



## **How To Use Art To Help Children Express Themselves**

The American Art Therapy Association represents more than 5,000 professional art therapists who use the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages. The creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop inter-personal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight.

This Tip Sheet and other Web-based materials available through the American Art Therapy Association can assist parents, teachers, and caregivers to: (a) help children create art, and (b) begin age-appropriate conversations with young children about the nature, range, and expression of their feelings.

### **Find the Right Words**

As children create their artwork, it's important for parents to interact and “find the right words” to foster and encourage that creativity—to find a *new* language to talk about art with our kids. In her article, *Creating with Kids: Talking About Art*<sup>1</sup>, Kathryn Horn Coneway suggests that “a good starting point is ‘tell me something about your picture’ or simply say nothing at all, pause a little longer than is comfortable while just looking and see what your child tells you.”

### **Develop Comfort in the Art Making Process**

Spending time with your children during the art making process is invaluable. “Talking about art takes time . . . shifting back and forth from the visual mode of looking (right brain) to the language mode of speaking (left brain),” says Ms. Horn Coneway. “If children begin to have a routine of art time in their day or week, their interaction with materials will deepen and grow over time. Repeatedly using the same materials is more likely to allow children to gain a sense of mastery over that material and what it can do, leading to the joys of expressing themselves with that material,” reports Ms. Horn Coneway in *The Home Studio-Begin with Drawing*<sup>2</sup>.

### **Value the Process of Making Art**

The artwork that your child produces should be valued for the creative process and the effort required to make the drawing. “As your child shows his or her artwork to you, express appreciation that the work is being shared with you . . . in doing so, this communicates that

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.americanarttherapyassociation.org/upload/creatingwithkids.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.americanarttherapyassociation.org/upload/homestudio.pdf>

you are interested in your relationship with your child.” Comments Megan L. Van Meter, LPC Intern, ATR-BC. Ms. Van Meter goes on to state, “Also recognize the effort that went into the art . . . in doing this you communicate that the effort, not ability, is necessary for success . . . ”

### **Let Your Child Decide How to Be Creative**

The space selected and materials used in making art are areas in which your child begins to determine how he or she wants to approach the creative process. “Give the child control over his or her art production: what to make, what materials to use, whether to keep their art or throw it away, whether to do art at all that day” advises Tracy Councill, MA, ATR-BC. In her work with seriously ill children, Ms. Councill knows first-hand that, “A child in the hospital gives up so many everyday freedoms that using art therapeutically creates a valuable arena in which to exercise choice and control.”

### **The Importance of Art In Children’s Lives**

Young children in prekindergarten programs are expelled at more than three times the rates of students in grades k-12, while preschoolers in child care centers are expelled at over 13 times the rate. This data illustrates the need to address young children’s social-emotional health.

**The American Art Therapy Association represents more than 5,000 members in the United States and around the world, all working to help improve lives through art therapy.**

*For more information about using art at home, in schools, or community programs, and to obtain more background information visit <http://www.AmericanArtTherapyAssociation.org>. If you are interested in beginning an art therapy program or wish to contact a credentialed art therapist, visit [http://www.atcb.org/find\\_a\\_credentialed\\_art\\_therapist/](http://www.atcb.org/find_a_credentialed_art_therapist/). Remember to look for the ATR and ATR-BC credentials when selecting a qualified art therapist.*

**American Art Therapy Association / 225 North Fairfax Street / Alexandria, VA 22314 / 703-548-5861 / [info@arttherapy.org](mailto:info@arttherapy.org)**