children about being given permission to express anger and to destroy things.



Model Scenarios

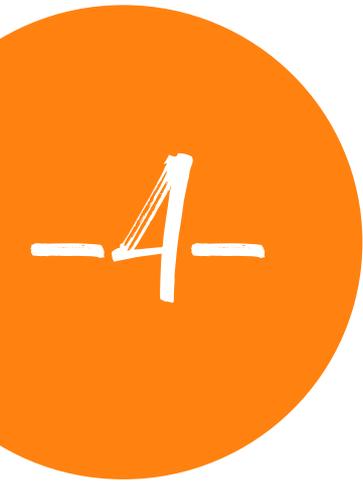
Some children will get really carried away with using play dough and will happily use it to model scenarios, either in a very literal way or by using balls to represent different people.

Some might use it to demonstrate something that has happened that they can't put into words, or to show their mood or to demonstrate things that they would like to do to somebody (like a voodoo doll).

Sometimes the play dough can be used quite symbolically, to represent an idea which may not fully sink in otherwise or may need reinforcing. For example, if a young person feels in danger from someone, the play dough can be used to represent that person and you can put them in a box, to show that you are going to take steps to ensure that they are safe from that person.

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Make a Face

If a child struggles to express their emotions, sometimes they may find it easier to do so with a play dough face, where they can play out expressions they may find difficult.

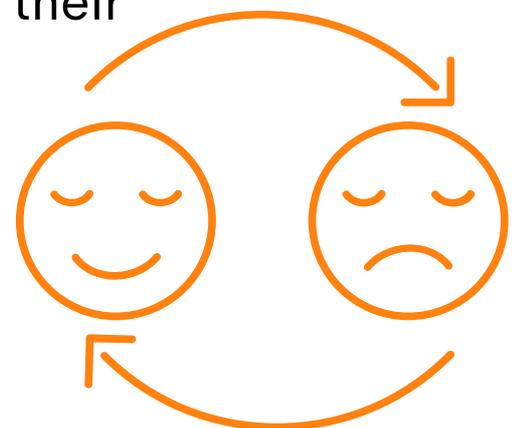
They could also use the play dough face to explore how different things make them feel – for example, if you were talking with a child who regularly self-harmed, you could explore how they feel when they're self-harming and then how they feel after they've self-harmed to explore any differences in their emotions at these two times.



Colours to Represent Mood

Having several colours of play dough can make for some interesting conversations as many children will find it interesting to explore their moods and emotions through colours.

Another technique is to start with a blob of bright play dough e.g. red or blue and a blob of white play dough and ask the child to mix the colours to represent their responses to different scenarios. e.g. Bright blue (with no white added) might represent their most unhappy and adding more and more white might represent a happier mood. You could use this to explore how they've felt at different points in the week, in response to different scenarios or after using different coping strategies to try and gauge their emotions.



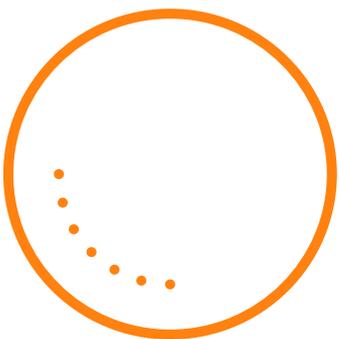


Size of Ball

The size of a ball of play dough can also be used to represent a wide range of different things. For example, a big ball of play dough might be used to represent feeling very angry.

You could explore different strategies for helping your child to calm down which will be represented by the ball getting smaller.

For each strategy you suggest, they could hand you back a corresponding part of their play dough ball; a big chunk means a strategy that will calm them down a lot whereas a small chunk represents a strategy that is less impactful. Of course, if you suggest anything which will increase rather than alleviate their anger, you'll have to pass them back some play dough to increase the size of their ball. This idea can be adapted in many different ways e.g. the ball might represent feeling safe or happy or calm.



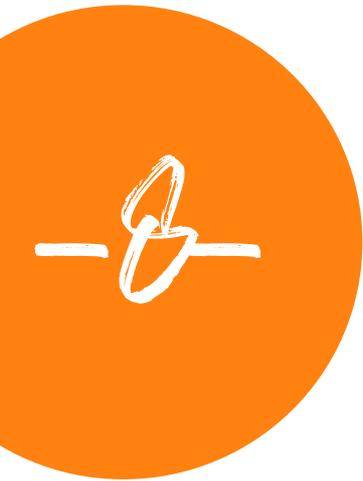
An Image of Themselves

Asking a child to create an image of themselves in play dough can be an interesting exercise and you might explore with them why they've created an image of themselves in a certain way if there is anything about their creation which is open to interpretation.

For example, sometimes children will add a heart so you might say – 'I see that the play dough 'you' has got a heart – is that to represent that you're a kind and caring person?'



The Third Person



Another benefit to having a child create a play dough representation of themselves is that it enables them to talk about themselves in the third person, which they will often find easier than talking about 'Me' and 'I'.

Make it clear that the play dough person is a representation of the child you're supporting; using the prefix 'Little' works well i.e. if the child is called Tina then play dough Tina could be referred to as 'Little Tina'.

Talk to the child about things that have happened to Little Tina or what Little Tina's hopes are, what makes her happy, sad etc. Children will often talk far more freely about the hopes and fears of 'little them' than they will when addressing the question directly in the first person.



No Cook Playdough Recipe

Ingredients

- 2 cups plain flour (all purpose)
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup salt
- 2 tablespoons cream of tartar
- 1.5 cups boiling water
- food colouring
- few drops glycerine

Method

- Mix the flour, salt, cream of tartar and oil in a large mixing bowl
- Add the boiling water
- Stir continuously to become a sticky dough
- Add the food colouring and glycerine (both optional)
- Allow it to cool down then take it out of the bowl and knead it vigorously for a couple of minutes until all of the stickiness has gone. (This is the most important part of the process, keep at it until it's a good consistency.)
- If it remains a little sticky then add a touch more flour until just right

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- Thank You! -

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Pooky x

