

■ Learning Through Play

All About Art

For young children, art offers opportunities to make things all their own. It provides colors, textures, and designs to explore, and ways to express feelings they can't yet translate into words.

Each satisfying experience encourages your child to explore and experiment, to trust his or her own sense of creativity, and to take pride in accomplishments. As your child manipulates scissors, uses crayons, or pastes constructions together, fine-motor skills and eye-hand coordination are being developed.

Art experiences such as finger painting and molding play clay offer sensory and tactile experiences. Language is also developed as your child describes a project or painting and sees his or her words written down. The best part of working with art materials is that there is no right or wrong way to use them. Here are suggestions to help you encourage your child's self-expression through art.



the "right" places, but it will be a puppet face to him or her. You might suggest yarn for hair and fabric scraps for ears.

You can also make puppets from paper bags or old gloves or mittens, using crayons and markers or scraps of material. After you've finished, enjoy some puppet conversations together.

Art is an important means of self-expression. If your child wants to make one "just like yours," recognize that she is looking for a sharing experience with you. Encourage her by your presence

and interest in her ideas to make her own.

■ Collage Creations

This is a great way to use bits and pieces of gift wrapping, ribbon, old greeting cards, and other fun tidbits. Gather an assortment of materials, then find a place for your child to work comfortably. Provide glue and a plastic-foam tray, cardboard square, or shoebox lid as a base.

A collage offers your child an opportunity to make choices and experiment with design. As your child works, talk about the objects and textures. "What do you like about them? How do they feel?"

■ Finger-Painting Fun

Brighten up a rainy day with finger painting. Cover a table with an oilcloth or newspaper and have sponges, towels, and soapy water nearby. If you don't have ready-made finger paint, you can make your own.

Dissolve 1/2 cup cornstarch in 1 cup cold water. Pour mixture into 3 cups boiling water and stir constantly until shiny and translucent. Allow this mixture to cool, then color it by stirring in tempera paint or food coloring. You can also use a whipped soap mixture (Ivory Snow works well), either white or tinted with food coloring. Let your child help beat the mixture.

To vary the experience, try providing music your child can finger paint to, or start with one color and slowly add others. To make the finger painting even more of a sensory experience, add sand to give it a gritty texture or glycerin to make the paint slick and smooth. You might suggest using straw, string, bits of sponge, or even an elbow or a toe to paint with!

■ Play-Clay Power

Children (and adults) of all ages can have fun with play clay. Here's a recipe to make together.

Uncooked play clay: Mix 1 1/2 cups flour, 1/2 cup salt, 1/4 cup vegetable oil, and about 1/4 cup water (with a little food coloring added). Knead the dough until it is smooth and the color is well-mixed. Add more flour if the mixture is too wet or more water if it's too dry. Store the dough in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Provide plastic utensils, cookie cutters, safety scissors, etc., that will encourage your child to work with the play clay in many ways. And remember that art is a sensory experience. Ask your child how the dough feels. Knead in rice or sand to give it texture. Try using the dough straight from the refrigerator. What does your child notice? Is the play clay harder to shape when it's cold?

■ Puppet Pals

Looking for a good way to use those stray single socks? Make puppets! Gather socks together and invite your child to choose one. Provide scraps of fabric for eyes, a nose, and a mouth. A young child may have difficulty cutting shapes that look like eyes or gluing them in