



I. Why Art Is Important

Many of us don't view ourselves as artists. How many times have you or someone you know said, "I can't draw a straight line"? In thinking about art in this way, we are focusing on the final product of an art experience. But art is much more than knowing how to draw or paint or mold clay. It is a means of self-expression as well as a satisfying activity in its own right.

When children splash brightly colored paints onto paper or roll out balls of clay, they are being creative. It doesn't matter if the painting resembles a rainbow or the clay a snake. What matters is that through experiences such as these, art allows children to show how they feel, think, and view the world.



Perhaps art's greatest contribution to any early childhood program is its ability to make children feel good about themselves. When they scribble with a jumbo crayon, fill paper with colorful strokes of paint, or glue a leaf to cardboard, children take pride in their creations. Through art, children learn not only to feel good about themselves but also to think and to refine their physical skills. Art supports children's growth in all areas of development.



Here are some examples of what children learn through art experiences.

Children develop thinking skills by:

- learning the properties of materials (feeling the difference in the texture of velvet and satin).
- identifying colors (mixing blue paint with yellow paint to get green).
- observing cause-and-effect (poking a hole through a ball of clay or adding water to powdered paint).
- labeling shapes and objects (drawing a circle and calling it a "sun").
- learning to solve problems (discovering how to balance objects on a mobile).

Children develop socially by:

- learning to cooperate (working together on a group mural).
- learning to share (waiting to have a turn at the easel).
- learning to plan (deciding who will do what on a group project).

Children develop emotionally by:

- experiencing pride (completing a drawing, painting, or collage and showing the finished work).
- expressing feelings (punching and pounding playdough or selecting paint colors to match a playful mood).
- asserting independence (starting, completing, and cleaning up an art activity on one's own).

Children develop physically by:

- practicing small muscle skills (coloring with crayons or tearing pictures from a magazine for a collage).
- coordinating eye and hand movements (finger painting on paper or drawing circles).
- learning to use balance (hanging objects from a hanger mobile).

These are just a few of the many ways in which children grow and develop through art. With a little planning, you can make sure that these learning experiences take place in your own family child care home.