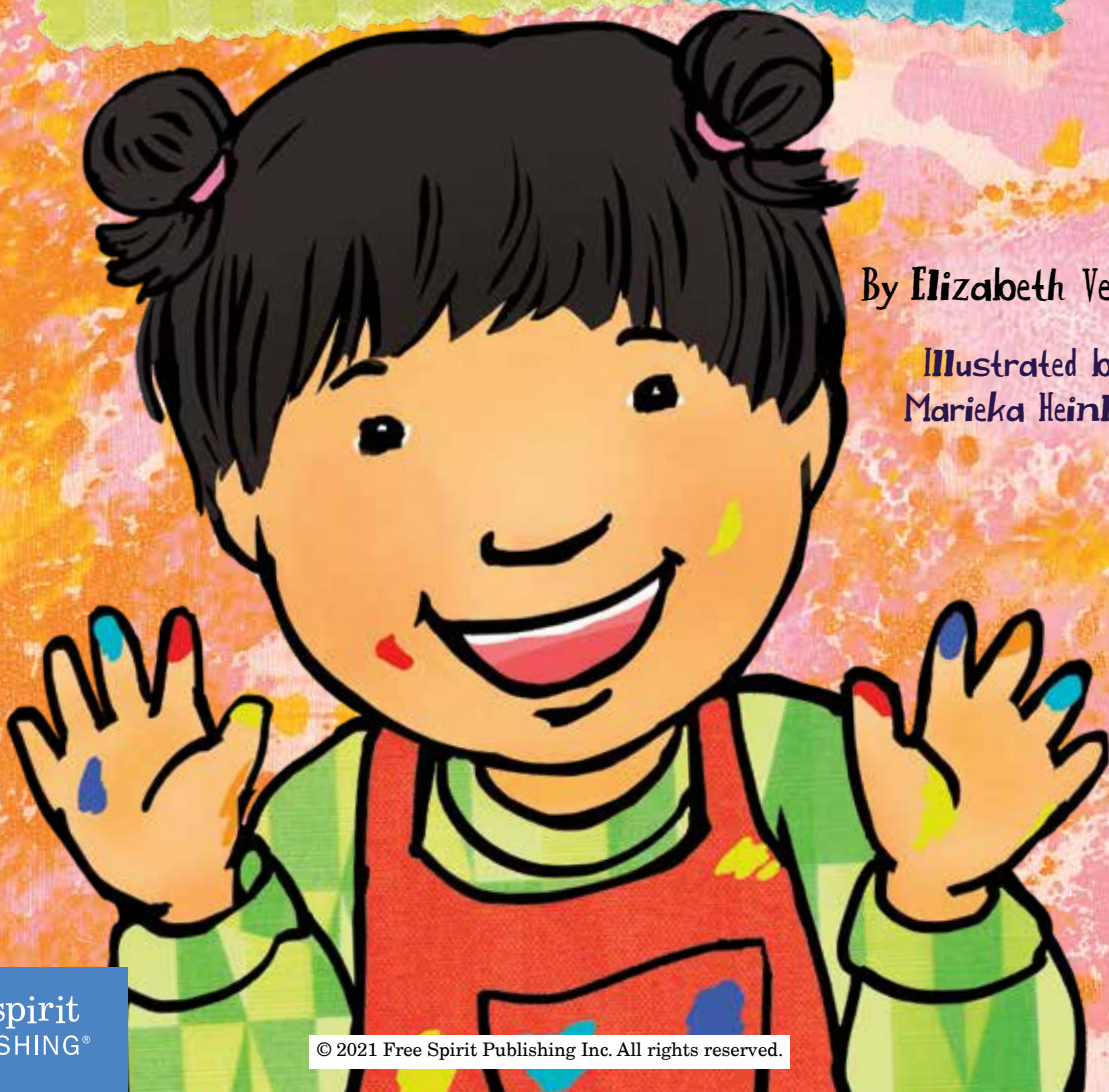


Messy Time

By Elizabeth Verdick

Illustrated by
Marieka Heinlen



It's messy time—
the best time!



Hello, dough!

Squash

Squish

Squeeze

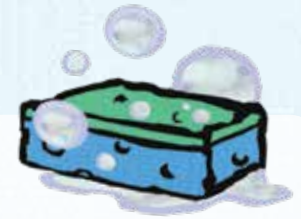


Messy Time Tips for Parents & Caregivers

- **Make messes every day.** Toddlers build their gross- and fine-motor skills through play, touch, and—yes—making a big mess. Think back to some of your happiest childhood moments: were puddles, mud, or sand involved? Or paint, markers, and paste? Messy time is *growing* time. Have get-messy clothes at the ready, so you and the kids can jump into the fun together.
- **Provide sensory-rich experiences.** Young children learn through their senses. Outdoor play allows children to feel the sun on their skin, smell the air, hear birdsong, taste the rain, see flowers blooming, and interact with the natural world. Does your child get enough outdoor time each day, even during sloppy weather? Mud play (mud art, pies, and sculptures) is a sensory feast. It boosts creativity—and immunity. Indoors, set up a table with art supplies; create a music corner; make room for toddlers to roll, tumble, and bounce. Welcome children into the kitchen too. They'll love mixing, pouring, baking, and even washing dishes with you.
- **Have simple recipes on hand.** Look online to find recipes for homemade play dough and bubble solution. Keep the ingredients handy so you can whip up a batch whenever the mood strikes. Find a child-friendly cookbook or website so you and your toddler can work together in the kitchen. These activities will be messier with your toddler helping, but you'll get some together-time while having fun.
- **Focus on process, not product.** The goal isn't to make the "prettiest" picture or "perfectly" frosted cookies. Let toddlers simply enjoy feeling wet paint on their fingers or squeezing blobs of frosting onto baked goods. The greatest joy is in the making. Use phrases like, "You're working hard" or "I like the way you're having fun," so children don't get set on making something "the best." If mistakes or messes

happen, reassure toddlers that block towers fall, papers rip, and sandcastles wash into the sea. Sometimes smashing the sand or mud is as fun as building with it.

- **Go with the flow.** Children enter the "flow state" during free play. They move from toy to toy, activity to activity, leaving a trail of objects behind them. Allow this free-for-all approach during messy time so children enjoy the magic of creating. Resist picking up after toddlers every step of the way—instead, watch the drama unfold and join in. Outdoors, encourage children to run barefoot in the grass, dig in the dirt, and get wet (with your supervision). To ease transitions from in to out and back again, have handy outdoor clothes and shoes that are easy-on and easy-off.
- **Finish with clean-up.** Young children learn from seeing the process of *tidy to messy to tidy again*. Involve them in clean-up by teaching how to put away toys, wipe off the table, wash in the tub, or whatever is needed to neaten up. Show them how you do the job with a smile, or sing songs to make cleaning more fun.



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