

Art and Craft with young children

Art and craft activities are an important part of young children's experience: they are great fun, young children usually love them, and they are also a significant learning tool. It is worth investing in a few general pre-school art and craft ideas books, particularly if you are new to working with this age group. They will give a flavour of the kind of things that young children can do, and many of the ideas can then be adapted to use with in a Christian context. You may want to link art and craft activities to a particular Bible story, to a natural season, to a festival in the Church's year, to a prayer activity ...the opportunities are endless.

Some things to think about ...

- if you are new to working with young children, take time to understand what children across this age group can and can't do, particularly in terms of using paint, crayons, scissors, glue, playdough.
- Most children across this age group cannot colour inside given lines, but they enjoy making marks with crayons and scribble colouring.
- Most children across this age group will not be able to cut out precise shapes, though older ones will enjoy simple cutting activities. Use child safety scissors. Pre-cutting shapes is sometimes a necessary part of the preparation for craft activities with this age group.
- Use glue sticks for sticking paper and thin card. It is easier for the children and less mess. Aim for one glue stick per child. Sharing gluesticks makes the craft activity frustrating – and there are other opportunities for children to learn about sharing.
- Do not be afraid of painting. The children love it – and parents love it that you will do it with them! With due preparation you can have painting without it becoming a nightmare ... even in church! Cover all table/floor surfaces well, (old shower curtains make good table covers), provide overalls (old adult shirts, washed and with the sleeves shortened and made into cuffs with elastic make good overalls) and have a bowl of water, soap (but be mindful of skin allergies) and some paper towels at hand.
- On your 'welcome' information, advise parents that children will be doing craft activities and so not to bring them in smart clothes.
- Design craft activities to include a message related to the story or the topic you have been doing. Although the children cannot read this, it can be an opportunity for other members of the family to pick up on the theme of the session, and it provides a clue for absent parents who want to talk with their child about what s/he has been doing.
- Always make a *here's one I made earlier* so that children and their carers can see what the finished article looks like.

- If carers are part of the group, encourage them to work with their child. It's a valuable opportunity to share in something together, and it frees other helpers to help the carer who has more than one child.
- Have some pencils handy so that carers can name the children's work straightaway. Put the finished items on a table by the door so that they are not forgotten when it is time to go home.
- Plan ahead how children will get their work home e.g. have some trays for playdough models
- Always use good quality materials
- Although children do like to take home something that they have made, collective art projects are good to do as well.
- Keep a record and a sample of the craft activities that have worked well for future reference.

Building a craft store ...

Here are some basic items to gather for a craft store:

- Chubby stump crayons
- Gluesticks
- Ready-mix paints
- Thicker, short handled paintbrushes
- Sponges (you can buy a variety of sponge shapes from resource catalogues and craft shops, and you can make your own by cutting up washing up sponges, the sort that have a pan scrub on one side because they provide children with a firm surface to hold.)
- PVA glue and spreaders for heavier weight gluing
- Craft sticks
- A4 coloured paper and card (thin card will go through the photocopier but thicker card will be needed for sturdier projects)
- A4 white paper and card
- A3 paper is also useful
- Paper plates
- Vivelle or self-adhesive felt
- Collage materials, e.g, oddments of wool, sequin mesh, different kinds of paper, corrugated paper and card. Think particularly of different textures
- Large punches (of the kind used in card making) especially a circle, square, heart, and flower. They save hours that would otherwise be spent cutting out shapes.

Useful items to save ...

- Rolls from wrapping paper
- "Pringles" tubes
- clean polystyrene trays
- old greeting cards for the pictures
- old magazines and catalogues, especially toy and gardening catalogues (Space can be an issue but I usually let them store up for a while, and then have an evening when I sit in front of a good film and cut out all potentially useful pictures! Store pictures according to subject in labelled folders or large envelopes.)
- left over bits of wrapping paper

Where can you buy art and craft materials?

- Specialist art and craft shops or children's educational shops– but they can be expensive. Check to see whether they offer a discount arrangement for children's

groups.

- Catalogues such as Baker Ross (tel 0870 458 5454; www.bakerross.co.uk) or S&S Services (tel.01789 765323; info@ss-services.co.uk)
- Find out if your local authority has a play resource centre where you can buy low-cost art and craft materials, and they may also have a scrap store (safe waste donated by businesses), materials from which may be free or sold at very low cost. Your group will probably have to pay an annual membership fee, but it can be well worth it, and if you register your church (not your particular group) then the membership can have wider benefits.

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