

Show your child how to use a straw to make a painting and encourage him to explain the process to someone else.

This experience allows your child to practice sharing useful information with others.



Why this is important

When you demonstrate a process for your child to share with others, he will need to pay close attention so that he can show it to someone else. When he uses words to explain the steps in a process, he is practicing narration, one of the skills in early literacy.

What you do

- Invite your child to watch you make a straw painting. As you demonstrate, let him know that later he will have the important job of teaching someone.
- Organize your instruction into three main parts so they will be easy to remember.
- Explain that first he must put a piece of painting paper down on a few sheets of newspaper. Second, place a few drops of paint on the paper. The third step is to blow gently through the straw to scatter the paint around. This will make interesting designs on the paper.
- Let him decide which family member he would like to teach. Encourage him to use both words and actions as he teaches.
- Review briefly the steps in the process: *Now, what is the first thing you will show?* Continue to talk through the remaining steps.
- Position yourself near the new teacher (your child) and student (family member), but do not intervene unless needed.
- Respond positively to both your child and the person he is teaching: *Michael, you explained the three steps so clearly! Jesse, you blew green and purple paint around your paper!*

Another idea

A few other easy-to-teach projects are making a peanut butter sandwich, planting seeds in a pot, and rolling a ball of dough.

Find various objects around the house and describe the sound your child can make with each object.

Your child becomes more familiar with his environment when he has the chance to hear and classify sounds.



Why this is important

A surprising variety of sounds can be made around the house. Exposure to these sounds helps your child recognize, label, and describe them. Knowing and classifying everyday sounds are part of your child's growing awareness of the world. Since sounds occur and then are gone, they demand a different kind of thinking and memory than do objects that will remain in view.

What you do

- Walk around the room with your child, and stop near various objects as you wonder aloud, *What kind of sound could this make?* Encourage your child to experiment with the object to create sound.
- Describe any sound your child makes, such as with a pan and spoon: *Listen to the loud clang, clang, clang!*
- Show him how various objects can make different sounds. For example, drop a small, plastic toy into the sink: *I hear a soft splash.*
- Review the sounds with your child at the end of the game: *Let's think about the sounds that we just made and decide which ones were loud and which ones were soft. First, we heard the sound the pan made. Was it loud or soft?*

Another idea

Search for sounds outdoors, listening for sounds you do not make, such as sounds from crickets, cars, or airplanes.

Painting With My Hands

Game 123

Invite your child to explore with finger paints as you describe the process and the marks she makes.

Your child may begin to notice the relationship between her hand movements and the marks made on the page.



Why this is important

Finger painting is a fun, sensory art experience. Through experimenting with finger paints, your child will begin to notice the relationship between her movements and the marks she creates. Allowing your child to freely explore the paints on a large, flat surface gives her the chance to develop her creative expression.

What you do

- Put a smock on your child to protect clothing.
- Use finger paint directly on a table with a wipe-clean surface, or use a cookie sheet or cover your table with a plastic shower curtain to protect your table top. Dampen the surface with a sponge and then put a spoonful of paint in front of your child.
- Stand back and enjoy watching your child freely move the paint around on the table. She may work more easily while standing to allow for larger arm movement.
- Observe and comment on what you see your child making: *You moved your arm in a big circle and now there is a circle in the red paint.*
- Give your child one color at a time as she learns how the paint works on the table.
- Later add another color to the activity. Start with a light color, such as yellow, and add a small amount of red or blue. Your child will enjoy watching the colors change.

Another idea

Save a copy of the finished artwork by pressing a sheet of newsprint on the table and then carefully peeling the paper away. This makes a print of your child's table painting on the paper. Lay it flat until the paint is dry.

Playing With Many Sizes

Game 124

Offer your child objects that are graduated in size, such as a canister set or measuring cups, and respond to the way she arranges them.

Your child will begin to learn about the math skill of sequencing items by size.



Why this is important

Playing with objects of graduated size encourages your child to create arrangements and sequences based on size or amount. This skill is needed for determining the differences among a series of sizes, such as in clothing, food portions, and tools. It will help your child make choices when she is able to understand where any one item fits in a series.

