

### BETTER · KID · CARE

## Topic: Arts and Creativity

### Introduction

Can one-year-olds (“ones”) truly be creative? If we step away from artistic expressions of creativity for a moment and just think about the essence of creativity, the answer is a loud “Yes!” Creativity is expressing one’s own idea, trying new things, and experimenting with changing materials. Ones spend more time than most adults exploring things in new ways and trying out their ideas, without caring what anyone else thinks! The job of early childhood professionals is to give them interesting materials to tinker with, and a positive atmosphere where trying out their own ideas is encouraged. With ones, it’s all about exploring the materials, not about a final piece of art!

### What caregivers can say and do:

- The most important message to convey with words, facial expressions, and actions is that it’s okay to touch, smear, and generally get messy!
- Some children are very reluctant to get messy and/or experience certain textures as uncomfortable to the touch. Let children decide if and when they will participate; they may just want to watch. Adults can also offer a less messy alternative by putting gooey or messy substances into a sealed plastic bag, which will allow young children to explore the substance without getting it on their skin.

## Exploring with Eyes and Hands

### What children are doing:

We often think of artistic expressions of creativity as being all visual – making things that are pretty to look at. But ones are very tactile, wanting to touch and feel everything. We need to think not only of ways they can experiment with appearance, such as mixing colors, but also with textures.

### What caregivers can provide:

- Changes in texture: After children have had time exploring a smooth substance (ex.: non-toxic paint, cornstarch and water mixture), let them add some texture, such as uncooked oatmeal, coffee grounds, or cornmeal (but nothing big enough to be a choking hazard).
- Different textured objects to paint with: sponges, cotton balls, wooden or foam blocks, bubble wrap, crumpled foil, plastic pot scrubbers, etc.
- Different textures to paint on: different types of paper, foil, fabric, plexiglass, sandpaper, bubble wrap, etc.



## Building Muscle Strength and Coordination

### What children are doing:

Ones have a long way to go before they have enough muscle control and coordination in their fingers, hands, and arms to be able to hold and control markers, narrow paint brushes, or skinny crayons, and to stay within the boundaries of typical-sized paper. When given something to mark or paint with, one-year-olds tend to make big marks using their whole arms. With lots of practice, their muscles will become stronger and more coordinated, so adults should encourage art activities that allow for whole hand and arm movements.

### What caregivers can provide:

- Fat, thick crayons, markers, chalk, and paint brushes that ones are able to grasp with their whole hand.
- Large canvases: a piece of butcher paper or sheet of plastic covering a whole table top (or skip the covering altogether and use the table top itself); a large but shallow cardboard box lid; a large piece of paper taped to the wall or laid on the floor; buckets of water and large paint brushes to use on an outside wall or sidewalk.
- Opportunities to use play dough and other types of squishable materials that help to strengthen ones' hands and fingers while also inviting their creative exploration.

### What caregivers can say and do:

- If the marks or paints stray toward an area that is out of bounds, gently guide children back to where their work is allowed, saying "Here is where you can paint/draw. Look! You can make it big!"

## Noticing Each Other

### What children are doing:

Much of ones' play activity is what child development experts call "solitary play," where each child does his own thing. That doesn't mean, however, that they don't notice each other. In fact during the second year of life, babies are very interested in each other. They just don't (yet) know how to play together. But creative art activities can be a way for ones to be alongside each other in the same experience, giving them more opportunities to develop those early social skills.

### What caregivers can provide:

- Activities big enough for several ones to engage in at the same time: finger- or sponge-painting on one big piece of paper; applying bits of paper scraps, stickers, or other small bits to a large sheet of sticky paper (like Contac™) attached to the wall sticky side out.

### What caregivers can say and do:

- Prevent conflicts by making sure there are enough materials and tools to go around.
- Comment to a child about what another child is doing as well as what he or she is doing ("You're squeezing your play dough. Look at Charlie. He's squeezing his play dough, too.")

## Keep in mind

All materials that are used with ones need to be completely non-toxic and safe in case a child swallows some. For that reason, many providers use food, such as pudding or applesauce, for creative sensory exploration. This runs the risk of confusing children, however, if they are faced with figuring out when they can play with their food and when they can't. If the longer-term goal is for children to know the difference, it may be less confusing to use substances that are non-toxic but not especially tasty for creative play.