

A Tinker Tray Play Guide to Loose Parts Play

What are Loose Parts?

Loose parts is the terminology applied to objects and materials that are provided for children to play with that have no defined purpose or use. They are not toys in the traditional sense of the word, they are a collection of 'things' that can be moved, merged, collected, shared, taken apart, stacked, stored, built up, taken apart, and any other type of play that you can think of.

They enable open ended play. Children can use their imagination and creativity to assign their own purpose and meaning to the objects and the ways in which they are used. For example, a stone can be a coin, a car, a piece of food, a fairy house. A scarf can be a hat, a veil, a river, a cloud, a blanket.

"When children interact with loose parts, they enter a world of "what if" that promotes the type of thinking that leads to problem solving and theoretical reasoning. Loose parts enhance children's ability to think imaginatively and see solutions, and they bring a sense of adventure and excitement to children's play" (Dale and Beloglovsky)



How do we play with Loose Parts?

There is no right or wrong way to play with loose parts. The possibilities for play are as limitless as the imagination of the child. Loose parts should not have a defined use. They should be stored in a location that is easily accessible to the child, and the child should be able to bring them out and use them however they wish.

What resources can be used as Loose parts?

The possibilities are endless. Once you're in the right mind-set, everything becomes a loose part! The key thing to remember is that materials must be open ended. Some of my favourites are:

- Household items like cotton reels, curtain rings, blocks, beads, buttons, balls, tubes, tins, pots, springs, washers, marbles, bangles, pegs.
- Natural resources such as stones, sea shells, feathers, pine cones, leaves, sticks, conkers, acorns, sand.
- Fabrics such as scarves, ribbons, laces, scrunchies.
- Modelling materials like playdough, kinetic sand and even slime.
- Plastic and synthetic resources definitely have a place too. Lego, bunchems, stickle bricks, and magnatiles.
- Outdoor drainpipes, tyres, wooden planks, bricks, sand, stones, sticks, pine cones, even water is a loose part!

What will children learn from Loose Parts?

Personal, Social and Emotional Development – Independent play, making choices about what and how to play, sharing, playing with others.

Physical Development – Fine and gross motor skills, learning how to lift and carry.

Communication and Language – Speaking with other children during shared play, new language and vocabulary.

Mathematics – Concepts such as shape, sorting, sequencing, size, counting, combining, measuring.

Literacy – Mark making and storytelling narratives during play.

Understanding the World – role play; stones in the kitchen, wooden blocks as cars, testing theories.

Expressive Arts and Media – Opportunity to explore media and materials, application of loose parts for creativity and art.