



Parent's Tips for Creative Children

by artist Robert John Bosler

Children are naturally creative. We can see this creativity in so much of what they do. Sometimes our children show *artistic* qualities very early, and we consider them to have what is regularly regarded as talent. But so too is a child who pulls things apart - boys particularly of course - exhibiting a creative element in what they're doing. And a child whom some might not regard as 'talented' will enjoy drawing in some way.

This book is to assist the parent in developing the child's pleasure no matter the child's artistic nature. You can use the tips presented here in many different ways to provide positive development for your child.

As a parent, you are probably reading this because you are interested in your child's artistic development, so the booklet contains art-specific information for you. It can be applied to children of a very young age, and onward throughout their development into maturity.

Your child's artistic development will blossom, at best. This might cause some anxiety in a parent as one considers the financial difficulties a career

in art is surely to bring. However, let's not worry about that for a child at an early age. The gift of art will always bring your child unforeseen and magical moments in their life and we are well advised to do what we can to develop these qualities.



Most children of course will not seek a professional career in art. Whatever you can develop in your child at an early age will, however, form a powerful framework upon which their mature life is built. Creativity is at the core of all a human being does, and art teaches us about creativity in a very potent way.

Sadly, it is common for a child's artistic qualities to be compromised in later life, and even to be blocked. Difficulties lie ahead for creative kids. There are many art teachers who can crucify a child's joy of art, often unwittingly and while meaning well. Even in mainstream society your child will meet well-meaning people who can inadvertently be destructive for your child's creativity.

I am continually meeting and dealing with people who, in middle age or later, express regret for what someone may have said about their work in their childhood or teenage years, stopping them from pursuing their art. Just a few moments with them at the easel brings their joy flooding back -usually accompanied by tears of happiness. It is very unfortunate that art teachers are the worst at causing these problems!

So our role in parenting is to do our best to make strong what is inside them now, to fortify and guard them against the pitfalls ahead, and to make solid that source of joy they can have for the rest of their life.

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Our natural response in looking at our kids' work will automatically see that the child's work could improve. Let's face it - they're not doing as a kid what Leonardo did as an adult. It's just automatic then that we see our kid's work as raw, undeveloped and crude.

Here's the key to your kid's creative happiness: *It's us as adults who need to change.*

The child's work is, in fact, perfectly developed! We are the ones who have

to learn 'how' to see what they've done.

There are some practical things which achieve this. I hope the following is of help for you.

Some simple things make all the difference:

Resist the "That's good darling" comment then continue along with what you are doing. We're all busy, and as adults we often have very pressing responsibilities. We may think we've said something positive to a child by this comment, but what the child feels is fobbed off, unfulfilled, and even unworthy. We need to understand the child has just given birth to a whole new world in their art (to them, at least)- imagine that! And here, with our best of intentions, by this comment we have shown them we don't care.



Do take the time to sit with your child, side by side (not opposite each other), with you and their art. If you're busy, tell them you *want* to spend time with their art and take a moment to arrange it.

You are a lighthouse or a bulldozer. You'll be sending signals one way or another and whatever you do, you want to minimize the impulse to exert your will and art knowledge on them. When you're talking about their art - now is not the time for that. That might sound contrary to your instincts, but if you get this right now you'll open up beautiful opportunities to have those discussions later. Right now, you need to be extremely aware of the types of signals you are sending.

Here's the reason for this. Creativity is a natural joy. Sharing it with others, however, can be very scary - even for a child to his or her parents. Your child is vulnerable when they do so.

Practical ways to get this right:

Ask questions! Once you get your child talking - about anything - *because* of their art, you've got it made. You've achieved it.

The best way to get them talking is to ask questions. Start with a positive, something like: "I like the way that part goes up and around, did you choose that colour for a reason?"

Listen. Listen to what they say and ask another question. Try to make the questions about their art, but if the child is reticent, ask something relevant to what they've responded with, about any subject that you think the child is interested in. This will at least help them feel good about what they've done and what they have said about it, and they'll get the message that it's good to share their art with you.



Once you get used to doing this, you'll be able to ask questions about their work so that soon enough they're pepped up and rambling on about amazing this and fantastic that!

