

art & music activities FOR KIDS

Yes, you can have your very own arts festival. Just make sure the audience is wearing wipe-down vinyl. Here are a few ideas for arty fun.

art by kids

Kids can start drawing from the time they can hold an implement in their hand. At first they need large coloured crayons or pencils: crayons are good because they don't have to be sharpened and are easy for little fingers to hold. Buy ones made specifically for kids: these will be labelled non-toxic. Pay a bit extra for quality brands and the brightest colours – they will be less breakable and will last longer.

You can make up non-toxic poster paint at home from bought powder or buy thick paint in tubes or plastic bottles, which will last longer and be runnier if you add a little water. Mix some interesting colours for kids. Having lots of white available is always a good idea because you can make much brighter, more kid-friendly colours by squirting it into the darker colours usually sold. Kids will combine colours until there's a yucky brown so to prevent this happening too quickly, and the paint drying up between sessions, only make up small amounts at a time.

From the age of about 2 and a half children find a chalk-board easel a great idea (one you can bulldog-clip paper to for painting on is ideal). Rolls of paper can be useful for large paintings or for drawing the outline of your child on to give them a start painting a big, life-sized figure for fun. A long piece of paper is also good for them to make footprints or a mural on. Washing lines make good drying racks for paintings.

Help your child to grasp the crayon or brush so that they get the most control they can for their age, and praise all efforts. As well as using crayons, pencils and paints on scrap paper, kids can draw with chalk on safe footpaths or concrete areas; with a stick in packed dirt or wet sand; with water on footpaths, sheds or brick walls; or even with paint on walls or sheds if you're murally minded.

Even toddlers and preschoolers can have fun taking photos. Get them to wander around and snap friends, family, stuff you see on walks, and help them choose which ones are 'good'. (Strange blurry shots and abstract-looking things can be 'good', too.) You can make cards or email messages to send to relatives and friends. Most phones, cameras and computers now have 'movie functions', so feel free to do some dress-ups and play-acting and record it for the future – you'll need some visuals for their 18th (or 21st) speech. Investigate the computer drawing, colouring and animation effects on your computer program, if you can and it won't risk trashing any important work you've got on there.

Older babies and young toddlers will make scribbles and dots, preschoolers will do impressions of feelings, figures to represent people, and so on (see in the book

chapters 16, 23 and 29 on development if you want to pinpoint stages). You don't need to teach your child to draw 'properly' and they don't have to draw recognisable items. Don't insist on your idea of what kids draw. You can suggest, but allow them to lead the way. Let them enjoy the colours, lines and shapes, and don't worry whether it's anything recognisable: this will come. Children of all ages use drawing to express their feelings and situation, and draw what they're obsessed with at the time. You may get weeks of rocket ships and then a slug, both of which look like tumbleweed. Encourage them to talk about the drawing and remember to praise different things: 'I love those bright colours', 'What's this interesting thing over here?', 'Tell me about your painting'. Not always 'That looks like a person' or 'You're good at drawing cars'. Display their drawings and paintings around the house or in a special place. Don't demand that drawings be 'good': all drawings are interesting.

Kids of almost any age can help to make birthday cards and wrapping paper. Display their works prominently on a wall or pegged to a piece of string rigged up inside.

THE ART BOX

An art box could have all or some of the materials listed below, depending on the age and capabilities of your child and whether they have access to it or you get it down from somewhere safe and supervise the contents carefully. Adjust your art supplies to suit all ages of kids in the house – for example, no plastic bags and no long string or ribbons for unsupervised kids.

Art box supplies:

- * A smock for each kid – and one for a visitor.
- * Paintbrushes – fat ones with short handles are best.
- * Poster paints – white, red, blue, yellow and black are a good start for mixing.
- * Big coloured crayons.
- * Big coloured pencils and a corresponding pencil sharpener.
- * Maybe felt-tip pens (although it's usually hard to wash out the marks, and toddlers and many preschoolers will inevitably leave lids off and mangle tips by pressing hard).
- * Little sponge shapes or potatoes for printing with paint. (Well, okay, don't leave potatoes in the art box.)
- * Sticky tape – the wider the better (and be careful that a dispenser doesn't have a nasty sharp edge).
- * A glue pot with a brush, or a pop-up glue stick.
- * Oil pastels (can be messy but have intense colours).
- * Coloured chalk.
- * Scissors made for children's use.
- * Keeping safety in mind, a collection of pieces of felt, icy-pole sticks, pipe cleaners, pots of glitter, fabrics, snippets of string and ribbons, wrapping-paper scraps, cut-out magazine pictures, dried seed pods and autumn leaves, cardboard tubes, egg cartons, streamers, bought feathers, buttons, and craft items saved from going out with the rubbish or bought in a craft shop. These can be used for collage or construction projects. (Beads can be a choking hazard or end up stuffed up noses.)

