

A child's interests are

# Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

**Sand** play is a powerful learning activity for many young children



## Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

Fill your home sand-play area(s) with *natural sand* or with inexpensive, washed small, smooth rocks (sometimes called "pea gravel"). Although small rocks don't form well into sand castles, they are lots of fun to play in with shovels, pails, and toy dump trucks. Avoid commercial "playsand" (the kind sold in many stores) made from quarried quartz rock. Quartz "sand" contains crystalline silica dust that can cause lung disease when inhaled.

### On a porch, stoop, or any flat area

- Help your child select a fun and convenient spot for a sand box or sand table. If you enjoy cooking outdoors, for example, your 2- or 3-year-old might want to be nearby to imitate your activities using sand. Just be sure to supervise so nobody eats sandburgers!
- Make a simple wood, plastic, or canvas cover for an outdoor sand-play container to help keep it clean. A plastic shower curtain can be recycled as a sand box cover, for instance. If you raise the cover on four posts, you'll provide a shady place to play, and your sandbox might double as a pretend camping tent or teepee!

### In the yard

- As your child explores in the sand, comment on what she's doing, offering praise for her activities. "You're digging such a deep hole, MaryAnne! Wow! You're a good digger with that sand shovel!"
- Help your child find ways to use natural materials found in the yard to expand his sand-box play. For example, a few pocketfuls of pretty stones can be lined up to make walls, pathways, or roads in the sand.

### Indoors

- Don't be afraid to bring the fun of sand play indoors. Simply cover the floor under and around your sand table with a tarp or a sheet of heavy-duty plastic and keep a child-sized broom, brush, and dustpan handy for spills. Encourage your older toddler to take charge of clean-up duties, and praise him for his good work.
- Keep a group of toys especially for sand play. Some ideas: Plastic play dishes, pots, pans, and other play kitchen equipment; toy cars and trucks; measuring cups, scoops, and spoons; all sorts of things to use for digging such as spoons, shovels, and garden trowels; things for drawing in the sand such as chopsticks and dowels; and plastic or wooden dolls.

# Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

## At a beach

- This is the perfect place to let your child explore the fun of playing with water and sand together!
- Help your child dig a hole in the sand until it fills with water.
- Show your child what happens when you scoop up a handful of very wet sand and let it drip slowly onto the beach from between your fingers. Work together to build mountains and towers with dripping sand.
- Bring along or find a variety of things you can use to mold different shapes with damp sand. Let your child pack sand into shells, cups, buckets, plastic butter tubs, and other forms, then show him how to turn them over quickly to preserve the sand shape. Find out what the sand shapes look like to him or suggest some possibilities: "You've made the sand look like Brownie's dog house!" "Do you think that looks like the merry-go-round in the park?"
- After a day at the beach, tell your child a story (at bed time or on the ride home) about all the exciting things she did with the sand. Describe the games played, discoveries made, and the wonderful things she built.
- If you took photos at the beach, let your young child help you paste or tape them on sheets of paper. Under each picture, print a simple description of what he's doing. Bind the pages together with staples or yarn and enjoy reading the sandy story to him again and again. Let him look at the photos and "read" the story aloud to you, too!



## At a playground

- Bring along a bag filled with buckets, shovels, trucks, and other favorite sand toys to enjoy and share. A sand box can be a great place to say "hello" and play alongside or interact with other small children.
- Show your child how to make handprints and footprints in damp sand. Compare the sizes of his prints with prints you make of your hands and feet right next to his. Which ones are bigger? Do they have the same number of fingers and toes?
- Let your child see you pat sand with your hand to make a smooth surface, and then use a stick to make simple drawings like a smiling face or a star. Talk together about what you're doing. Let her see you write her name in the sand and read it aloud to her. Give her a stick to make her own marks and drawings in the sand. Talk about each figure and praise her efforts.
- Build a sand mountain together. Perhaps other children at the playground will want to help carry sand and pat it into a mound. Show young children how to scoop sand away carefully with one hand to make a tunnel. Let him have fun driving small cars and trucks through the tunnel.
- Set up a sand box "bakery" together. Older toddlers can have lots of fun patting damp sand into cookie and pancake shapes. They can use buckets to mold "birthday cakes" and poke sticks in their tops for "candles." Let your child experiment with sprinkling dry sand on top like "sugar" and serving the sandy "treats" to you.

