# Opportunities to engage pupils in play

When imaginative play does not come naturally to a child, you have to work harder to engage and excite, to draw your pupils in and demonstrate the fun they can have. Different children will respond to different materials and resources but exposing children to a wide range of opportunities will enable them to experience variety and enable them to make choices in the longer term.

* Gloop is a wonderful, stimulating, tactile activity that fascinates children and can be used to develop vocabulary such as wet, dry, lifting, dropping, mixing. All you have to do is pour a cup or two of cornflour into a bowl, gradually add water until you have a gloopy mixture, stir, add a few drops of food colouring and enjoy. If you are using it again, save it in a covered container and stir again.
* Bubbles are so much fun and bring joy to the faces of children (and staff!). I remember when a child with emergent language first used the word ‘more’ when we were blowing bubbles and stopped. A short pause – and then the word. What a thrill to hear this word through play. Following the bubbles to burst them supports hand eye coordination. Learning the skill of using the bubble wand creates independence. Watching you creates joint attention. Consider the BIG bubbles and the delight they bring in the playground.

* Using the senses to enhance activities is a creative way to bring your classroom to life and encourage reluctant participants to join in. For younger children, presenting a story such as *Mrs Wishy-Washy* by Joy Cowley (Hameray Publishing) with artefacts to accompany, soap and water for smell and feel, the animals to clean and the animal sounds – all bring the story to life.
* For older groups, consider, for example, a balloon in the air game, counting how many times it can be batted back up before it hits the ground. Try to break the record number and if there is a child who does not want to join in, can they be the record keeper/counter? Looking, listening and cooperating with peers are skills involved.
* Parachute games encourage the same skills and engage a group in joining together.

**Remember that repetition is important – variety is NOT the spice of life for your children with autism. By repeating the activities and allowing the children to become familiar with them and join at their own pace, you are reassuring them of the continuity of the resources and actions. Regularly use the language of the game to introduce new and reinforce common vocabulary including prepositions that are often hard to learn.**