'My daughter loves cutting up the paper and sticking pieces onto pages without any particular method to the madness. She loves it when I join in but is happiest doing it side by side rather than trying to divvy up the cutting and the sticking. I used to try and help her cut around particular objects but I decided in the end that she was trying to do that herself anyway and was happiest with the result if it was her own work even if she missed the object she was trying to cut out all together. A lot of the time she is happiest watching and then copying rather than having me try and manipulate her hands/scissors/whatever for her. I step in with a helping hand when she wants it but I have to fight back the temptation sometimes to take over.' **CAROLINE, GLEN IRIS, VIC**



more info on art by kids

abc.net.au/abckids

The *Play School* website has a 'Make and Do' section, with craft suggestions, colouring-in and even recipes. From the ABC for Kids main page, click on 'Program A-Z', then 'Play School', then 'Make and Do'.

gymboree.com.au

Gymboree runs art classes for the under-fives. Check the website for your nearest branch.

marthastewart.com

Gobsmacking homemaker guru Martha Stewart has some great craft and making ideas on her site (choose 'Crafts' from the main page, or search 'children crafts' for a list of more kid-friendly ones). Please ignore how 'perfect' Martha's results are – she has a team of grown-up minions doing them, after all – but pinch ideas and focus on the fun kids have making things with you. One of the saddest things I ever saw was a British TV home-decoration presenter refuse to let his kids decorate the Christmas tree or hang their homemade decorations, because he wanted it to look all designery. It still gives me the whim-whams just thinking about it.

art for kids

Take your kid to an art gallery and explain what that's all about. Keep your eye out for opportunities to point out other art forms, at sculpture parks or public spaces, and old or modern buildings.



more info on art for kids

Most major Australian art galleries offer children's workshops or special exhibitions for children, including some for the under-fives. The best on offer are the Queensland Art Gallery's Toddler Tuesday and the Art Gallery of New South Wales's Tours for Tots. Check their websites for upcoming workshops and to book online.

ACT nga.gov.au
NSW gallerykids.com.au/tots
NT magnt.nt.gov.au
QLD qag.qld.gov.au/kids
SA artgallery.sa.gov.au
VIC ngv.vic.gov.au
TAS tmag.tas.gov.au
WA artgallery.wa.gov.au

music for kids

A baby starts making music with their cooing and their rattle, and it's all fun from there on.

Make tapes of music you like that's suitable for children and listen to them together. Point out when a different instrument is used or talk about who is singing at different stages of a song.

Don't restrict music to the 'made for children' variety – but be careful of adult concepts in the lyrics that will need to be explained. Music that works on two levels is good. A small girl I know loves Dave Graney and the Coral Snakes songs such as 'Feelin' Kinda Sporty' and 'I Held the Cool Breeze', without understanding the finer nuances of some of the lyrics but also without being disturbed by any of them. That sort of compromise is much easier for parents who've heard their 900th Wiggles song for the day.

Take your child to see free performances of classical and other music, but avoid frightening moments that might put them off, such as a sudden introduction to angry-sounding thrash metal that hurts their ears. Kids' ears will be damaged by rock-concert or pub-band level noise. Festival performances held outside or performances specially for kids (ask your local council what's coming up) are best.

Have family-and-friends singalongs or play and sing to DVDs and recordings at home so it's sometimes a passive experience and sometimes an interactive one. Compilation CDs or singalong tapes for the car are good, and kids can help choose what goes on.

The point of 'making music' is participation – and fun. Young children are rarely capable of playing complex music such as tunes or mastering the mouth organ. The kid shaking, banging and blowing on something can be their own music, or you can join in. Or you can get them to 'accompany' music. You or your musical friends or relatives can teach your child some skills and give them a few hints when the kid is a toddler or preschooler, but 'untrained' fun is good too.

THE MUSIC BOX

What you add to your box of musical instruments will depend on the age and capabilities of your child and whether they can get at it freely or you keep it somewhere safe and supervise the use of its contents closely when you bring it out. Don't give a child an expensive musical instrument and expect them not to break it: they're not old enough to have the mental or physical capacity to be responsible for fragile things.

