

When a child needs some time aside to focus on something calming, Roll Around: Feel Calm can help them relax and promote feelings of wellbeing. Creating repeating patterns in play dough is sensory and satisfying, as well as useful for developing fine motor skills. It also offers the opportunity to talk about the patterns and the feelings they evoke.

Keep calm and roll on

Simply exploring using a roller with play dough independently will be beneficial for children who need some special time out on their own. Children will be soothed by the rolling action, the feel of the playdough, the attractive patterns, the repetitive movement and images that evoke a sense of calm, such as flowing water, swimming fish or floating feathers. You could set up a quiet corner or tent as a calming area, with the rollers, play dough and a selection of other sensory resources, including a cushion and a cuddly toy.

As well as using the rollers independently, children might benefit from some support:



- Admire the pattern that the child makes in the play dough and ask them what they can see in it.
- Children might choose to roll round and round, up and down, or in any direction – use directional language as you talk about their movements.
- Younger children may simply enjoy using the roller as a stamp.
- Encourage them to press harder or more gently and see how this changes the appearance of the pattern.
- Talk about how the play dough feels as they squish it under the roller. Is it smooth or rough, hard or soft?

- The patterns in the dough are inviting to touch – what do they feel like?
- As well as using the rollers spontaneously and seeing what pattern emerges, children might enjoy being more intentional. They might like to create pictures by combining patterns from more than one roller – such as fish and waves, feathers and clouds, or stars and clouds. They might find it amusing to create unexpected combinations, such as fish swimming through clouds or a river of hearts.
- Offer play dough in several colours for children to explore mixing and rolling together.
- Make the dough multisensory by adding scent to it – such as real lavender, rosemary, cinnamon, vanilla extract, baby oil or essential oils.
- Use the rollers with a variety of substrates, each with a different feel to it – such as kinetic sand, cloud dough, clay or a thick slime.



It's good to talk

The different patterns the children create might prompt conversations about what they show:

Stars

- Have you ever looked up at the stars?
- How do stars make you feel?
- Do you know any songs about stars?



Feathers

- What do feathers make you think of?
- What bird do you think the feathers have they come from?
- Watch a feather drift to the floor. Can you describe how it moves?



Feather breathing

Feather breathing may help to relieve tension and calm down an anxious or upset child. You could build it into your everyday routines, perhaps after lunchtimes. This will help children learn the technique for the next time they're feeling anxious.

1. Hold a feather in front of your face. Take a deep breath and breath out slowly, watching the feather move with your breath.
2. Place a feather on your hand, take a deep breath and blow the feather into the air. How long can you keep it airborne?



You can also use a tissue or just an imaginary feather, but the first time use real feathers so children can see what is happening.

Clouds

- Have you ever looked for pictures in the clouds?
- How do fluffy clouds make you feel?
- Try some cloud gazing by lying on your backs outside. How does it make you feel?

Hearts

- Can you think of someone you love?
- Who loves you?
- How can we show we care for each other?

Waves

- Fill a container with water and make some waves with your hands. How does it feel on your skin?
- How do you feel watching water flowing along in a river or stream?
- Have you seen real waves at the seaside?

Fish

- Where are these fish swimming?
- Have you seen fish swimming in the sea or in an aquarium?
- What would it feel like to be a fish swimming in the sea?

Calming art

Making patterns with the rollers is creative and satisfying in its own right. It can also inspire other calming artistic creations:

- Copy the patterns by sticking feathers, hearts or stars onto paper
- Create stars, fish or clouds to hang from the ceiling and create a visual 3D pattern over the children's heads
- Use the rollers with air-drying clay, then after it has completely dried out, seal it with a mix of PVA glue and water (80% glue to 20% water) – after this has dried, children can paint their design with poster paints.



Music to your ears

To enhance feelings of calm, you could play some calming music, such as:

- *Sheep May Safely Graze*, by J.S. Bach
- *Clair de Lune*, by Debussy
- *Movement II (Szene am Bach: Andante molto mosso) from Symphony no.6 (Pastoral)*, by Beethoven
- *Gabriel's Oboe*, by Ennio Morricone

Get talking – useful words

Relax, breathe, deep, slow, rest, flowing, floating, swimming, shining, soaring, rippling

Rolling action: roll, push, stamp, away, towards, across, round, roll gently, press harder

Books about feeling calm

Little Boat by Taro Gomi

Calm-Down Time by Elizabeth Verdick

The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld

I Am Calm by Roger Priddy