

KEYS TO GREAT PARENTING



Fun and
Learning
with Your
Baby or Toddler

My Child Is an Artist! The Stages of Artistic Development

It is fun for adults to watch how young children freely use art materials as they grow. Their scribbles, marks, and paintings on plain paper are their own creative expression at each developmental stage and are also the beginning of writing. All we have to do is give them the tools and our warm encouragement!

Here are a few simple tips for getting your toddler or preschooler started, along with a few do's and don'ts on what to say. The developmental stages to watch for are also outlined below.

TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR YOUNG ARTIST STARTED

- Give your child jumbo crayons, washable markers, and washable tempera paints with large brushes (not the small watercolor paint sets, which are better for older children) at about 12-15 months, or after she has stopped putting everything in her mouth and understands that these items make marks on paper.
- Find large pieces of blank paper—at least 12 by 18 inches for free movement. Look for free rolls of newsprint from your local newspaper office, paper sacks cut apart to lie flat, computer printouts, butcher paper, or inexpensive paper pads from discount stores.
- Lay an old plastic tablecloth, shower curtain, or old newspapers under the drawing paper to prevent stray marks or paint splashes.
- If you give your child washable felt tip markers or tempera paints, cover his clothing with a larger shirt. Roll up the sleeves or cut them off. You won't have to worry about cleaning paint or marks off his clothes.
- Allow plenty of time for the art activity. Plan to spend time sitting close by, quietly smiling and watching.
- Useful comments are open-ended, such as, “Wow, I like those neat red lines.” “Hmmm...that's really interesting!” “I like the way you are working hard on your drawing!” “Would you like to tell me about your drawing?” (if child is able to use words). Do not tell the child what she is drawing or what colors she should use. Let her tell you about her drawing or painting if she chooses to do so. She may not have a picture in her mind; rather, she may be just enjoying the process of creating color, lines, and movement—early expressions of her unique creative spirit.

STAGES OF ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Stage 1: *Uncontrolled, random scribbling*—large movements from the shoulder. Either hand or both hands may be used; crayon is usually held in a fist grip.

Stage 2: *Controlled scribbling*—repeated marks, such as irregular open circles; diagonal, curved, horizontal, or vertical lines. A crayon or marker may be held between the child’s thumb and forefinger.

Stage 3: *Naming unplanned creations*—the child may volunteer the names of familiar persons, pets, or objects after finishing the picture.

Stage 4: *Beginning of representational drawing*—usually a “sun,” an irregular circle, with lots of “rays” sticking out, or a rough circle with one or more recognizable human features inside or connected to it.

Stage 5: *Developed representational drawing*—clear prior planning before starting to draw; increasing detail, motor control, and use of color. Colors may or may not represent reality; either is OK.