

Bring the fun of the farm right into your setting with Farmyard Footprint stones, and you'll have plenty of opportunities for children to explore through sight and touch, and develop their fine motor skills.

### Footprint detectives

Down on the farm, you might need to follow a footprint trail to find where the animals are hiding! One day, children could arrive to discover a mysterious set of animal prints in playdough or damp sand. Where do they lead? What might have made them? Perhaps the trail goes to a pile of leaves or sticks... and underneath is a special stone with an animal print on one side, and the animal that makes it on the other!

- Did the children guess the animal correctly?
- What do the stones feel like?
- How do the footprint shapes vary?
- Have the children seen animals like these in real life before?



Now it's the children's turn to have a go at making their own farmyard footprints in playdough or damp sand. As they learn how to make a realistic footprint for themselves, they develop the sense of applying different amounts of pressure. These gross and fine motor movements will help develop essential pre-writing skills.



Why not take the farmyard fun outside? Children might find some perfect farmyard mud to make more animal footprints in.

### Farmyard in a tray

Make your own muddy farmyard in a large tray for children to enjoy:

- Cover the floor of a tray with either mud or brown playdough – if your playdough is homemade, add equal amounts of yellow, blue and red paint until you have muddy brown
- Add found objects such as pine cones, sticks and leaves, as well as farmyard animals, tractors or fences
- Have fun making lots of footprints with the stones

#### Get talking – useful words

*Hoof, claw, horseshoe, webbed, squelch, scratch, paddle, trot, gallop*

# Stone rubbings

Making rubbings of the footprints is a great way for children to practise holding and using a crayon or chalk, and applying pressure evenly. Show them how to make a rubbing themselves and then:

- Match the rubbings to pictures of animal footprints or of the animals themselves
- Get practising with scissors as they cut the rubbings out and stick them onto paper to create a farmyard scene.



## Sort it out



There's so much to discuss as you sort the stones into groups. Children could sort them by:

- Two legs/four legs
- Wings/no wings
- Hooves/no hooves
- Smallest to largest animal.

What sound might the pig's foot make in its muddy pen? How about the horse going down the lane? Or the hen scratching the ground for bugs or seeds?

By looking carefully at the footprint shapes children will develop important visual discrimination skills. Encourage them to describe what they see.

- The duck and the chicken both have three toes – but what's different about the duck's foot? Why does it have webbed feet?
- On the dog's footprint, what might make the dots above the toes? Do any other animals have claws?
- What is the rim around the edge of the horse's footprint? Maybe you can get hold of a real horseshoe to show the children.

## Old MacDonald's farmyard friends

When you sing this old favourite, you could pass round a bag containing the eight animal footprint stones. Whoever has the bag when you sing, '*And on that farm he had a...*' pulls out a stone and calls out the name of the animal on it.

Children love the opportunity to visit a real farm and see the animals for themselves – can they spot any real animal footprints in the mud? What do they notice about the animals' feet?



### Books about farm animals

*What the Ladybird Heard* by Julia Donaldson  
*Farmer Duck* by Martin Waddell  
*Usborne Farmyard Tales* series by Heather Amery  
*Duck in the Truck* by Jez Alborough  
*Russell the Sheep* series by Rob Scotton