

Creating With Open Ended Materials

WHAT ARE THEY?

Before you can use and enjoy open-ended materials with your children to their fullest, you need to know what they are. Open ended materials are those which young children can use for creative play in any way they like, within your guidelines for safety and clean up. Open-ended materials are like open-ended questions. There is no "one" answer or one "right" way to use them. Any child can enjoy, and be successful in creating with crayons, markers, clays, paper and glue, finger-paint and paint. Using open-ended materials nurtures both the child's creativity and self esteem. Blocks, dress ups, props, recycled items, and natural materials like seeds, earth, sand, and water are also open ended materials which can be used in many ways. This section is about open ended art materials.

DRAWINGS AND SCRIBBLINGS

Every day, give your child some time and a special place to use crayons or markers of various types with paper to scribble or draw whatever he or she likes. If possible, buy large sheets of drawing or colored paper; you can also recycle the blank side of discarded computer paper, the inside of cereal boxes, paper grocery bags, shirt cardboards, even discarded newspaper. Show your interest and admiration of the child's creations by describing what you see him or her doing. "You really like to use a lot of yellow. Is that your happy color?...I see you are using lots of up and down lines and some round and round lines...Tell me about this." To interest your child in written language, print whatever he or she says about the design or drawing on the paper, including the child's name and the date.

COLLAGE

Use an old shoebox to collect scraps of material, bottle caps, bread tags, unused trading stamps, buttons, Styrofoam pieces, QTips, cut up straws, bits of yarn and scraps of foil and paper that your child can use with glue to make collages on stiff paper or recycled cardboard of any type. If you are worried about the glue, structure the activity by having the child keep his or her work on a tray or cookie sheet. Teach the child that only a small drop of glue (squeeze bottles work best) will work just fine. Collage designs are interesting for the child to create and to talk about, and they also help develop eye and hand coordination.

PAINT

Nothing seems to make a child feel as special, creative and powerful as putting vibrant, thick paint on big pieces of plain paper. Covering a blank sheet with bright colors of watercolor paint develops creativity, self esteem and eye-hand coordination skills. Painting also stimulates the senses of sight, touch and smell. Any recycled paper can be used...even newspaper or paper bags, but children should have a few big paintbrushes and real tempera paint. Buy red, blue, yellow and white paint from a hobby store for starters (liquid tempera is easiest) and let your child experience the magic, joy and pride of mixing his or her own orange, brown, green or purple. Use a muffin tin to hold small amounts of several colors of thick paint with a brush for each color (you can even use cheap household trim brushes). Add a few drops of liquid dish soap to the paint. Put newspaper on your kitchen table and let the child paint there, or outside at a picnic table. The child can wear an old shirt "smock" and help clean up.

FINGER PAINT

You can make your own finger paint in several ways, and let the child use it on the white shiny paper that meats are wrapped in. You can recycle this paper or buy some from a butcher or grocer. One way to make finger paint is to make a batch of strawberry or raspberry "Danish Dessert." You only need a spoonful, so it lasts a long time. Store what is not used in the refrigerator. You can also use Eagle Brand condensed milk to which tempera color is added. Another easy way to make your own finger paint is to add tempera color to a little liquid starch or to thin wallpaper paste or flour and water paste. Shaving cream can also be used as finger paint, right on the table itself.

PLAY DOUGH

Homemade play dough takes only a few minutes to make out of ingredients you probably have in your own kitchen. Commercial products make stains, get dry and crumbly, and cost a lot. Your own play dough costs a few pennies, and since it is made of natural materials, cleans up perfectly. Keep play dough handy for you and your child to use daily at a table or on a cookie sheet. Play dough is pleasant to feel and squeeze; it is a great stress reliever, strengthens hand and finger muscles, lets the child create whatever he wants (a POWERFUL esteem builder), and offers many opportunities to use language as the child tells what he or she is making. Recipe: Set aside 2 C. flour in big bowl. Heat 1 1/2 cups water with 1/2 cup of salt. Stir to dissolve salt and add any food color. As it begins to simmer, add 1 T. cooking oil and 1 T. alum; pour the hot mixture into the bowl of flour; mix. Knead smooth as it cools. Keep in air tight bag or container; no refrigeration needed.

PLAY DOUGH GAMES

When you use a material in a new way, you are modeling creativity for your child. You can play a word game as your child uses the play dough, a game which will increase his or her vocabulary during the fun. Ask the child what he or she is doing and/or can do with the play dough. Print the child's words on a piece of paper as he or she tells and demonstrates such words as pound, knead, squeeze, squish, stretch, break, press, roll, pinch, twist. Show the child the list and read the words. You can also play a "mystery detective" game with the smooth, non-sticky play dough made from the recipe in this book. Make some flat round shapes like cookies. Have the child leave the room or hide the eyes. Take each flattened circle and press it against various items in the room. If you are in the kitchen, some of your "mystery prints" might be an electrical outlet, the side of a basket, the corner of a picture frame, a fork, a grater or colander, the raised buttons on the TV remote or the telephone, or the decoration on a trivet or glass bowl. Have your child come back and try to guess where each print came from.

CORNSTARCH CLAY

This is an alternative to play dough that is lusciously smooth, soft and white; it can be painted when it's completely air dried, and it dries without cracking. Combine 1 cup cornstarch, 2 cups of baking soda and 1 1/4 cups of cold water in a saucepan and cook over medium low heat. Stir constantly until it congeals. When it looks like thick mashed potatoes, it is done! Set it out to cool before use; keeps well in an airtight bag

SILLY PUTTY

Make your own silly putty! Put 2 T. of liquid starch on a plate or right on the table. Add about 1 T. or more of white glue. Keep mixing and handling it until it blends into a small ball of silly putty. If it stays stringy and will not blend, add a drop of glue. If it is too dry and brittle, add a drop of starch. When you learn the method you can make up any amount. Add food color or tempera for color. Children will love the elasticity of silly putty and the way it stretches and oozes.

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