What you do

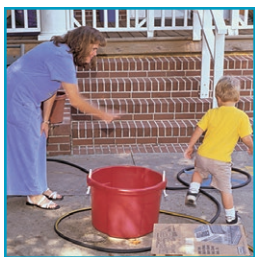
- Find safe household objects for your child to play with that are graduated in size, such as measuring spoons, canisters, nesting toys, or graduated wrenches. You also can create groups of shoes or jar lids in varying sizes.
- Show your child one set of objects and invite her to play: *Here are a set of six measuring spoons. Let's see what you can do with them.* (If you use measuring spoons or cups, make sure they are separate and not joined on a ring.)
- Wait for your child to notice the different sizes and begin to compare the items. Give her plenty of time to play without assistance.
- When you notice your child comparing sizes, talk about size relationships: *You put them all in a row. Let's see, this is the smallest one at this end. What did you put at the other end?*
- Invite your child to record her accomplishment by placing the row of items on a piece of paper and tracing around each one.

Another idea

Challenge your child to notice a different type of size relationship by filling a few identical plastic cups with varying levels of water. When she arranges them correctly, add more water to (or pour some water out of) one or two glasses so that she can find a new order.

Invite your child to maneuver around a small obstacle course while you describe his body motions.

Your child will gain experience using position words to talk about what he is doing.



Why this is important

The best way for your child to learn action words is to hear them and say them just at the moment he is engaged in doing them. Performing the actions increases his understanding of positions in space. Knowing the words for spatial relationships increases his understanding of situations and instructions. For example, *Go around the puddle to the car* is quite different from *Go to the car*.

What you do

- Use a garden hose or rope to mark an interesting path for your child to follow.
- Describe his movements as he moves along the path: *through the box tunnel, under the bench, over the block*.
- Invite him to say the words first with you and then encourage him to describe his position by himself: *Where will you go next?*
- Add new challenges to the path to increase his physical skills. Try incorporating a small plastic lid that he can stand on with one foot or a one-inch wide tape for walking on a line.
- Describe more subtle movements such as *walk next to the box, jump away from the paper, go around the puddle, or tiptoe along the line*.
- Periodically, reposition the obstacles to provide new actions and help him learn new positions.
- Walk him through the path the first time you use the new position words.

Another idea

Play a game with one rule: Your child must say the word that describes his action as he does it.

Help your child use a doll to learn how to respond to strong emotions.

Responding to a doll's pretend emotions gives your child a chance to practice sympathy and learn various ways of comforting someone.



Why this is important

Your child can begin to practice feelings of concern or sympathy by responding to the imaginary needs of a doll. You can role-play real problem situations in order to guide your child and teach her how to express concern. Showing personal concern is part of learning to help and care for others.

What you do

- Invite your child to play with a doll after witnessing another child display strong emotion.
- Start by saying, *This doll fell down and skinned his knee, just like Jimmy did a few minutes ago. What can we do for this doll?*
- Give your child time to make suggestions such as a bandage or wet cloth.
- Hold the doll to show your child another way to provide comfort. When she imitates the action, respond with positive feedback: *Oh, I see that you're going to comfort him. The doll needs some love as much as he needs the bandage.*
- Include various scenarios such as a sad doll that needs cheering up or an upset doll that your child could help to calm.

Another idea

After your child has had a number of opportunities to respond to a doll's emotions, begin to encourage her to respond helpfully to the feelings of her siblings and other family members: *Jimmy looks a little sad right now. Do you think you might be able to cheer him up?* Do not expect every effort to be successful, but your child will feel good when she helps someone feel better.

Show your child how to make a picture of her hand using finger paints.

Making a print of her own hand gives your child a special way to express her individuality.



Why this is important

Seeing a print of her own hand can help your child become more aware of herself as a unique person. Your child may enjoy tracking her growth by comparing her current handprint to one she made as a baby.

