

The Value of Guttering in Outdoor Play

Experimenting with guttering and channelling is often seen as an example of unstructured play, which can be important for young children's physical, cognitive, and social development. It provides opportunities for children to explore their environment, exercise their creativity and problem-solving skills, and develop social skills as they play with others.

Guttering activities can be a fun and engaging way to promote exploration, experimentation, and learning in the outdoor environment.



Water Play



- Children can explore the properties of water by using a variety of containers such as watering cans, giant teapots, funnels, scoops, measuring jugs, and buckets. Let the children experiment with pouring, transferring, and floating objects. Try to include containers with handles and others without to develop fine and gross motor skills. Can the children transport the water and pour it down the guttering? Which receptacles work best? The bigger or smaller ones? Which ones create a greater flow of water? Challenge the children to make the water run faster or slower by experimenting with the angles and positioning of the guttering.



Design a Waterway



- Watch as children cooperate and collaborate to design and build a waterway or water channel using guttering, stands, crates or other items. How can they work together to move and position the different pieces of guttering? Encourage children to test their creations to see if the water flows from one piece of guttering to the next or whether it overflows and spills onto the ground. Challenge the children to work together to see if they can solve the problem. They may also wish to experiment with creating channels or waterways of different lengths or heights.



- Alternatively, try combining more than one water or tuff tray. Add the guttering to create a connected waterway where they can fill and empty the water whilst watching it travel down the guttering into the next section.

Mini Engineers – Dam Building



- Once the children have created waterways/ channels, wonder out loud to encourage thinking skills. I wonder if we could block the flow of water? If the children are interested, this may lead to discussions about dams and why they are used in real life. Can they break the dam using different strategies? In doing so, the children will experiment with force (pushing the blockage away), gravity as they change the angles of the guttering, and viscosity (by adding water to dry mud or sand). You could hide items in the dam for the children to find. See the delight on the children's faces as they unblock the dams, revealing the hidden objects within.



Creating Patterns



- Dip objects such as textured balls, stones, conkers, ice, or toy cars into different coloured paint and roll down the guttering. What do they notice? What textures, patterns, and marks can they make?
- The children can make their art permanent by lining the guttering with paper. Discussions around printing, symmetry, and colour mixing can extend this activity further.
- Provide a bowl of bubble mixture mixed with paint and a bubble wand. Children can dip the wand into the mixture and blow bubbles through the guttering, creating long, winding bubble streams that make patterns as they develop.



A Day at the Races

- Why not get competitive and have gutter races? The first person to get their object into the bucket placed at the bottom of the guttering wins the race. Can they make predictions on who will come first, second, or third?
- Children can experiment by rolling down different objects such as balls, cars, or sea creatures. They may wish to experiment by rolling things directly down dry guttering or may experiment further by adding water to see if affects the speed.
- Using timers or their counting skills, children can find out how long it takes the items to get to the bottom. Which ones do they think will travel faster or slower? Can they give reasons for their predictions? Children may wish to make a scoreboard where they can record their results.



Creating Small Worlds



- Use guttering to explore habitats. Children can explore the different animals found as well as observe water flow through a river.
- The guttering can be used to create small worlds. It may take on an icy feel when covered in tin foil or become an empty river bed when sand, small stones, and pebbles are scattered along the bottom.
- Add small world resources such as figures, vehicles, boats, or animals so that the children can experiment with language and weave stories into their play.



Many thanks to Kelly at the Tinker Tent and Shardi Vaziri for collaborating with us on these activity ideas.

