

## Simple Craft Activities for Under Fives

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Claire ran a session at the 2008 Children's Ministry Conference in Eastbourne. Here is the basis of her presentation.

***'Wondering how to 'survive' creative/ craft activities? Practical ideas and tips for 'making' and 'doing'. Takes account of developmental stages of children and common issues for busy leaders and helpers running toddler groups and Sunday /midweek church groups. Come and be inspired and encouraged!'***

### Introduction

The title for this seminar is **'Simple Crafts for the Under Fives'** and it's just one of the topics within the Under Fives stream this weekend. Firstly my apologies for being a little more focused on parent toddler groups as this is my background.

I'm going to be concentrating on tips for **enjoying** and making the most of craft and creative activities with this age group. The focus must be the enjoyment and needs of the CHILD within this context!

Now I wonder if the thought of craft activities with the Under Fives fills you with excitement and anticipation. or a sense of dread and anxiety? ... or perhaps a mixture or you're going along nicely!?

Whatever we think, the benefits seriously outweigh the disadvantages. God is the source of all creativity and when we 'create' we reflect the image of our Creator.

Just to get a feel for the extent of your involvement, let's have a show of hands ...

### Who is involved with running or helping with

- Sunday groups with this age group more or less every week?
- Midweek toddler groups? (with parents or carers accompanying the children)
- Monthly Children's specials (with a wider age range)
- Annual children's clubs?
- Crèche and baby focused groups?
- Other?!

Or maybe you're just thinking about it or supporting those who do!

Well the practical considerations will vary with each context. Each will have its own opportunities and constraints but there are some factors common to all.

So where do we start and how do we go on? We need to ask these questions before we set off into the world of 'splodge and splatter', 'cutting and sticking', glitter and glue' (did I say 'glitter!!), toilet roll (oopps kitchen roll inserts) and the Blue Peter image of crafts with a handy 'here's one I made earlier'.

Coming away for a weekend with your team (if you have one) or perhaps on your own, is an opportunity to stop, reflect away from the busyness of church life and to look at things in a new way.

Let's just stop for a moment and ask ourselves what is the purpose... why do we offer craft activities?

Many of us learn from 'doing' and getting involved, rather than simply absorbing a message by sitting and listening or watching. There's a great book on Learning Styles by Marlene LeFever\*, a regular main speaker at these conferences. She explains that we all communicate and learn in different ways. Not everyone will see themselves as creative and visual so it's important to see this creative opportunity as a multi sensory experience as well as just something to make or do.

Children (and adults) can gain so much during a time of relaxed 'hands on' time and it can offer so much if offered to the under fives. It's also about choosing, perhaps a craft activity may be offered as just one doing activity during a session and some will want to join in and others won't. Children's needs must be first and foremost.

Creative craft activities offer:

- Time for play – such an essential part of learning, relationships, communication and blossoming spirituality.
- Creative expression – some of us are more inclined to express ourselves through making and doing but we can all be encouraged and valued.
- Sensory stimulation - as children explore the materials and sometimes get messy!
- A Community experience – sharing and listening to each other or chatting in the process of doing
- Spiritual experience as children wonder and explore in response to something they have seen, heard or imagined.
- Choosing – so important in respecting the needs of little children
- Fun and enjoyment
- Valuing the children in the process of doing - not always needing to achieve an end product
- A sense of achievement in creating something to cherish (whatever that looks like) or making something together
- An opportunity to cherish
- An activity to keep them occupied or to fill time

But the end product is **not** always the most important part. With little children and adults, it is the process – the journey experience rather than having something just so that Mummy or Granny can stick on the fridge door.

In fact lets just take a moment to reflect... lets ask ourselves the question

- For whose benefit are the creative crafts activities offered?
- Do we set our own standards for these activities – are they child centered/appropriate?

One of the biggest hurdles for adults to get over is their own expectations of how snazzy the crafts should be when a very simple activity is the answer.

Lets be really honest and I count myself in this...Is there sometimes a tendency to want to produce something impressive for parents, carers or the congregation to show that we are being productive and imaginative in our efforts?

Sometimes the anxiety and desire to produce a satisfying end product is to prove we are doing a good job. Getting too ambitious or complicated with crafts for the under fives can be counter productive and lead to a pressure to please for the child instead

of a freedom to enjoy and explore their own learning and creativity at their own level and pace.

It can also prevent other potential helpers coming forward if the 'standard' of crafts at a particular group is deemed too high to attain or keep up with.

We as leaders and helpers need to remember what is important for the CHILDREN above all else but be realistic about what motivates us as adults in this experience..

### **Types of craft or creative activities seem to fall into categories-**

- Bible Stories & lesson reminders
- Aids to worship or play
- Crafts as Gifts
- Seasonal Items
- Souvenirs
- Free expression opportunities\*

There is an important difference between what we see as a 'guided craft' (here's one I made earlier') and the opportunity for little children to express themselves freely using materials provided.

My explorations into Godly Play\* and children's spirituality has made me much more relaxed these days as I give children the opportunity to express themselves using materials provided rather than always directing their efforts or putting them under a certain pressure to make something from an example within a limited time frame.