What you do

- Offer your child a blank sheet of paper at the end of a finger-painting session.
- Ask her to press her hand lightly into the paint, then firmly onto the paper.
- Observe her reaction to the design. Does she recognize the picture of her hand? Does she try it again? Does she want to repeat with the other hand? Does she look to you to share what she just did?
- Explain that the handprints are a kind of picture of herself: *You made a picture of your hand! Thank you for sharing your special art with me. It looks like you are going to make a blue handprint with your other hand now.*
- Encourage your child to look at her handprint next to yours or those of other family members. She can count fingers on her hand and on the other prints to discover they have the same number. You can point out that each handprint is slightly different, which makes each person special.
- Invite her to have fun making handprints on various washable surfaces both indoors and outdoors. She can put handprints on the refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or counter top.

Another idea

Your child can use her handprint as her personal signature in letters to relatives. Her handprints made on paper can be saved and displayed or sent to loved ones who want to see how she is growing.

Put some paper cups or other useful things in a handy place that your child can reach and invite him to use these items for tools in various ways.

You can encourage your child's independence by making helpful objects available to him.



Why this is important

As we grow, our need for tools increases. Early and varied opportunities to use tools help your child think creatively about objects and problem solving. Keeping useful household objects readily available for your child encourages independence.

What you do

- Encourage your child to use everyday objects, such as paper cups, as tools that help him complete tasks independently.
- Make the items easily available to him so that he can think of various ways to use them. For example, he can use a paper cup as a bowl for his dolls, a scoop in the sandbox, a watering can for his potted plant, or a temporary home for a snail he finds.
- Offer positive feedback for his ideas: *Using the cup to hold the snail is a good idea!*
- Try not to intervene when he uses an item incorrectly unless it is unsafe.

Another idea

Spend a few days observing your own behavior. Notice tasks that you do for your child that he can begin to do for himself if the tools are handy. Allow him to use more tools such as tape, boxes, safe scissors, a small wheelbarrow, a small step stool, washable markers, or a bucket. Don't restrict him from using them in new ways unless his actions are unsafe.

Provide your child with paper, paintbrushes, and one or two colors of paint. Your child's creativity will grow when you offer her a variety of painting experiences.



Why this is important

At this age, your child may naturally experiment with many original ways of doing things. With paint, she has many opportunities to express her original ideas without instruction. Early creative experiences can help to enrich the later, more cautious stages of your child's artistic development.

What you do

- Place painting materials on a low, flat table surface protected with newspapers, or put a few newspapers on the floor to use as a work space.
- Offer your child a paint smock. An old adult shirt worn backwards also works well.
- Allow your child plenty of time to explore with the paint and brushes.
- Stay nearby as your child paints, but wait until she finishes before offering comments: *You made a big red shape and some long blue lines. That's a wonderful painting!*
- Increase the number of paint colors after she feels comfortable with the painting process. You also can offer different colors of paper and different sizes of brushes or sponges to paint with.

Another idea

Find a space in your home to display your child's art. You can talk about her work and encourage her to describe it to others.

Matching Among Similar Pictures

Game 130

Let your child look for one matching pair among several pictures of the same kind of thing, for example, among several pictures of cars.

Your child will begin to notice which pictures are nearly alike and which are exactly alike.



Why this is important

Challenging your child to observe and make careful choices from among a group of similar items encourages her to pay attention to details. This skill will help your child as she learns to quickly and accurately see the differences between letters of the alphabet, including letters with similar shapes such as *b* and *d*.

What you do

- Cut out pictures of the same kinds of items in a catalog or magazine.
- Begin the game with four pictures on the table. The pictures should be similar, but with only two that are identical. For example, four pictures of coats, two of which are exactly the same.
- Invite your child to play with you: *Can you find the two coats that are the same?* When she succeeds, acknowledge her achievement: *You found the two red coats that match!*
- Ask your child to hide her eyes as you switch the positions of the pictures, remove the previously matching pair, and add a new matching pair to the group.
- Play the game with the first set of pictures several times before moving on to a new group of similar pictures.

Another idea

Create a game that uses all the pictures. Spread every picture randomly on the table and invite your child to find each matching set.