

From foaming waves and seaweed fronds to stunning coral reefs, ocean habitats are naturally full of intriguing patterns. Children will love recreating them using these rollers and bringing them to life as they add a variety of fascinating sea creatures. As well as developing fine motor skills, counting animals and simple storytelling, this opens up opportunities to build children's vocabulary and knowledge of the natural world.



Making waves

Children will enjoy trying out the rollers independently, but guiding them through the early stages will help them get to grips with them:

- The easiest way to use a roller is to roll it away from you – creating a long scene or pattern in the dough. Afterwards, if the design is facing sideways, simply turn the piece of dough round so the scene faces the child. They can then use the stamp at the end of the roller to complete the picture.
- The next step is learning to roll across the body. As well as encouraging children to apply equal pressure laterally, this action will challenge them to cross the midline and develop motor skills important for learning to write.
- Talk about how hard the child has to press down with the roller to make the design come out well. What happens to the picture when they press harder or more gently?

- What does the picture feel like when they run their finger over it?
- Explore using the rollers with different substrates, such as clay, kinetic sand, sand dough or cloud dough. This will encourage children to adapt their rolling technique, pressing harder when necessary and developing their motor skills.
- Provide the rollers and dough on a suitable surface for children to explore independently.

Underwater wonders

As children use the rollers, take the opportunity to talk about the different sea animals:

- Do the children recognise any of the animals?
- What do the children notice about the shape of each animal? How many limbs does an octopus have? What does the turtle have to protect its body? Does the seahorse look like a horse?
- How do the animals move through the water – do they use a tail, fins or arms?
- Which of them have gills for breathing underwater? Which come up to breathe air (dolphin and turtle)?
- Where do you think these animals might live? Do they travel far in the sea or stay near a coral reef? Do they hide among corals, caves or sea plants? Using the rollers will help prompt children's answers.





- What do they eat? Do they eat plants, other sea animals or a combination? Are there any other animals that like to eat them?
- Which of them lay eggs? Which one gives birth to baby animals (live young)? (All lay eggs apart from the dolphin.)
- Can the children match the rolled designs to pictures or figures of these animals?
- When the children have stamped the animal shapes onto their design, encourage them to count the number of animals – such as how many seahorses are swimming through the sea grass.
- Have the children ever visited an aquarium? What was it like? Did they see any of these animals?

Sea stories

Make up some simple shared stories about the sea creatures on the rollers:

- What are their names and where do they live?
- What might happen if any of the animals meet each other? Are they friendly or scared?
- Are any of them looking for food, are they hiding from other animals or are they lost?
- Have any of them found something special, such as sunken treasure, an underwater city or a message in a bottle?



Explore more

- Children can build on their rolled designs to create sensory sea art, adding sea-themed items to them, such as small shells, attractive pebbles, blue glass beads, artificial seaweed or leaves that look like sea plants (such as dill or tarragon). They might like to combine designs made using several rollers to make a larger underwater world.
- Use the rollers and dough as part of a sea explorers table, alongside sea animal figures, notebooks, magnifying glasses, images of ocean animals and books about seafife.
- Create a small world ocean around the rollers with plenty of storytelling potential, using a combination of sand, water, plants, pebbles, shells, fish and other sea-life figures, Ocean Play Scenery Stones and Let's Investigate Seashore Stones.
- Find out more about how the places these animals live need to be protected, such as coral reefs and the beaches where sea turtles lay their eggs. What dangers do they face – such as from oil spills or sea plastic? What can we do to try and help?



Books about ocean life

Look Inside: Seas and Oceans by Megan Cullis

Little Turtle and the Sea by Becky Davies

Tiddler by Julia Donaldson

The Big Book of the Blue by Yuval Zommer

Get talking – useful words

Fish, mammal, reptile, mollusc, fin, tail, shell, arm, gills, scales, coral reef, eggs, swim, dive, glide, crawl.