

Practical Tips for Craft Activity Sessions with Under Fives (In toddler group sessions)

Planning

Be age specific - consider little fingers

Remember drying time, storage and preparation

Think splodgy

Safety

Make it easy for yourselves

Enjoy the journey

Cherish, cherish, cherish!

The importance of this activity.

We cannot emphasize enough the value of play through creative expression. It is difficult to refer to 'craft' when it sometimes implies a 'Blue Peter - Here's One I Made Earlier' experience. The truth is it can be a very effective part of the relationship building within a group.

Seeing it as creative expression opens up more opportunities.

PAINTING!!

Paint is not always a practical option but if you do have the opportunity, make the most of it!

Some parents and carers are delighted that something messy and splodgy is offered as they don't relish the idea of it at home! (and someone is going to clear it all up for them.. that is real servant ministry!!)

With some careful planning re practicalities the children (and adults) can have a very fulfilling time. Painting and exploring the material can be very therapeutic. So much is shared when hands are busy and occupied and there is a sense of relaxed enjoyment and encouragement. . There are real opportunities for sharing and deeper conversation around or across the craft table, time for cherishing the children as they express themselves. Those who benefit from the craft activities are not just the children!

This could also be said for the Play Dough table.

Aprons are a must for children (and possibly some adults (especially your helpers!) and the ones with long sleeves are the best to protect clothes. (You can buy them from IKEA etc)

The lids of ice cream or margarine tubs can be used to squirt the paint on (then thrown away afterwards. Plates need washing up.

Have at least one helper from your team to be on craft table duty. They can oversee (but not take over!) the activity, squirting out the paint, distributing the materials etc) If you leave the paint bottle free it will be used up very quickly and there will be more wasteful use!

Ice cream lids are excellent for portion control and too much paint just gets out of control!

Paint rollers from craft stockists or washing up sponges cut smaller are very effective and don't use lots of paint. You can also get a good coverage with less paint.

Cotton buds are good for dotting eyes or applying small dots of PVA glue etc.

Black paint can quickly spoil everything. If you need it for eyes or tiger stripes etc, Squirt only a small amount out should be used with minimum. Restrict it to a very small blob and replenish as required.

Stencilling

Really effective and easy for toddlers to do with a bit of adult assistance. Make your own simple cut out stencils using card (or old cereal box card) Children can sponge paint through the openings for a pleasing effect.

Glitter

is a delight for children (not necessarily welcomed by parents or those clearing up!) You could use glitter glues or paints which contain glitter.

What looks good and is easy to do?

Think about the abilities of the children in your group? Can they actually handle the paintbrushes? Are they just learning about what happens when you dip the brush in the paint or roll the roller across the paper? What does a crayon taste like?! What happens when I hold the runny glue up in the air.. does it drip off spreader in a runny ribbon? Remember children are discovering new things all the time and this doesn't stop at the craft table!

What are their fine motor skills? Are we expecting too much?

Try to plan for the children to be able to be free to have a go without too much parental input. (although we would stress it is important for parents to be with the children at the activity)

If you don't think you are any good at drawing, it doesn't matter. Little children are not judgemental and a simple face with two eyes, a nose and a mouth is great. Simple shapes are good to fill with paint or collage. Try drawing different animals from this simple face shape... tigers, dogs, monkeys etc.

Cut out or draw simple shapes to fill with paint or sticking on.

Cutting and sticking

is great but you may need to do the cutting beforehand. (If using scissors, think of safety and only offer age appropriate materials - don't forget left handed ones)

Use clear, perspex rectangular boxes (better for shelf storage) with lids to store cut scraps of coloured paper, wrapping paper, tissue paper, fabric etc and colour code some of them so you can grab and go. Always have extra boxes on hand so you can keep any remainders from a session for next time.

Have some hypoallergenic non scented wipes for hand wiping at the table..

Be careful of cross infection (especially with runny noses in the winter!)

Parental supervision is to be encouraged for the cherishing experience. Valuing the process - not always aiming for perfect end product.

Important to have other team members on hand to cuddle babies so that mum, dad or other carer can give time to older child at craft table.

