

Caring and Teaching

While there are some differences in the kinds of art experiences you offer infants and those you plan for toddlers and twos, the process of using art materials is more important than what children produce with them. The goal is to make it possible for children to explore and experiment freely with a variety of materials.

To plan art experiences, review what you know about the children in your group. What do they most enjoy? What new skills are they developing? Who enjoys messy activities? Who avoids them? Keep in mind that the younger the child, the more gross motor skills are involved in art experiences. When mobile infants paint the play yard fence with water, they use their whole bodies to make broad strokes. Twos have developed more wrist and hand control, so they use their arms, hands, and fingers to paint, rather than their whole bodies.

Young Infants

You probably already have many materials in your indoor and outdoor environments that infants can touch, smell, look at, and even chew on. Allow time for infants to explore what interests them.

Julio (4 months), while sitting on Linda's lap, becomes fascinated by the texture of her scarf. Noticing this interest, Linda allows him to play with it as long as he likes.

See what happens when an infant discovers a dab of yogurt on her tray. Observe how she uses her fingers, hands, and wrists to explore its smooth texture. As young infants explore the world through their senses, talk about what they are experiencing.

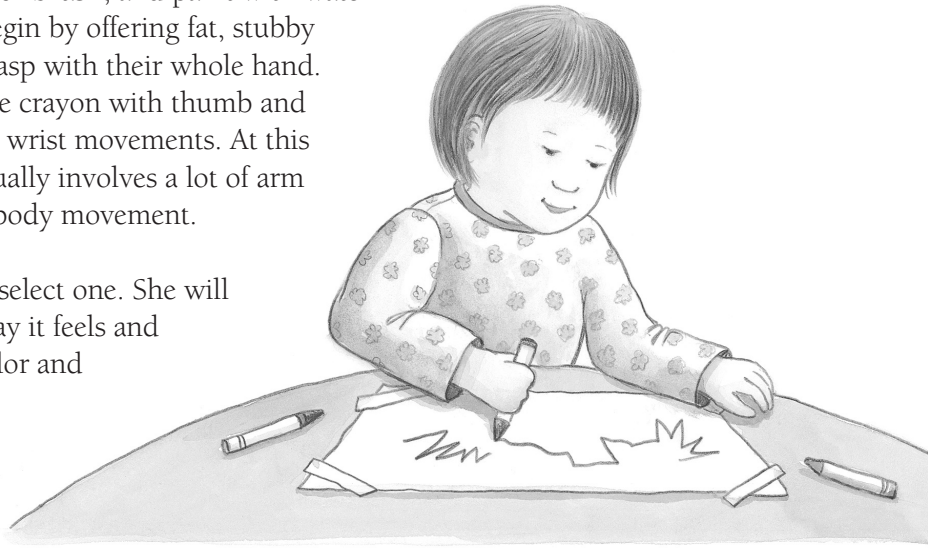
- The sensory experience: *That yogurt feels so smooth.*
- The child's actions: *You're making lines in the yogurt.*
- The child's feelings: *You certainly are having a good time with that yogurt!*

Share joyful moments of discovery together and focus on what the child is doing. You will gain insight into the infant's developing skills and interests, and this information helps you plan future experiences for the child.

Mobile Infants

Mobile infants can grasp a crayon or brush, and paint with water on a chalkboard, wall, or fence. Begin by offering fat, stubby crayons that mobile infants can grasp with their whole hand. Do not expect an infant to hold the crayon with thumb and fingers or to be able to draw using wrist movements. At this stage of development, drawing usually involves a lot of arm movement and sometimes whole body movement.

Offer the child a crayon or let her select one. She will probably be as interested in the way it feels and smells as she is interested in its color and what she can do with it. Tape a large piece of paper (at least 24 x 36 inches) to the floor. Then gently show the child how to use the crayon by guiding his hand.



Introduce older mobile infants to painting with water in much the same way, because children go through the same developmental steps in painting as they do in drawing. They paint with bold arm movements, using their entire arms and bodies.

For molding experiences, children need the freedom to poke, pound, and squeeze the dough. Handling molding materials is both soothing and filled with learning opportunities about the use of objects and about cause and effect.

When you make dough with children, notice what intrigues them and build on their interests.

- Comment on their actions: *You sure can squeeze that Cloud Dough hard.*
- Help them solve a problem: *Looks like it's getting sticky. Should we add some more flour?*
- Talk about their reaction: *You like it better when the dough isn't so sticky.*
- Engage the child's cooperation: *What a big helper you are in cleaning up.*

Toddlers

Many of the same art experiences you offer mobile infants are appropriate for toddlers. Because they have more control over their small muscles, they can begin to paint and draw with a variety of tools. Toddlers are more aware of what they are doing and understand you when you talk with them about their experiences.

Organize experiences so that toddlers can experiment and use materials without having too many constraints. Then interact in ways that show you are interested in what they are doing and make suggestions to extend their ideas.

- Describe what the child is doing: *You painted lots of lines on the ground with your water and paintbrush.*
- Make suggestions to extend the experience: *Do you want to paint anything else? I see a fence and a table. They might need some painting.*
- Provide choices: *What color should we make our dough today? We have red, yellow, and blue food coloring.*
- Reflect a child's feelings: *I thought you would enjoy the feel of that Goop we made! It's kind of sticky, isn't it?*

Twos

Twos happily use the same materials in different ways, but they also begin to take an interest in what they are producing. Because they have developed greater wrist control, they can control their scribbling. Their lines become curves, spirals, ovals, and eventually circles. They may start making designs, repeating them, and sometimes seeing patterns in what they made. While the patterns may be totally unplanned, they are exciting for a child to discover. These experiences also affect children's thinking. For example, they learn about predicting ("If I use paste, the object will stick"); about space ("If I squeeze this much paint out of the bottle, the paint runs off the paper"); about transformation ("If I add yellow paint to red paint, it looks different"); and about cause and effect ("If I rub the paint brush against the edge of the bottle, paint will not drip down the brush").

Some twos have enough muscle control to use paste and scissors.

Jonisha (33 months) proudly tears magazine pages into tiny pieces with great concentration, and she snips other pages with scissors. Then she pastes the scraps on a piece of construction paper. She loves the creative process and is satisfied with her three-dimensional creation.

If you make a few simple adjustments, children who are physically challenged can also have fun with art experiences.

Ivan found some egg-shaped markers that have caps with animals on them. They are the perfect size for Gena (30 months) to grasp and use. She can even grasp the cap and get it on and off the marker. When Ivan brought them out for Gena, other children gathered and wanted to play with “Gena’s markers.” Gena became the focal point of a play activity in which she could participate fully with her classmates. Ivan also used these markers to talk about colors, different animals, and animal sounds.

Enjoy your interactions with twos as they explore and experiment with art materials.

- Describe the child’s actions: *First you rolled out the dough. Then you pounded it flat. Now I see you are making circles in the dough by using the paper towel roll.*
- Talk about the sensory experience the child is having: *When your fingers move through that Goop, does it feel slippery?*
- Ask open-ended questions: *How did you make those wavy lines in the finger paint?*
- Encourage problem solving: *How can you keep the paint from dripping down the paper on the easel?*

Your interest in what a child is doing makes any experience, including art, both more enjoyable and an opportunity for the child to learn.

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