



Little Picasso

Young children seem to ooze creativity out of every pore, but where does this come from and how will your little artist develop as she grows older?

BY KERRYN KEMP

We all have fond memories of finger paints and playdough from our childhood, but we don't realise how much of an effect that early creative expression had on our development, nor do we think about how it could help our own children. According to Samantha Davis, an art psychotherapist in Johannesburg, scribbling with crayons or painting with fingerpaints develops your baby's sense of touch and encourages visual and kinaesthetic exploration. This means that your baby's brain learns how to identify her body's position and to regulate and control her movements. She also says, "Scribbling develops your baby's motor coordination which is needed to help her develop writing skills in the future and to develop her cognitive functions such as spatial relationships, sequencing and creative expression."

When your baby first grasps a crayon she makes random marks on paper. This is called "early scribbling" and she's most likely to be more interested in the physical experience than in the end product. Once your baby realises that she can control the marks she makes, "controlled scribbling" takes place. As she increases her skill and confidence with a crayon and starts exploring techniques and colours, your baby also develops her hand-eye coordination, small muscle skills and her ability to think before she acts, says Samantha. It's essential to understand that creative expression occurs as play when it comes to young children and it is important to allow them the freedom in which to do this.

How they grow

Despite occurring completely spontaneously, your baby's creativity can be predicted. According to art therapists, creative milestones occur at specific ages, so look out for them as your baby plays with crayons and paper

14 months

Your baby can make purposeless marks with a crayon. The "picture" will be shapeless and quite primitive because

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your baby will be making sweeping arm movements from her elbow or shoulder, as she doesn't quite have much muscle control yet.

Tip: Give your baby large, chubby crayons that she can grip in her tiny hands and large pieces of paper to scribble on at this age.

18 months

Your baby can now include circular elements while scribbling, that are interspersed with lines. This comes from the greater control she has over her hand, wrist and arm muscles.

Tip: Let your toddler do what she does best at this stage – get her hands in everything. Encourage her tactile explorations by providing her with different materials to play with.

24 months

Your toddler now has even more control over her arm, wrist and finger muscles, which means she can exercise more precision over her scribbles. You will see more angles and lines, crosses and even a few zigzags, that will gradually increase

to form recognisable images.

Tip: Your toddler will love playdough at this stage and it will help draw out her creative tendencies.

36 months

Your child can now draw isolated, restricted lines instead of just scribbling across an entire page. She can probably draw a circle as well. Samantha says, "The circle is the earliest representation of the self, or of people. Viktor Lowenfeld said that

the representational attempt as a person is usually a circle for the head and two vertical lines for legs. Other forms develop later. Your child may also change the meanings of her artworks at the drop of a hat – what was a flower ten minutes ago might now be a person." Your child will now learn to respect the boundaries of a page, and will enjoy experimenting with different media, such as paint, crayons and pastels, on the same page.

Tip: If your child has not yet started to favour a certain hand when drawing or painting there may be cause for some concern. Speak to your child's nursery school teacher or paediatrician if you're concerned.

The creative process

Creativity needs to be fun for your child, and it should be allowed to develop freely. Provide your baby with a secure and contained space in which to express herself, where she can just play without feeling the pressure of having to produce an amazing artwork. Samantha says, "Adults have often forgotten what it is like to play and be in the present, and

may then bring anxiety into the creative process. Let your child be in charge of the process and remember that the activity can just focus on the playing and not necessarily have a finished product at the end of it."

Samantha says that creativity and exploration need not be limited to only crayons and paper. Almost any action can be expressed creatively. As your baby begins to point at objects and pick up smaller objects like raisins with her fingers, you can begin to encourage her creative expression. Give her objects and materials that she can mould with her hands, like a piece of bread that can be squashed and rolled or pieces of jelly. "Encourage messy play with sand, water and paints to develop your baby's interest in touching and using different textures. It will also help develop her drawing and construction skills."

Allow your baby to explore and express herself through a tactile medium. Spray shaving cream onto a plastic table and let your baby spread it around with her fingers. Be sure that she doesn't put any in her mouth, though! Encourage your toddler's tactile awareness further by giving her pictures and pieces of paper that she can tear out and then glue together and paint to make "models". Your child can also "draw" on water using a stick or her finger in sand.

Create a masterpiece

Encourage your child's freedom of expressing by allowing her to direct her creative process. This doesn't mean you should let her draw on the walls at will, but when she is drawing or painting try not to restrict her by naming her picture for her, or telling what to draw. Rather let her tell you what she drew and remember that to her that indistinguishable blob really does look like a flower, or like the dog. "Allowing your child to have control over her creative process gives her the validation that encourages self-esteem and self-empowerment as she feels she

has control over her imagination," says Samantha.

It's also important to talk to your child about her efforts at art. This kind of admiration encourages her to do more and to be open about her feelings. Include realistic, informal praise when talking to your toddler about her work, and be sure that she knows that there

is no right or wrong when it comes to creative expression. Remember that the meaning of a drawing changes for your toddler, so cats turn into flowers, which then turn into people. Don't try to correct her on this, but allow her to express herself freely.

Your child should be drawing and painting because it's fun for her and

not because you expect something from her. That is probably the most important lesson your child learns while playing Picasso! ■

RESOURCES:

Samantha Davis, art therapist and journey therapist,
www.arttherapy.co.za or sami@arttherapy.co.za



Creative ways with your child's art

Your tot's gorgeous creations are without a doubt coming home in droves. Here are 5 super ideas to display it.

BY VERONICA EXTER

Tag it

Photograph or scan in their art and then size it down to gift tag sizes. Print them on good quality paper and then cut them out. Strengthen the punched hole with ring binder reinforcements and store your gift tags in a safe place. What a pleasure not to have to worry about last minute gift tags.



Magnetise it

For this craft, you won't need to use the whole picture, but just a selection or a character from it. If the artwork is huge, photograph or scan it and resize it on your computer. Once printed, laminate it and then cut out the chosen character. Add a magnet to the back and voila – no more losing all of those reminders taking up space on the fridge.