

# Visual Arts

Art is a vital part of the curriculum for children of all ages. Art materials attract curiosity and desire to explore. Art stimulates children's expressiveness, which is especially important for young children who are learning to use language to communicate. Through art, children can create and integrate curriculum experiences, including science, math and social studies.

As children grow and develop, their art changes too. While change is not predictable, there are general patterns in the development of children's art. As parents, you can support your child by providing a variety of art tools and materials and by helping your child explore each developmental stage of art:

**Stage 1. Exploration of art materials.** At this stage, the process of art is more important than the final product. The young child delights in the movement of his/her arm and hand, in the feel of the brush and crayon in his/her hand, even the smell of paint and clay. You may support your child at this exploratory stage by saying, "I see you are moving your arm up and down! How else can you move your arm to make lines?", or "How does the paint feel (cool, wet, slippery, slimy)?"

**Stage 2. Control of the material.** Older children are able to decide and control which lines should be long or short, wavy or straight, thick or thin, and what color to use. You may support your child by commenting on the arrangement of lines and choices of colors. "I see you made wavy lines on top of the paper, and you painted a big red round shape in the middle of the paper!"

**Stage 3. Creation of design.** At this stage, children who have had experiences with exploration and control combine and arrange shapes, lines and colors into aesthetically pleasing designs. A child might make a round ball of clay and attach long, thin, coiled shapes which radiate out like rays of the sun. You may support your child by asking, "Tell me about your art work?" As adults, we often assume that the child produced a representation, when it could be just exploring arrangements and designs.

**Stage 4. Early representations.** At this stage children begin to incorporate symbols that remind them of representational things. It is still an early stage, so children's art fluctuates between representations and designs. You can help your child continue exploring the elements of art by commenting on the lines, shapes, colors and the composition that your child made and asking your child to tell you about his/her artwork.

**Stage 5. Later representations.** Children at this stage plan and organize more complete and detailed representations of their experiences and ideas. They begin to include many aspects of the environment. You may help your child at this stage of development by encouraging your child to include more details in his/her picture. "You told me this is the picture of your dog. Where is your dog, inside or outside? What does your dog see outside?"

To inspire your child in his/her artistic explorations, you can look at the works of artists together. You can discuss the choice of colors, lines, and shapes the artist used and comment on the texture of the paint or sculpture. Ask your child how the artwork makes him/or her feel.