

THE IMPORTANCE OF MUD

“In relation to children and play, mud should not be viewed as mess – but a key ingredient to childhood.”

Jason Tyndall Nature Play SA

Happiness and wellbeing

In addition to mud being fun and a source of childhood joy, research has demonstrated that exposure to friendly bacteria in soil can assist the brain to release serotonin, the endorphin used to regulate mood. A deficit of serotonin can lead to depression and therefore anything that releases this endorphin contributes to our overall happiness. Furthermore children spending time outside in nature has been shown to decrease anxiety, stress levels, and reduce symptoms of ADHD.

Immunity and overall health

Studies are now indicating that the cleanliness of our society is reducing the exposure to important bacteria resulting in increased levels of immune disorders and allergies. In addition when children are interacting in the natural environment they are being active which aids in the prevention of obesity and cardiovascular related illness.

Creativity and imagination

Mud is an unstructured element of play with no prescribed use. And therefore children have full creative power to use it in any way they choose. Whether they invent characters, games, make mud pies, create small worlds, or perhaps smear it all over their face – they are creating their own stories from the creativity and imagination that exists in their hearts and minds. In addition, problem solving, sensory awareness, benefits to fine and gross motor skills, resourcefulness, inventiveness, and other life-long skills are associated with mud play.

Connection with nature

There is something profound about the benefits that nature provides to every human being. Whether it is listening to the wind in the trees, watching the clouds float across the sky, or recognising the familiar smell of dirt after rains, and the gritty feel of mud between our fingers and toes, we all feel a connection. Nurturing this connection in children is vital as it builds values associated with empathy, nurture, love, and a broader sense of belonging. Mud provides an ideal platform for children to immerse themselves in one of nature’s finest elements and in doing so build a life-long connection to the natural world.

10 THINGS TO DO WITH MUD

- 1 Make mud pies from dirt, water, flowers, grass, stones, bark, and your own secret ingredient!
- 2 Build a mud kitchen from pallets or other recycled materials
- 3 Create a mud recipe book
- 4 Create a mud face on a tree and use natural things for its eyes, nose and mouth
- 5 Using mud as your paint – create a masterpiece on paper, the ground or on a tree
- 6 Create a temporary mud pit using hay bales as edging with a tarp as the lining or invent your own!
- 7 Identify a permanent mud play area and provide kitchen utensils and small digging tools
- 8 Using mud and other natural things – build a village or kingdom for tiny people
- 9 Build a birds nest from mud and dried natural material and find a place to carefully put it
- 10 Take your shoes off and find a muddy path and walk along it as if you were walking on the beach

For resources on mud, children, and nature visit Nature Play SA natureplaysa.org.au