Special Occasions

For special occasions, you might offer an activity with materials bought from a supplier, e.g. wooden mobile templates to paint (they have them with wind chimes from some catalogues)

Stickers... little children love stickers so you could buy some sheets and snip them so each child has a little sheet from which to peel the individual stickers and stick them on something else. They love it!

Masks and Headbands.

We think little children prefer a headband rather than full face mask. Cut bands to fit the head circumference. Then decorate a face shape or other type of image to attach to the band, This sits above the brow line like a headdress.

Plain white (sick bags!) can be transformed into hand puppets! - happy sad or jumping for joy!

Drying

Use a washing line with pegs to hang up the items to dry. It is effective, out of the way and decorates the room during the session.

Always have a washable marker pen for naming the completed items.

Don't be afraid of offering a blank piece of paper for general painting! Its free play!

Have a washing up bowl with water for rinsing hands but mind infection control aspects re paper towels etc.

Have a monitor for washing up the paint brushes and rollers. Don't assume or expect the refreshments helpers to do this messy job!

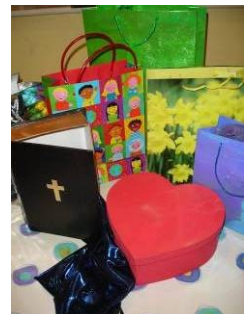
Hurray for Cheap shops!

A good supply of very reasonably priced craft materials and all sorts of things to resource your toddler group!

Bags & Boxes

Children love the suspense created in wondering what might be inside. Look out for different coloured gift bags and ones with lovely designs that you can use in your sessions - from cheap shops, stationery suppliers etc.

Boxes of different shapes and sizes can be bought ready to paint or decoupage from Hobbycraft.



Paper plate bags

See how easily you can make a simple bag using two circles (they could be paper plates) folded in half and then joined to make a heart shaped bag to decorate.



Choose the best

The Parent Toddler Group is a significant ministry an outreach opportunity for the church. It should be acknowledged and valued as such. Go to your church leadership/committee and present a report on the group and its ministry with the young families. Invite the PCC members (especially those who hold the purse strings) to come and visit!!

Buy only good quality materials e.g. paint brushes etc and crayons that are cheap will break and be a risk to safety.

Choose those who enjoy crafts and creative expression to help with this aspect of your group and encourage delegation of tasks.

Team Building

Why not have a craft evening for team or invite parents along too making things or cutting in advance for an activity. Make it an evening social. Bring a bottle! Have fun!

If you want to recruit volunteers, jot down a Job Description listing the things this role entails. People are often wary of volunteering into a commitment that may be too far reaching and becomes burdensome.

Holding the baby...

Mums, dads or carers may often have two young children to look after at the craft table, or a toddler who would like their undivided attention while baby is kept out of the paint pots! Why not encourage helpers to look out for opportunities to assist. Time at the craft table can be a very special moment for adult and child to share an activity, talk or do something together. So help make things easier by offering to hold the baby.

More tips to come as time goes on.....

References & Resource Ideas

- Sunday Club material -(Children's Ministry/Kingsway, Scripture Union, Kevin Mayhew etc) for a specific teaching session
- 'Big Books'* (SU) for multi-purpose outlines for pre-school groups (not necessarily just Church groups on Sundays - also toddler groups and worship services)
- 'Here's One I Made Earlier' & Here's Another One I made Earlier'*
- 'Pretty Much Everything You Need to Know about Working with Under Fives' by Judith Wigley (pages 122-123 on creative craft activities)
- Australian Woman's weekly
- Usborne Books Publications
- Charity shop & school fair finds for craft books (even if they look like they come from the 1960's)
- Ideas from your local pre-school or from other churches you are linked with.
- Reception teachers and people you know who are creative but may not be able to attend the sessions you run. They also have handy craft tips and books you can borrow

- Catalogues for craft supplies - often have pages of ideas and picture you can use without necessarily buying the products! (Baker Ross or S& S Services)
- Websites with ideas and references - even instructions
- Some specialist suppliers may give discounts to children's groups.