

12

SIMPLE PLAY DOUGH ACTIVITIES for PRESCHOOLERS

- 1. Flatten with hands or a rolling pin** – Good for shoulder/arm strengthening, bilateral coordination, and heavy work.
 - 2. Roll into a snake or ball** – Gives kids practice using two hands together, both with symmetrical hand movements (rolling with two hands together on table) and asymmetrical (alternating/opposite directions to roll a snake or ball in hands).
 - 3. Decorate with accessories** – Try toothpicks, Q-tips cut in half, golf tees, googly eyes, and beads to practice hand/finger strengthening and pretend play.
 - 4. Hunt for buried treasure** – Find coins or beads with eyes open or even eyes closed! Helps the tactile sensory system learn to “discriminate” between and identify different textures.
 - 5. Use cookie cutters** – Opportunity for strengthening and teaches kids about pressure and force as they cut all the way through the play dough or only partially, depending on how much force they use.
 - 6. Cut with kid-safe utensils** – Practice cutting with the side of a kid fork, as well as with a kid-safe knife. Can also cut play dough with the side of an old plastic gift card.
 - 7. Use mini serving tongs** – Helps exercise hand muscles needed for scissors and challenges hand-eye coordination. Try to make sure child is controlling tongs with fingertips as much as possible, rather than pressing tongs into palm and using whole hand. If they can do so while squeezing with their thumb, index, and middle finger (the “worker fingers”), even better.
 - 8. Use scissors to snip a hot dog, cut a line, or cut out shapes** – When snipping and cutting, encourage the “thumbs up” position (cutting hand with thumb in top loop of scissors, helper hand holding play dough with thumb on top). Start with snipping, progress to cutting forward using a few consecutive snips down a 5-inch line, then progress to cutting a 4-inch circle and square. For even more challenge, partially press a cookie cutter into the play dough, pull it out, then cut along the imprint to cut out the shape/character (e.g., heart, pumpkin, snowman).
 - 9. Build a 3D creature** – Encourages pretend play, independent thinking/problem solving, hand-eye coordination, and fine motor strength/coordination. Incorporate decorations!
 - 10. Build shapes, letters, and numbers** – Help them understand the difference between big lines, little lines, big curves and little curves when rolling out the parts. When starting out, it can be helpful to write the letter on paper or mini whiteboard, then place the lines and curves right on top of it.
 - 11. Pinch or poke along a path** – After building the shape, letter, or number, pinch or poke all the way along its path for extra finger strengthening and understanding of the correct sequence and direction.
 - 12. Write in it** – Using a golf tee, toothpick, or pencil to create shapes, letters, numbers and basic drawings challenges grasp strength and provides extra sensory feedback.
- BONUS: Use play dough mats** – Pictures that can be printed and laminated or placed in a page protector. They encourage kids to interact with the pictures by using play dough, like giving a butterfly some wings or adding a body to caterpillar legs. Google “play dough mats.”