

# BACK TO BASICS

## Art center

Art activities encourage children to explore materials and express creativity. The best art activities support investigation and experimentation and avoid focus on the product or end result. Use these guidelines as you help children become young artists.

- Position the art center in good light and, if possible, near a water source.
- Focus on open-ended activities—those that allow children to be involved in the process of creativity. Avoid closed activities—those that have only one correct method or product.
- Encourage invention and independence. Avoid making models for children to follow.
- Give children access to art materials. At a minimum paint, paper, crayons, scissors, and paste should be available at any time during the day.
- Ask open-ended questions about children's artwork. For example, say "Tell me about your picture. I see you used lots of blue paint" rather than "You drew a blue fish." Children sometimes share information but it's OK if they don't. Encourage art for its own sake—not for the product created.
- Avoid writing on children's artwork. Encourage children to sign their own art. If a child wants to dictate information about the art, write on a separate piece of paper that can be attached to the back of the art.
- Expect children to share cleanup tasks and to be responsible for their own materials. Show children how to control paint drips, wash brushes, cover dough and clay containers, hang up smocks, and wipe up spills.
- Use art materials that are safe and nontoxic. Stress that art materials and equipment are used for visual art. Eatable materials, like peanut butter play dough or chocolate pudding fingerpaint easily confuse children. Avoid using food as an art medium.

## Art center basics

- Designate areas for storing supplies and drying and displaying finished art.
- Use easels that are stable enough to be used indoors or on the playground.
- Buy left- and right-handed scissors that are blunt-ended, comfortable, sharp, and smooth in operation.
- Provide a variety of paper including colored construction paper, drawing paper, newsprint, tissue, cardboard, foil, and wallpaper scraps.
- Offer a variety of painting tools. In addition to standard brushes, provide sponges, feathers, combs, cotton swabs, toothbrushes, medicine droppers, spray bottles, and roll-top bottles.
- Provide chalk, markers, watercolors, pencils, and crayons.
- Invite sculpting with play doughs, clay, and materials like straws, toothpicks, Styrofoam, pipe cleaners, and colored wires.
- Offer and let children discover the best uses for glue, paste, glue sticks, and tape.
- Collect beautiful junk for collage and other art activities that use cloth scraps, paper tubes, string, ribbon, greeting cards, gift paper, and yarn.
- Buy powdered tempera paint. It is economical and can be used dry or mixed to any consistency for the easel, stamping and printing projects, and fingerpaint. Contain paint in muffin tins, used margarine tubs, juice cans, or commercial paint cups with lids.
- Provide smocks and furniture protectors. Layers of newspaper and vinyl sheeting are effective in containing messes.

