

Arts & creativity in two-year-olds

When doing art with two-year-olds (“twos”), keep in mind that twos are energetic and love being silly together. Their emotions are as big as their energy and can change with no notice. They want to be in charge but are unpredictable. Twos learn by doing. They’re also learning to communicate with words, although they often lose patience with it. Explore how to add meaningful art experiences to the busy world of twos.

Moving with their whole bodies

What children are doing:

Twos move! They run, jump, dance, and climb, determined to figure out on their own what their bodies are capable of doing. Incorporate creative art experiences working with their high energy rather than against it.

What caregivers can provide:

- Stand-up art: Place art materials so that children can stand while working with them.
- Outside painting: Place butcher paper on a fence or wall and put containers of paint and brushes nearby table.
- Painting with feet: Invite twos to step in paint with their bare feet and make footprints on a large piece of paper laid on the ground.



What caregivers can say and do:

- Help twos express themselves verbally by commenting on what they are doing, echoing back the words they say and inviting them to say more.
- When there is a conflict between twos give them words to say to each other and stay nearby to provide gentle support in listening to each other, reading each other’s faces, and figuring out a compromise.

Gaining muscle control

What children are doing:

Twos are gaining more muscle control in their arms, hands, and fingers. They begin paying more attention to what they can make and less to the sensory part of the experience. Twos will often stop and look at their scribbles, then experiment with scribbling differently. When painting they pay attention to the design that they have made and experiment with making a different design.

What caregivers can provide:

- Opportunities to practice using the same materials. It gives them the opportunity to use a familiar material to recreate something they’ve done before (mastery) and to try something new (innovation).
- Different painting tools and printing objects. Invite them to experiment and notice the differences in the outcome.
- Opportunities to work in smaller spaces. Painting on an easel, painting or printing in a pizza box, or using play dough on a tray gives them practice with more controlled movements.

What caregivers can say and do:

- Help draw twos’ attention to the marks and designs on the paper (“I see you made a long line with your paint brush”).
- Invite twos to experiment (“What else could you use to make a design?”).

Developing a sense of self

What children are doing:

Twos are developing independence, learning who they are as individual persons, separate from others. Part of that learning is insisting on doing things by themselves, their own way. Include lots of open-ended, creative art experiences with twos – a perfect fit for toddlers to practice making choices and being in charge.

What caregivers can provide:

- Opportunities for individual creation: Allow them to work on their own, with no competition for materials and no conflicts of ideas.
- Face/body paint and mirror: Not all twos will want to try, but many will be curious. [Caution: Be sure to only use paint specifically created for face painting with children. To be safe, test a small amount before allowing them to apply it to their faces.]

What caregivers can say and do:

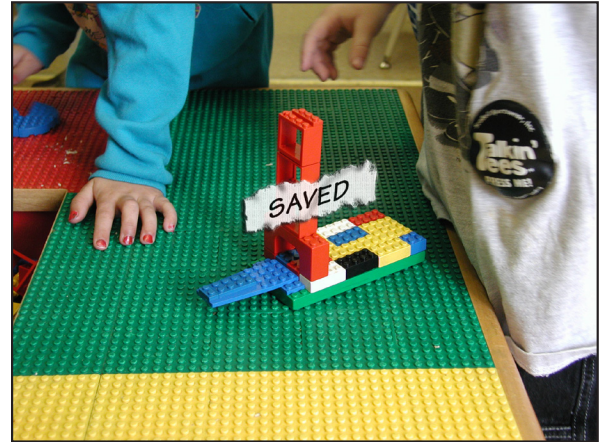
Expect that twos will come and go, change their minds frequently, and decide they don't like something that they did like yesterday. The result is often resistance to anything an adult suggests. Rather than insisting that they do an activity, invite them:

- Appeal to their curiosity ("Oh look, Kaitlyn, here's a feather. I wonder if you could paint with it.").
- Appeal to their natural desire to help ("Oh no, there's a whole spot here with no green! Who could find some green to put there?").
- Engage their fun side. Put on some up-beat music and invite them to dance while they are creating!

Remembering

What children are doing:

It is meaningful for twos if their creations are saved, and they can continue practicing and trying new things. Adding to or changing creations can strengthen memory connections and a sense of mastery.



What caregivers can provide:

- Multiple opportunities to add chalk marks to the sidewalk, paint designs to a large piece of plexiglass, or crayon marks to a large piece of paper taped to the wall.
- Give each child his own glob of play dough in a plastic resealable bag or container that he can open himself, and labeled with his name.

What caregivers can say and do:

- Write each child's name next to an area that she worked on. Then when she comes back to it, comment on the work that she did earlier.
- When a child is done working with materials, say "You can play again later."

Keep in mind... Art with toddlers and twos is messy! It's worth the time to think of strategies for accommodating their messy creative experiments while also making clean-up easier. Adult t-shirts, slit down the back, with a little Velcro™ at the neck for quick fastening, make great art smocks. Lay a plastic sheet or cut-out bottom of an old kiddie pool on the floor but be mindful of tripping hazards. Take messy art outside on warm days. Give each child a damp sponge to help with the clean-up.