

The Process of Creative Art



Do you remember as a child getting that new box of crayons (the bigger the better) or a tin of bright watercolors? Even in today's world filled with electronic gadgets, most children are thrilled with new art supplies—a book about painting, art supplies, and maybe even an easel. Expressing themselves through art is very satisfying to children and the endeavor will keep them busy far longer than most activities.

Providing art supplies and offering opportunities to explore are among

the most meaningful gifts a parent can give a child. Children need the space, the supplies, and maybe a little help with cleanup, but they can do the rest. Crayons, markers, watercolors, tempera paint, clay, collage, glue, bits of paper and fabric, and woodworking materials are basics for an art center. All kinds of elements from feathers to sequins can be added to nurture artistic ability.

Through repeated use and exploration of materials, your child will begin to create compositions with movement, design, and structure.

Tips for Inspiring Creative Art

- **Share your enthusiasm for art.** When you're reading a picture book point out the illustrations and give your child time to look at the art. Point out the name of the illustrator as well as the author. Go to galleries, and read books about art and great artists.
- **Art can be messy and often is!** The process is interesting to children and sometimes the messier the better. Cover the floor or work surface with newspaper, a vinyl tablecloth, or shower curtain. Get your children in the habit of wearing a smock from the beginning. An adult sized t-shirt works great.
- **Provide a variety of art materials, and then talk about different media.** Encourage your child to choose the media most suitable for expressing his ideas.
- **Appreciate art.** Find a place to display daily work, and consider framing special projects. Many paintings or drawings may be appropriate to give as gifts to family and friends. And charities often hold successful fund-raisers by auctioning off a collection of children's art.
- **Let kids express themselves freely.** Instead of providing a model such as a tree or a snowman for children to copy, provide creative materials and let them do their own thing.

Children need to be free to initiate art activities as well as choose their media from a storehouse of materials.

- **Avoid imposing your own values or expectations.** What looks like scribbles or splashes of color to you may have tremendous meaning for your child. Comments such as, "The sky is not yellow it's blue," or "Dinosaurs don't have polka dots," may be well intentioned but are exactly what you don't want to say. It's seeing things through a child's eyes that make their art so fresh and interesting.

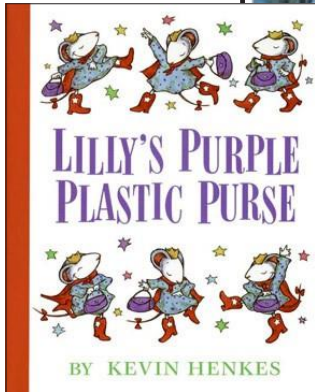
- **Commenting on children's art can be tricky.** What you interpreted as a dinosaur (a very good one) might, indeed be an elephant or a monster. It's usually safe and more helpful to draw children into a discussion with a few questions and words of encouragement, "Can you tell me about your picture?" "How did you make that line?" "Wow, you used a lot of blue!"

Developing truly expressive art experiences requires that parents stand back while children explore and create. Giving that gift of freedom will result in the ultimate satisfaction, creativity, and fun.

Personal Parenting

Build a Family Library

It's important for children to have lots of books to look through and read. Create a special place for the books and teach children to treat them with respect—no books on the floor where they can be stepped on and ruined. To collect books, find them used at yard sales and thrift stores. For just a few bucks you can gather lots of books!



Create a space for children to put the books they borrow from the library so they don't get mixed in with the family's books.

When adding to the collection, suggest subjects and titles of books your child may not have thought of, but always be willing to share what they find most interesting.

What Do Babies See?

At birth vision is pretty fuzzy, and newborns see about 8 to 15 inches away. Just far enough to distinguish the face of the person holding them. By 1 or 2 months, babies can focus and even track objects moving back and forth. By 8 months old, vision has become much stronger and babies this age can recognize objects and people across the room.

As the eyes develop, color differences become clearer, and shapes more detailed. As a result, you may notice your child showing a preference for certain colors. Recent studies at the University of California in Berkeley have shown that infants as young as 2 weeks of age have color vision and can distinguish a red object from a green one even when these are perfectly matched in brightness. You can help by providing high contrast black and white objects as well as brightly colored pictures and toys.



Caps For Sale!

Toddlers and preschoolers love playing with hats. Read the time-less classic, **Caps for Sale** by Esphyr Slobodkina—an easy-to-read book that includes patterns, colors and repetition.



* Collect as many hats as you can from around the house — baseball hats, sun hats, cowboy hats, straw hats, knit hats and let them play.



Coconut-Banana Bites

Ingredients

- 1 orange
- 2 medium sized bananas
- ½ cup shredded coconut

* Squeeze the juice from the orange into a small bowl. * Peel the banana and cut it into bite-sized pieces.

* Spread the coconut onto a cookie sheet and use a fork to dip banana pieces in the orange juice. * Roll the banana pieces in coconut. Eat immediately or chill in the fridge. Yummy!

Ready to Write

Writing is a natural and uneven process. It may look easy but it requires a number of skills before children can put marks on paper, write their name, copy their spelling words, or write a story. Below are some hands-on, fun activities you can do at home to reinforce writing skills.



A first step is to build strong muscles in those little fingers and hands. Infants start grasping food and other small objects, and that's a beginning. But shape sorting, lacing, and stringing beads, are excellent activities.

If you have a preschooler you know how much satisfaction they get from building with blocks and putting puzzles together. And it's almost impossible to imagine childhood without clay and play dough. When children roll, pat, and tear they're not only being creative they're building muscles.

Here are some other activities you may not have thought of:

- * Make a marshmallow and toothpick sculpture.
- * Press golf tees into Styrofoam and balance marbles on top of the tees.
- * Fill a spray bottle with paint and let children paint outside on news papers.
- * Let children pick up things with a pair of tongs.
- * Give children paper and let them tear it into pieces.
- * Provide old newspaper and let children crunch the sheets into "snowballs."
- * Let them write on vertical surfaces, such as easels and blackboards.
- * And, of course, let them practice cutting with scissors.

Writing requires strong arms and wrists.

It's not all about the fingers—arms and wrists need strengthening too. That's where playgrounds fit into the picture. When children climb on structures and hang from their hands, they're building endurance and strength.

Writing requires good eye-hand coordination.

Activities such as throwing bean bags at a target, playing catch, or pouring water from one container to another are perfect examples for reinforcing eye-hand coordination. Putting puzzles together is another good activity.

Writing requires lots of time.

Pushing them to draw a circle or write their name when they're not ready will always backfire. Kids want to leave their mark, and when everything comes together—the muscles, the endurance, the eye-hand coordination and the opportunity, they'll do just fine. Developing writing skills is a process individual to each child so don't worry about how the kid next door is progressing, keep providing activities and enjoy the moment.

Let your child see you writing:

- Thank you notes and letters
- Activities you plan to do with your child
- Notes on your calendar
- Captions for family photos
- To-do-lists.