- * Plastic containers filled with dried beans to shake (make sure the lid is secure) or shop-bought maracas.
- * Drums – you could supply saucepans and large, empty plastic yoghurt containers.
- * Wooden clap sticks.
- * Bells.
- * Whistles.
- * A stringed implement of some description (depending on the kid's age and destructive tendencies).
- * A xylophone.
- * Cymbals (saucepan lids are good).
- * Triangles (although these can be annoying because the various bits always get separated, and they don't ding properly without the little string holding them up or the dinging wand).
- * Tooting things.

BE COOL ABOUT KIDS & MUSIC

Some parents hate kids' songs and want their kids to listen to 'cooler' grown-up music. While some grown-up music is okay for kids, a lot of the lyrics can be just confusing, worrying and unnecessary. Much as it might drive you nuts, good kids' music is based on the study of how repetition, rhyme and simple and fun music tricks make kids happy and help them learn speaking, communicating and moving. Let them love it. Soon enough you can introduce them to your 'cool' stuff; they can roll their eyes and be appalled by your mortifying parent dancing.



more info on music for kids

Search 'Australian kids music' to see what you can find in the way of DVDs and CDs. ABC shops are also a good place to start. Apart from music you already like and may have on CDs or tapes or have compiled for travel, there is music for kids that is bearable for adults. And kids usually love anything by Paul Jamieson (Australian) or Raffi (US).

acmf.com.au

The Australian Children's Music Foundation is a non-profit organisation, started by former *Play School* presenter Don Spencer, aiming to bring and teach music to kids who wouldn't otherwise get that chance. It runs a song-writing contest, donates instruments, and shares music and song with kids in remote and disadvantaged areas and juvenile detention centres. Click 'shop' for the commercial arm, which sells sheet music and some of Mr Spencer's CDs, including useful times tables, alphabet songs and Aussie kid classics.

putumayo.com

World Playground is one of several collections of songs for kids and families released by Putumayo World Music. Includes a Pitjantjatjara version of 'Waltzing Matilda' ('Nyanpi Matilda') and some catchy tunes kids love to sing from Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere, including 'Three Little Birds', 'Mardi Gras Mambo' and 'Just Keep Goin' On'. Other kids' CDs are available.

kidsmusic.co.nz

kidsmusic.com.au

The Kids Music Company is a commercial entity started by two NZ mums who were also music teachers and who run workshops for preschoolers and older kids. For free stuff from the main Kiwi page, click 'Products', then 'Lyrics to download, or 'Reading Room', then 'Articles', then 'Why Music?' for some philosophy and good parenting info about music's benefits for development. There's a great links page for Kiwis and Aussies.

sfskids.org

The groovy San Francisco Orchestra site introduces kids to instruments, notes and concepts such as rhythm, pitch and harmony.

mamalisa.com

Children's songs and rhymes from around the world. It doesn't matter if you can't sing like Pink; bub will adore traditional ditties.

Rocket Ship Beach, Family Dance and Night Time

by Dan Zanes and friends, released by Festival Five Records.

Three CDs by a bunch of cool singers and musicians, including Rosanne Cash, Lou Reed, the Wonderland String Band and Rankin' Don ('Father Goose'), who get together to create a family-friendly sound with lots of interesting instruments and songs.

dance for kids

Dancing with your kid can start when you hold them as a baby and progress until you're teaching a preschooler elementary 'choreography'. Buy or borrow music DVDs and recordings with join-in ideas for small children. Some kids mightn't want to join in or follow movements and dances: let them sit it out if they like.

You'll see how presenters on TV shows such as *Hi-5* and *Play School* show kids how to copy a dance. Kids can also be encouraged to do their own free-form dancing. Preschoolers from the age of 4, say, may enjoy a non-competitive or non-performance-pressure dance group (or music group).

THE DARK SIDE OF DANCE

Avoid high-pressure dance lessons for little kids. Intense dancing lessons with an emphasis on a 'good' performance and the end-of-year concert being 'brilliant' can put undue stress on a little one. Dance classes for kids should have an emphasis on fun and feeling, not judgement. Beware, too, any dance academy or organisation where the little girls absorb dangerous messages from the conversation of older girls and teachers about staying 'thin' for ballet or other dance disciplines. This is a breeding ground for low self-esteem and eating disorders. Look for dance classes where there is an explicit philosophy about enjoyment, inclusion and the irrelevance of shape and size.



more info on dance for kids

gymboree.com.au

kindermusik.com.au

Both of these programs combine music and movement with learning for the under-fives. Check the websites for your nearest branch.