

Art – an opportunity to develop children’s skills

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Art is important for children especially during their early development. Research shows that art activities develop brain capacity in early childhood. Art engages children’s senses in open-ended play and supports the development of cognitive, social-emotional and multisensory skills. As children progress into elementary school and beyond, art continues to provide opportunities for brain development, mastery, self-esteem and creativity.

Encourage creativity

Creativity is expressing one’s own idea, trying new things, and experimenting with changing materials. The best way to develop creativity is to provide a variety of materials, and give children time to create on their own. Another way to support children’s creativity is to simply observe while they work, to provide additional supplies when needed, and to allow the child to decide when the work is complete.

Encourage children to try a new art experience. Asking open-ended questions, such as “What do you think you can do with the yarn?” can help children think about what process or creation might be possible.

Art activities for children also introduce them to new tools and materials, and possible ways to use them. Then the children can decide what to create and how they want to do it.

Art helps to develop cognitive skills

As children draw, paint, and make collages, they are learning about the world (color, shape and size of objects). When they use paints, glue, and markers, children are planning, experimenting, and problem solving. As children mix paint, they learn to understand cause and effect. Art gives children chances to make decisions, and to learn from the experience of making choices about their art work.

Art offers opportunities for self-expression

Children express how they feel and think about the world through their art, which gives them a way to express the feelings and ideas that they don’t have the words to talk about. This way of expressing themselves helps children to cope with the natural stresses of growing up. Art helps children to develop a sense of their own individuality, a sense of self-respect, and an appreciation for others’ work.

Art develops physical skills

As children use scissors to cut, fingers to finger paint, or weave yarn with fingers, they are improving control of the small muscles in their hands. Along with drawing with crayons or markers, this helps children develop fine motor control that they need later for writing.

Art is a process not a product

Where art is concerned, it is the process of creating – exploring, discovering, and experimenting – that has the greatest value for young children. The process is what’s most important, not the thing they actually create. Learning takes place even when children do not make a finished product to take home at the end of the day. Sometimes when children are asked to focus on an end result, or to finish something, it can limit the type of learning that can take place. Through self-expression and creativity, children’s skills will develop naturally.

Talk with children about their art work

Talking about art is a great way for children to develop their language skills, as they talk about color, shape, and size while describing their work to friends, caregivers, and parents.

Adults can:

- Ask children open-ended questions – “Tell me about your picture!” Write down what the child says about her work. Read the words back to the child to give her a chance to add more detail. Putting children’s words into writing shows respect for the child’s thinking and help others to understand her work.
- Give children art vocabulary – Talk about lines (straight, curvy, rounded, wavy, etc.) and colors (traffic light red, sky blue, grass green).
- Describe what the art looks like, and then let the child tell you about his work – “You made long lines on your picture.” This is a good way to get a child to talk about his work.
- Ask children about the process – “How did you get the tissue paper to look like that?” or “How did you mix the paint to make that color?” Encourage the child to talk about the process.

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.”
– Pablo Picasso