



Inspire Expressive Art: Five Easy Tips

You are a parent now, but when you were a child do you remember crayons, markers, paint, and clay? Do you remember finger painting, or the magic of putting on a smock and painting at an easel like a real artist? Do you remember coloring a rainbow, pressing the crayon down as hard as you could, or scooping up paint with a brush and watching a painting materialize that moments ago was in your head?

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

1. Messes--they are a good thing. Fingerpaints are perfect for little hands too small and uncoordinated to hold a crayon or brush. The fun is in the tactile experience and of leaving a mark on paper! Painting with a brush at the table or at an easel is fun for older kids, and it can create a mess too. Before beginning art activities, cover surfaces on the floor with newspaper, an old shower curtain, or a vinyl tablecloth. Also cover the body of your little artist. Cut a hole in the end of a plastic trash bag and then cut straight up the sides. This artist poncho can be recycled for years.

2. Provide lots of art materials. Not all kids like the feel of clay in their hands, for others, it's their medium for creative expression. They may sculpt everything from elephants to bowls with lids or vases for flowers. Crayons, markers, watercolors, tempera paint, clay, collage, and woodworking materials are basics for an art center. All kinds of elements, from feathers to fabric, can be added to nurture your child's artistic ability.

3. Appreciate art. Find places in your home to display daily work. Frame pieces that are special. Purchase the type of clay that allows you to save sculpted items. Children's art is often a hot item at fundraisers for charities and other organizations. And grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends close by or far away love to see the world from a child's point of view. Go to galleries, and read books about art and great artists.

4. Make their art their expression. A page filled to the edge with green paint or what looks like scribbles to you may be a treasure to your child. Start a conversation about the artwork. "Wow, you used lots of blue and yellow in this picture." "Can you tell me about your painting?" "That's a neat circle, and these squiggly lines are interesting." Avoid letting your interpretation and expectations get in the way of true artistic expression. "Grass is green, not red" may shut down creative exploration.

5. Give children a forever gift. Parents can provide space for art expression. They can provide supplies and time and encouragement. Of course, there's that pesky issue of cleanup, but parents can help with that, too! Art is worth the trouble!



PERSONAL PARENTING

Make Some Chunky Crayons

Crayons get broken, and the best ones get colored down to stubs, but they can be recycled into chunky crayons that fit the smallest hands.

✓ Take the paper off the crayons, and break them up into small pieces. Spray a muffin tin or a mini muffin tin with vegetable oil spray, and put the pieces of crayons into the muffin pan. Be creative! You can make red, white, and blue crayons, camouflage crayons from green and brown, or pastel crayons from blue, pink, and yellow. Place the muffin tin in a preheated 275-degree oven, and bake for about 8 minutes. After the crayons melt, remove them carefully from the oven. Cool completely, and pop the crayons out. Provide plenty of paper, and start coloring!



Lighten Up

- Cleaning kid's rooms while they are still at home is like shoveling snow when it's still snowing.
- I am woman. I am invincible. I am tired!

March is Youth Art Month!

Let your child channel his or her creative spirit and find new ways to use common household items with these art projects from the new book *Art with Anything*, by best-selling author MaryAnn Kohl.



Fruit and Chicken Salad

- 1/3 cup low-fat mayonnaise
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tsp. apple cider vinegar
- 2 cups diced cooked chicken
- 1 large apple, cored and diced
- 1 cup red or green seedless grapes, quartered
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 8 slices wholewheat bread
- 4 large Boston lettuce leaves

In a small bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, salt, pepper, and vinegar. In a large bowl, combine the chicken, apple, and grapes and sprinkle with lemon juice. Add the mayonnaise mixture and toss gently. Place a spoonful of chicken salad onto a piece of bread, and top with lettuce and another slice of bread.

Celebrate Reading!

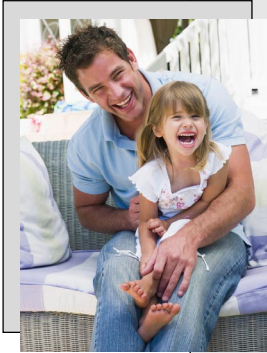
The National Education Association (NEA) annually sponsors Read Across America. Now in its twelfth year, it focuses on motivating children to read, in addition to helping them master basic skills.

The reading celebration takes place each year on March 2, the birthday of Dr. Seuss. Across the country, thousands of schools, libraries, and community centers participate by bringing together kids and books—and you can join in too! On March 2, the NEA calls for every child to be reading in the company of a caring adult. Go to readingrockets.org for great reading tips and activities for young children.



The Playful Parent

Parents who can act like a child once in a while and enter their playful world are in for a treat. Chances like these are over way too soon, as children grow up fast and in no time are asking for the keys to the car. Being a playful parent builds close bonds and memories that will last a lifetime.

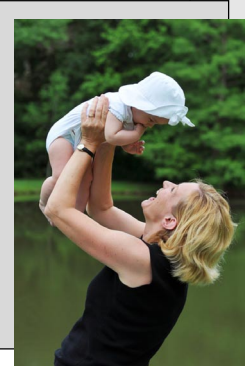


Jokes, Riddles, and Word Games

Make up some knock-knock jokes and riddles of your own. Play word games such as the old standard, “I love you more...” “I love you more than all the pine cones on every pine tree in the whole world.” “I love you more than all of the popcorn ever popped.” You will be amazed at the creativity of children when they play this game. Besides being fun, it makes them feel loved and secure.

Get Physical

Keep it low-keyed and don't do it just before bedtime, but pick up a pillow or two and gently bop each other. Walk on a balance beam or on a ledge, arms outstretched for balance. Swing alongside your child at the playground or in your own backyard. Explore the other playground equipment with your child—there are lots of bridges to cross and tunnels to crawl through. Give the dog a bath, and then go for a romp. Ride bikes together to a destination or on a trail. Kids never tire of playing tag, and it's very good exercise for everyone. They also like to practice soccer, basketball, and jump rope with parents. And hide-and-seek might be an all-time favorite.



Jazz Up Routines

It's a lot of fun for kids to be carried over a parent's shoulder like a sack of potatoes. Try it at bedtime or the next time you leave Grandma's house—the giggling is contagious. Or try pulling your child into the car with a pretend rope—they hold one end, you hold the other. Instead of just picking up toys, place toys in a dump truck and deliver them to their rightful place. At bath time, fill the bathtub with bubbles and scoop them, pile them, pour them, and blow them around the tub. Mealtimes can be boring, so cut a sandwich into little pieces or make tiny miniature pancakes for breakfast.

Pretend Play

Without being intrusive, enter into your child's make-believe world. You can be dancers or doctors, firefighters or kings and queens. It's a magical world, and playful parents can have lots of fun. You don't necessarily have to wear the costumes, but provide plenty of dress-up clothes and make up dialog to go along with the play.



It Pays to Be Silly

Joking around with kids builds strong bonds. Kids like silly. A one-year-old laughs when a bear falls off your head—repeatedly. Preschoolers laugh if you pretend you've just missed your chair and end up halfway to the floor. Try singing an instruction in an opera-type voice: “Pick up your dolls pleeeeeease.” “Did you eat all of your super duper, delicious, juicy, better than candy apple?”