

Splish, Splash, Litter Dash!

Learning objectives:

To explore water, objects and simple tools through hands-on sensory play.

To begin developing fine motor skills by grasping, squeezing, scooping and transferring objects using tongs or hands.

To begin understanding that litter does not belong in water and that we can help to keep places clean.





Practitioner Knowledge

Litter can be very harmful to rivers, as wind and rain often carry rubbish into drains, rivers and streams and eventually the sea. Plastic, wrappers, bottle tops and other waste can make water dirty and unsafe for sea animals, who may try to eat it or become tangled in it.

For children, this should be introduced gently through repeated phrases such as, “Rubbish does not belong in the water,” and “We can help by putting it in the bin.”



Activity

In this activity, children practise removing litter from the water by grasping, lifting and transferring objects using tongs, scoops, cups or their hands, depending on their stage of development.

This supports early hand strength, coordination and concentration, while also introducing simple environmental messages in an age-appropriate way.





What you will need

- Water tray
- Clean, Safe litter
- Water
- Child-safe tongs, scoops, cups or small sieves
- A container labelled or introduced as the “bin”
- Towels
- Optional: toy sea creatures, shells, pebbles or blue fabric around the tray



Safe litter ideas for the tray

- Clean plastic bottles
- Clean yoghurt pots or small plastic tubs
- Strips of clean food packaging, cut large and with no sharp edges
- Scrunched paper or card
- Clean foil pieces, scrunched into large balls
- Reusable fabric scraps to represent bags or wrappers



Setting up the activity

Set up a shallow water tray with a small number of clean “litter” items floating in the water.

Invite children to explore the tray and model picking up one piece of litter with tongs, a scoop or your hand. Place it into the bin and use simple language such as, “rubbish in the bin,” and “clean water.”

Encourage children to take turns removing the litter. If children are not yet ready to use tongs, support them to use their hands, a cup or a scoop so that every child can take part successfully.



Language prompts:

Model the action slowly: “pick it up” “in the bin.”

Use short, repeated phrases such as: “dirty water”, “take it out”, and ‘all clean.’”

Name objects: “bottle” “paper,” “wrapper,” “tub.”

Celebrate effort: “well done, you helped the water!” “Tidy Team!”



Optional extras to enhance the activity:

Add one small drop of black or green paint to the water to make it look dirty, then talk about how it is harder to see the litter when the water is dirty.

Add toy sea creatures and invite children to “help the fish” by taking the rubbish out of their water.

Offer sorting tubs for older toddlers, such as “paper” and “plastic”, using pictures or colours rather than written labels.

Repeat the activity on another day with items hidden under bubbles or floating leaves to encourage searching and problem solving.

