

# How is Art Therapy Beneficial to Children?



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As an art therapist who works with young children, I sometimes encounter parents who are hesitant about using art as a tool for child development. Reactions can range from, “So you just make art?” to “I can’t take mess eh”. It poses the question, what is “just” art? Can the process of art making be beneficial? Does it matter if my child is creative? Although some may regard art making and education as a luxury, simple creative activities can be considered some of the building blocks of child development.

## ***Fine Motor Coordination***

Many of the motions involved in making art, such as grasping pencils, tracing a line or scribbling with a crayon, are essential to the growth and development of fine motor skills in young children. This development will help your child with writing, buttoning a shirt, and tying shoelaces later on. Many preschool programs emphasize the use of scissors because it develops the skills children will need for writing.

## ***Language Development***

Making art, as well as describing and sharing it, provides opportunities for children to learn words for colors, shapes and actions. When toddlers are as young as a year old,

parents can do simple activities such as crumpling up paper and calling it a “ball.” Art making can also be a great opportunity for children to learn new vocabulary words regarding their projects.

## ***Cognitive development***

Experiences in the arts go hand in hand with learning. Children can practice critical thinking skills by making a mental plan or picture of what they intend to create and following through on their plan. On a deeper level, art actually seems to have an impact on the brain’s neural connections, which act as the wiring for learning. The senses have to operate and deep thinking is a requirement. This leads to the development of skills such as recognizing the difference between abstract and reality, understanding patterns, and making observations about the world.

## ***Social Development***

Establishing social skills at a young age is incredibly important for regular development. Art trains children not just to focus on themselves but also on others. When children work together to create art, they learn to share, to interact with others, to be responsible for clean up, and to put materials away. They realise the importance of teamwork, and can appreciate differences between people and their individual perceptions.

## ***Emotional Development***

One of the main goals of art therapy is the use of art as an emotional outlet, however even casual art making can help children to develop and better understand their feelings. Being angry or hurt is not always easy to describe in words, but a child can put these emotions into a drawing or painting, and make it easy for themselves and others to comprehend. Getting their emotions out in a creative way can be both therapeutic and insightful.

## ***Self Control and Flexibility***

Things don’t always go as planned, and sometimes an activity may take longer to complete than expected. Opportunities to show children that by waiting you get a good result are excellent in teaching patience. What happens if your child’s sculpture

accidentally breaks? Children are forced to deal with the imperfections of real life in a more controlled and comfortable environment, where they can practice skills in patience and flexibility. A more flexible child is happier, plays better with others, and finds ways to become even more creative.

## **Self-Esteem**

By selecting crafts that are age appropriate you are giving your child the opportunity to experience the feeling of accomplishment. Unlike the accomplishment of taking steps, or finishing a meal, art has a tangible prize at the end – the art itself. The child can look at it, hold it and show it to others. As children improve and see their own progress, their self-confidence will continue to grow. Art can also improve confidence by opening up dialogue about situations that may be hard to deal with or share.