### **Developmental considerations**

Of course, within the 'under fives' or pre-school category there is an enormous developmental range as we include birth to five years. So much is happening and at different rates. Without going into too much detail (see extra handout), it is important to tailor the activity to the capabilities of the child. It is also important to be inclusive so that children with special needs can participate, make choices and feel involved.

We tend to focus most on the 2-5 years when thinking about under fives.. What is considered a 'baby' will vary but perhaps if we think of them as up to 1 year. Even within the 1-2 year early wobbly toddler period, we can offer opportunities to play with materials (with safety in mind) they can explore and learn through messy play and make splodgy marks, hand and footprints with help.

Its never too early to start although we can make life easier for everyone if we are able to separate babies and young toddlers in to a group of their own if we have enough helpers and time and space to do this (not always possible!) At this point may I make a recommendation that you look at how your baby sessions at church are perceived. Are they seen as a babysitting service or valued, planned and prayed for within the context of children's ministry in your church?

### **Prayer & Planning**

It goes without saying that everything we do for God, including the arty stuff needs prayer and discernment.

- Prayer
- Does the church know your needs?
- Budget? Do you subsidise the costs of materials or do you have a fund allocated for this? (fundraising for crafts could also help raise awareness)
- A team approach if possible – people with different skills and gifts and time to help with certain tasks and delegate!!
- Could you meet as a social to plan, prepare or make what you need?
- Ideas? – do you have resources e.g. books, session plans, patterns for templates – there are plenty out there!
- Materials – recycled or donated? (There are places called ‘Scrapstores’ set up by local authority waste management for inspiration and materials) Could you appeal for basic set up?
- Storage and Space? – How do you store the materials you need? Can you store certain basics in one place? Are they clearly labeled and sorted for easy use and recall?
- Could you keep examples of things you have made for future reference?

**Always consider:**

- The children’s needs as a priority
- Keeping things simple
- The developmental abilities of the children
- Concentration span!
- Time limits – especially if glue, clay or paint has to dry out first!
- Washing up and clearing away requirements
- Perhaps a project will take a couple of weeks or some preparation of the first stage- is the age group going to understand this?
- Health & Safety including non-toxic materials, choking, allergies and first aid.
- Opportunities for reflecting different ethnic/cultural images
- Providing the best you can afford re materials – felt pens, etc
- Recycling and use of paper
- Creating hassle free sessions – sufficient pens, scissors etc and time for the activity without rushing. Play background music while the session runs. Children will not always want to or understand about sharing so do make sure you have enough materials to make life easier.
- Encourage your helpers and parents/carers to cherish and celebrate the results that may be presented at the ends – reflecting on the picture or craft item
- Choice – pre-school children often wish to exercise their own choice and we must offer them opportunities for choice in the colours they want, the way they stick them down or what way up they want a picture to be.

Now let’s get on with some of the practical examples for craft activities:

As you will see, I have brought along my collection of examples of craft items we have made and paint features in many! This is because the toddler group we run allows for a two hour period with a craft table open all session. Pictures are hung out to dry with pegs on a handy ‘washing line’ which adorns our hall and celebrates what we have made. Remember I also have the parents and carers present during the session.

Being a fairly creative person, I used to be ambitious with my craft projects and would often spend time cutting out shapes by the dozen the night before. I wonder what my motivation was to achieve pleasing effects! Was it always children focused?

Now I go a lot simpler and want to create the opportunity for children to have freedom within the session and to choose how they want to express themselves using the materials provided.

Just because we have referred to a story about a lost sheep, they may not want to make a cotton wool sheep as a take home reminder (although some may!)

I tend to gather bits and pieces at home in handy storage boxes and try to imagine what a child would want to do that allows a pleasurable experience (not what an adult would like to take home!)

If you run a Sunday group, the reality is that you are in a temporary room or hall used for other purpose, you have to set up and clear away and have about ten minutes for the making activity before its home time. Paint may not always be an easy consideration.

### **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 re 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**

I love it! Really effective and easy for toddlers to do with a bit of adult help. 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.

### **TOP TIPS ....**

#### **Paint:**

Use ice cream box lids for squirting paint (to save paint)  
Sponges and sponge rollers are very popular and cover a lot of surface quite quickly  
Make your own card stencils with simple shapes to sponge paint over for good effect.  
Dry pictures on a 'washing line'  
Aprons or old shirts are a must  
Do you have time for paint to dry before home-time?  
Some children don't like mess – others do!!  
Some prefer the play with water afterwards in addition to or more than the painting activity!  
How do you manage hand/face washing and clearing away?  
Finger painting can be very imaginatively used  
Not all children like getting messy but lots do!!  
Some parents seem to appreciate these opportunities done away from home!!

### **Crayons**

Could be a choking hazard if they get too small  
Need a lot of pressure to make on the paper to make any marks  
Can be messy and unsatisfying

### **Chalk**

Not good for little tots and can break, cause dust and be eaten

### **Felt Pens**

Great if they are non toxic and big and chunky but aprons still required!?  
Watch out for lids (pens dry out and can be a choking hazard. Be age specific)

### **Shredded paper**

Wonderful to play with too!  
Can be home made in your domestic shredder!

