

Manipulative equipment for play

Mahi ā-ringā



Manipulative play refers to activities where children move, order, turn or screw items to make them fit. It allows children to take control of their world by mastering the objects they use. It is often solitary but when sufficient resources are provided it can also be a cooperative activity.

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Te Whāriki

Manipulative play supports learning across all strands of Te Whāriki. In particular, manipulative play supports the **Communication strand**, where children experience the symbols of their culture including those associated with mathematical concepts, and in the **Exploration strand**, where children develop working theories about spatial understandings and where they learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning.



Manipulative equipment can help children to

- practise making decisions
- learn about size, shape, weight, length, height
- learn about sequence, comparison, order, patterns, colours, textures
- learn to analyse and solve problems
- develop concentration and perseverance
- learn about cause and effect.



Adults can support children by

- providing a good range of manipulative equipment and resources
- talking to them about what they are doing, to encourage discussion
- allowing them to explore at their own pace
- keeping the area and the resources tidy and attractively displayed.

Providing for Manipulative play

Manipulative play is easy to set up and can happen indoors or out. The floor indoors or a protected spot outdoors is ideal. A carpet square will give warmth and comfort. Provide a range of equipment clearly labelled in storage containers, and encourage children to bring items from home. A group outing could be organised to gather items such as shells and stones. Supervision is needed for small items under 5cm.

Ideas for equipment

- threading materials e.g. beads and cotton reels
- screwing materials e.g. nuts, bolts and small plastic jars with lids
- a range of items for sorting and matching for colour, shape and size
- stacking toys e.g. blocks interlocking sets such as Mega Blocks and Duplo
- a sensory treasure basket for infants.



Ideas for a sensory treasure basket

The container should be low-sided and flat-bottomed with smooth edges. It needs to be strong enough for the infant to lean on without tipping up. Different items can be added into the container or basket to add variety.

Some objects to gather for play...

Some you might already have at home or will find in the natural environment and some you will be able to buy from second-hand shops for very little cost. Infants and toddlers should not be left unattended whilst playing with any of these items.

Aotūroa – of the Natural World

Pine cones of different sizes, big feathers, loofahs, pumice (boil to keep clean), dried gourds, lemons or oranges, sheepskins, balls of wool, large leaves, large shells, harakeke balls, slices of manuka and totara, coconut shells, rose petals, bark, lei, sticks, stones, driftwood, small cloth bags containing lavender, rosemary or thyme.

Ngā rauemi – of the Material World

Wooden Objects: Pegs, egg cups, cotton reels, bowls, coloured beads on string, blocks, door knobs, wooden spoons, bamboo mats, cane bag handles.

Leather or Rubber:

Leather purse, leather glass case, bookmarks, tennis balls or other rubber balls.

Metal Objects:

Pots and pans, egg cups, shiny bowls, lengths of chain, measuring spoons, keys, lemon squeezer, strainer, sieve.

Other Objects

Scarves, bangles, beach balls, blow-up swimming rings, cardboard boxes, ribbons, bean bag, bath plug with chain, woollen balls.

