

Why Art?

Fostering creativity won't just increase your child's chances of becoming the next Picasso. You're also helping him develop mentally, socially, and emotionally, says Ecklund-Flores. Creating art may boost young children's ability to analyze and problem-solve in myriad ways, according to Mary Ann F. Kohl, author of *Primary Art: It's the Process, Not the Product*. As kids manipulate a paintbrush, their fine motor skills improve. By counting pieces and colors, they learn the basics of math. When children experiment with materials, they dabble in science. Most important perhaps, when kids feel good while they are creating, art helps boost self-confidence. And children who feel able to experiment and to make mistakes feel free to invent new ways of thinking, which extends well beyond the craft room.

If your kid asks, "Is this right?" reassure him that art can't be wrong! There's no "right" way to create.



6 Ways to Inspire Creativity

Foster process-focused art with advice from Leslie Bushara, deputy director for education at the Children's Museum of Manhattan.

1 Prepare for a mess.

Set up an art space where your kid can be free to experiment (and get messy!), advises Bushara. Throw a drop cloth or a newspaper on top of your kitchen table or in the garage. If weather permits, let kids paint outside.

2 Avoid giving direction.

Don't tell your kid what to make or how to make it. Instead of saying, "Paint a rainbow," encourage her to "experiment with mixing colors using different types of brushes and paper," suggests Bushara.

3 Speak specifically about art.

When talking to your child about his artwork, try to be precise in your comments. For instance, instead of giving a generic compliment, Bushara recommends saying, "I see you used a lot of purple. Why did you choose that color?"

4 Explore your child's process.

Often the best way to encourage conversation about your child's art is simply to say, "Tell me about what you made," or ask, "Did you have fun making it?"

5 Don't draw with your child.

When parents draw something representational while a younger child is sketching, it can frustrate him, warns Bushara. "It's better to be near him and let him know that you're interested and supportive of his art-making," she says.

6 Let it be.

When a child finishes a piece, don't suggest additions or changes, advises Bushara. It's important for a child to feel that what she's created is enough—even if it's just a dot on the page.