### **Paper**

Collect recycled paper, wrapping paper, brown paper, save novelty papers and keep those bouquet wrappings on Valentines Day!! Store in envelopes with a system so you can grab-n-go! Do you know a friendly printer or printing company for waste materials?

### **Pretty scraps**

Keep cut out scraps in multi colours using takeaway boxes with lids (you don't have to eat the takeaways but could appeal for them in church! Again, have a system for easy storage and recall!

**Scissors** – children's scissors (not forgetting left handed ones too)

**Large hole punches** in novelty shapes – e.g. circle, star, heart and flowers

**Scrap/recycled material** (if you have storage room)

Boxes, bottles, pots, trays (not from toilet roll or raw meat/egg origin but that still leaves lots)

Magazine pics and greetings cards

Old toy and gardening catalogues for cutting and sticking

Felt and fabric scraps

Craft sticks (always be mindful of safety)

### **Runny PVA glue**

Can be an activity in itself!

Dries clear and has a varnishing effect too.  
Glue sticks. Enough for all and avoid drying out.

### **Glitter!**

This is fun but may not be an option as it does get everywhere (you could use shakers!) but you could also use glitter glue

### **Papier Mache**

Don't use wallpaper paste with toxic/fungicidal ingredients – use child-safe PVA



Collage  
make  
sure you  
keep  
sticking



–  
a



satisfactory experience rather than expecting things to stick when they are too heavy for the sticking material! Collage is usually a real winner! You can make individual items or a joint creation (make sure children who don't understand will still have something to take home!

### **Paper plates – an essential**

So adaptable and cheap! Can be used to make head dresses, masks or folded to rock and stick an animal on or make into a rocking cradle or angel.

### **Drawing & Colouring**

Make sure the eyes in any people figures are nice and big so they look friendly (if they are meant to).

Under fives like simple, 'two eyes, nose and mouth' faces. Don't be over-critical of your own abilities... little children are very accepting. Look at Christian and other books for inspiration for simple images.

Don't make pictures for colouring too complicated. It's good to have enough time to complete a picture rather than feel half finished.

Simple symbolism/ cartoon style rather than detailed 'works of art' work best!

Find someone in the church who can draw you some simple images you can use again and again!

Use **www clipart sources** and Christian Clipart software which is excellent

### **Writing and words**

Children towards the top end of 'under fives' will may have some reading and writing skills. If using scripture texts or phrases, keep them simple and ask how you can best present the message you want to convey in words. Choose child friendly fonts and

styles (some fonts are like bubble writing for colouring in) and enable the children to form their own name if they want to write it on their picture etc.

### **Personal space**

In line with the Montessori tradition of personal space, let each child make their own work mat for helping them to focus on their own area of table if they are competing for space.

Make sure that the materials provided are not a cause of frustration i.e. blunt pencils and glue that isn't sticky.. also remember they are only just learning to share! So providing enough rather than too ;little is preferable!

### **Displaying the materials**

Set out the pens, paint, etc clearly within reach and visible so that choices can be made.

### **Supervision**

Essential with the Under Fives – not just for safety and practicalities, but to encourage and cherish the children.

Unfortunately those listening to this presentation on CD or viewing it on the website won't be able to see the examples we have here but I hope it will serve as an inspiration to have a go and to keep going as we value the creative opportunities for little children

### **In Conclusion...**

Finally, have fun, play and learn from children as they learn and explore through making and doing. We are all creative in some way as we are made in the likeness of our creative Father.

It just takes a bit of imagination and resourcefulness to help children (and adults) enjoy and benefit from all that making and doing offers.

### **References**

#### 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.
- Teaching material often provides the craft ideas and inspiration for your themed Sunday group sessions

LeFever M. 'Learning Styles'. ( Pub Kingsway 1998)

Tiddlywinks Big Books Scripture Union

Tiddlywinks Glitter & Glue Scripture Union

Wigley J. 'Pretty Much Everything You Need to Know about Working with Under Fives' (Pub Scripture Union 2005)

Copsey K. 'Here's One I made Earlier' (Pub Scripture Union 1995)

Cont..

Orme C. 'Here's Another One I made Earlier' (pub Scripture Union 2000)

Price S '100 Simple Bible Craft Ideas'. (Pub. Kingsway Publications 1998)

Stohs A. R. 'Save it' 52 Crafts from Recycled Items (Pub. CPS US 1993)

### Craft Suppliers

Baker Ross [www.bakerross.co.uk](http://www.bakerross.co.uk) 0870 458 5454

S & S Services [www.ss-services.co.uk](http://www.ss-services.co.uk) 01789 765323

Cheap Shops!!

Seasonal bargains in the shops at certain times of the year.. e.g. reduced Gold paper after Christmas etc

Recycled materials and donations, scrap stores etc.

To make a paper plate angel. Take a paper plate and cut along bold lines A B and C including round head as shown. With head folded forward, slot together cuts A and B and you will have an angel with wings! (might take a bit of practice without the visual demonstration!)

