

Painting with Young Children: There's More to the Picture

Painting in early education and care is part of its natural landscape. We can see the easel filled with an array of vivid colors just waiting to be explored. What does painting with young children really offer? Are they too young? What do we need?

Why is Painting so Valuable?

Caregivers may plan a painting experience to fill part of the schedule, but what most educators discover is that painting becomes much more than just a simple activity. Painting is a way for children to do many important things: convey ideas, express emotion, use their senses, explore color, explore process and outcomes, and create aesthetically pleasing works and experiences.

Are they too young?

Most early educators place value on painting with very young children. It is important to consider any safety factors, such as non-toxic materials and the ability to experience the process without injury. Even very young children can dip their fingers in a paint mix and spread it on a table or tray.

Children form many connections and ideas of how the painting process works for them, as well as what they enjoy about it. Watch a child painting and you will see a fully engaged child. We can almost see children's thoughts, such as, "When I push my brush flat, my line gets bigger", or "I like stirring this, but I don't want to put it on paper or touch it", or "I mixed red with more red and orange, and got fire color red!"

While we listen and observe, we may begin to understand the way a child perceives his world, his developmental abilities, and his needs or interests.



Get Inspired!

Adults and children alike can be inspired by other artists (famous or not!), books, museums, nature, resource catalogues, art stores, or even simply every day materials, ideas, and experiences.

It is a good idea to teach children how to prepare to paint independently. Encourage children to ask to paint as well as request materials to use. Introduce where materials are kept, how to clip paper to easel or tape to table, where to place for drying, and proper clean up steps.

Offer Valuable Painting Experiences

The soothing process of painting is often what is interesting to young children. The pleasant feeling of painting over and over, possibly using two brushes or their fingers, is what is important. We need to encourage the experience where it interests the child, not the adult. As children develop, they become more focused on creating representations and conveying ideas.

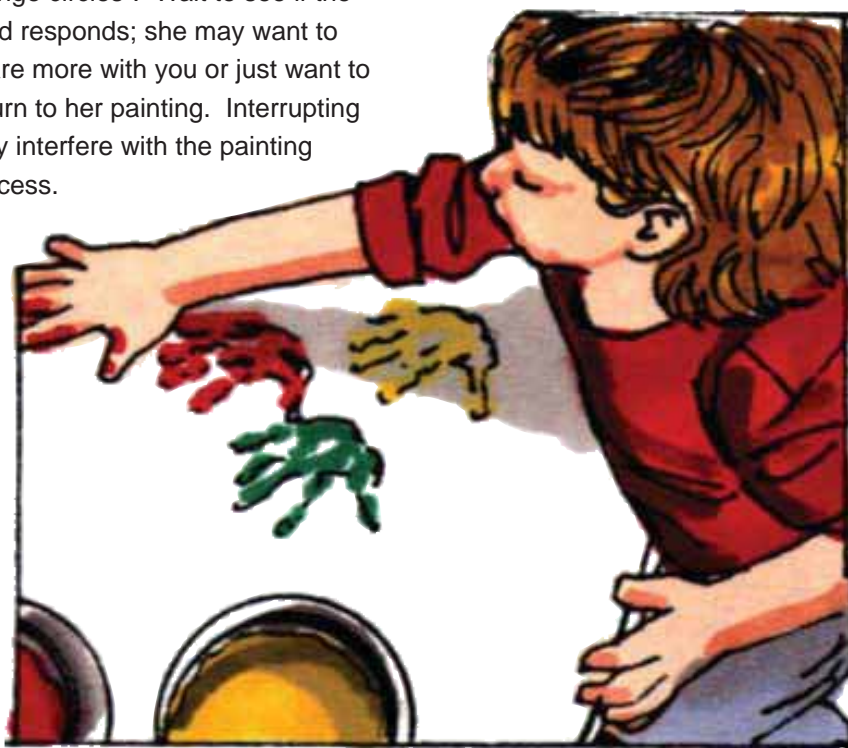
Young children need large pieces of paper (to have full range of motion) as well as a variety of brush sizes to experiment with (find what works best for control). Consider offering smaller quantities of paint so children can manage fewer spills and can mix colors without ruining large containers of paint. Color mixing provides endless discoveries.

Painting areas should support the child's physical abilities. Easels should be at correct height or sturdy platforms added to adjust height. Move chairs from tables to allow children to stand and paint if they

wish. Very young children can be held in a lap or sit on the floor with an adult.

Rich Conversations

Responding to and encouraging children's painting is important. See if the invitation is open for conversation first. A good way to start may be to describe what you see; "Your painting has long blue lines and orange circles". Wait to see if the child responds; she may want to share more with you or just want to return to her painting. Interrupting may interfere with the painting process.



When children seem ready to share, think of thought provoking questions. "I see you used red and yellow. What other colors might you use and where are you going to put them?" or "This part of your paper is filled with pink and white spots. What do you want to do to your painting next?" or "What are you going to do with your painting when it's done?"

Important Connections

Painting with young children allows us to see much more than a simple picture. If we observe with careful eyes and ears, we can gain tremendous information about each child. We can share with families what we have discovered and why we feel it is important. We can create enjoyable experiences and support development at the same time; what a masterpiece!

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