Resist the "It goes this way" comment. Your child has probably created something which is meant to be an image of a real-world thing: a house or clouds or tree, we all have seen this. We also see that the thing is crudely done. One of the strongest impulses we have is to then start instructing the child, even very gently, to do it another way - a way we think is better. We do this because we naturally want to help the child. However, it's one of the biggest causes of a child feeling unhappy about their work, and can be extremely damaging.

It doesn't matter at all what the thing looks like, or how crudely it's done. What matters is that the child *did* it. They did their best, and they did it with creative commitment. Whatever they do, try to see it as something new and special brought into the world *exactly* as it is. Take pleasure in that, and in the act of your child bringing it into the world.

You don't have to be false about this - your child will of course sense that immediately. Instead, develop your own ability to take real joy in everything your child has done, starting simply with the fact they've done it.

Talk about color. “Gee that’s a lovely blue,” to re-affirm their choice and to show you agree with that, and to share in the natural joy of color in our world.



An excellent way of helping a child open up is to ask the child to show which pencil or brush or texta was used for that color. Take hold the implement they give you, marvel at it visibly, and give it back - even ask for it again! That might sound strange but what it does is validate their choice of implement and colour *and* what it has done. These are subtle, but very powerful and effective signals you’re achieving.

Those tools created their masterpiece and you want to show you are excited by the tools he or she chose. This also helps to affirm the child’s dedication to creating their work, and the wonder and positivity of the result.

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Now that you’ve listened to your child, you can refer to their artwork at a later time, when you’re doing something completely different. You may be driving in the car, or out for a walk. Make the effort to remark about their art in a positive and easy tone. This shows you have listened and absorbed their creative efforts (and more profoundly, who they are) and that these efforts have grown to become a natural part of your being. Your child may not respond effusively to this, but rest assured you will have made a profound change in their life by this simple remark.

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Take the moment to have your child sign and date every artwork they do. The act of having your child do this sends them the message that you treasure what they’ve done. They’ll feel wonderful about doing it - and later when you’re going past a painting in a gallery or in a café or shop

window, or even with one at home - you can point to that artist's signature and say "They signed it just like you did!" Of course, the child will feel warmed and secured by this adult connection to their (vulnerable) creative work. And, it's a really lovely thing to share in as they do it.

Dating a work is important, because even a few months down the track you'll probably not be able to remember exactly when the work was done, while you may feel you will remember now. It's much more difficult when the years pass to remember even what year the child created a particular piece. You're making memories much more intensely liveable and valuable by getting the date down now.

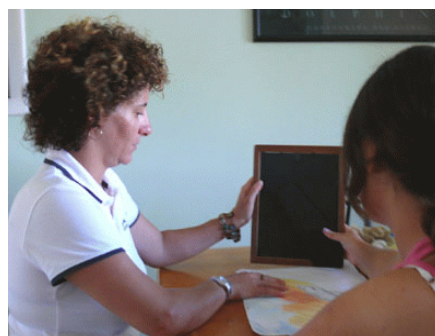
And many years later, when your child has grown into an adult, he or she will be forever thankful for having that time of their life captured for them.



Frame your child's works.

Even a piece of heavy cardboard with a square cut in it will do, but a very effective frame can be found in two-dollar discount shops where they stock a range of common prints. Make a show of removing the print and replacing it with your child's

work! How wonderful your child will feel, knowing you have taken these efforts to treasure what they do - even if it's just a few squiggles. For these few extra efforts, your child grows tremendously in self-esteem and joy - an incredibly valuable achievement not obtained by filing the work in a cupboard. Re-arrange the works if your child is creating a stack of them, sharing in which choice to display in the frame with your child.



Then, put the framed piece on the wall, in a pride of place, next to other artwork if you want, and be sure to tell everyone who visits!

Was this helpful? We'd love to hear from you. Would you prefer some changes to be made, or have any suggestions? Are there other things you'd like included? Just want to say hello... please take a moment to touch base with us and let us know your thoughts by clicking on the link below. And please check back regularly, as we'll add to this booklet for you.

Feedback & Thoughts

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