The Child Unplugged

PAINTING & COLOUR EXPLORATION

Simple play ideas to connect.
Explore & Support yours babies developmenr

33
Simple Play Ideas



0-12 Months

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Introduction

Painting is a wonderful way for children to explore their creativity, express feelings, and develop new skills. It's not just about creating a pretty picture—painting helps build imagination, confidence, and focus, while also being fun and engaging. Through painting, children learn to make choices, solve problems, and experiment with colors and textures, all while enjoying the process. Whether your child is doodling a happy cow, splashing abstract colors, or trying out new brush strokes, painting activities transform learning into playful exploration and self-expression.







Why Painting Is So Valuable

- Encourages Creativity: Children learn to express ideas, stories, and emotions visually.
- Develops Fine Motor Skills: Holding brushes, making strokes, and mixing colors strengthens hand-eye coordination.
- Boosts Confidence: Completing a painting, no matter how simple, gives a sense of accomplishment..

Every scribble, line, and swirl is part of the learning process.

How to Support Play at Home

Create a relaxed painting space where children can explore freely, focus on effort and creativity, and spark curiosity by asking questions about their work.

Basic setup:

- Surface: paper, cardboard, canvas, or old boxes
- Paints: child-safe watercolor, tempera, or acrylics
- Brushes & Tools: variety of brushes, sponges, or fingers for texture

Simple steps:

- Choose your subject: Animal, scenery, abstract, or just fun shapes.
- Pick colors: Encourage experimentation—mixing is part of the fun!

Helpful tips:

- Keep paints accessible and safe—children love independence.
- Encourage messy play—it's part of learning and exploration.

Ideas

Provide paper, cardboard, or canvas with safe paints and brushes, sponges, or fingers for creative painting.







BUBBLE WRAP PRINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Bubble wrap (small or large pieces)
- Paint (tempera, acrylic, or watercolour)
- Paper (thicker paper works best to avoid tearing)
- Rollers, brushes, or even fingers for painting
- Scissors (optional, for cutting shapes)
- Smocks or protective covering

WHAT TO DO:

- Cut bubble wrap to a manageable size or into fun shapes (circles, stars, hearts).
- Apply paint to the bubble side using a roller, brush, or fingers.
- Press the painted bubble wrap gently onto paper and lift to reveal textured prints.
- Repeat with different colours, overlapping prints, or rotating the bubble wrap for varied patterns.
- Allow the artwork to dry fully.

BENEFITS:

- Pattern Recognition: Spot repeating shapes and textures
- Sensory Play: Engage tactile senses by feeling the bubbles
- Creativity & Expression: Experiment with colours, layers, and shapes
- Fine Motor Skills: Strengthen hand-eye coordination using brushes or rollers
- Early Experimentation: Learn cause-and-effect through paint and pressure variations



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **3D Art:** Press bubble wrap onto soft clay or playdough instead of paper to explore textures in sculptural work.
- **Storytelling:** Encourage children to turn their textured prints into scenes or backgrounds for a story.
- **Combination Materials:** Add glitter, stamping, or stamping with other found objects for more complex textures.

ICE PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Ice cube trays
- Water
- Food colouring (or liquid watercolours)
- Paper (thicker paper works best to prevent warping)
- Tray or plate to contain drips
- Optional: small toys, glitter, or salt for added texture

WHAT TO DO:

- Mix water with food colouring and pour into ice cube trays. Freeze until solid.
- Place a piece of paper on a tray to catch drips.
- Remove coloured ice cubes and encourage children to “paint” on the paper as the ice melts.
- Observe how the colours spread, blend, and change as the ice melts.
- Discuss what is happening to the ice and how it transforms from solid to liquid.

BENEFITS:

- Cause-and-Effect Learning: Children see how the ice melts and moves across the paper, connecting actions to outcomes.
- Science Exploration: Introduces concepts like temperature, states of matter (solid to liquid), and melting.
- Fine Motor Skills: Holding and manipulating ice cubes strengthens grip and hand-eye coordination.
- Sensory Play: The cold sensation of ice adds a tactile element to painting.
- Creativity & Expression



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Age-Friendly:** Bigger ice for toddlers, smaller or shaped ice for older kids.
- **Indoor/Outdoor:** Outdoors for messy fun; indoors with trays to catch melting water.
- **Themed Colors & Shapes:** Holiday colors, seasonal pastels, or fun molds like stars and hearts.
- **Different Surfaces:** Paper, cardstock, fabric, or windows for creative effects.
- **Mixed Media:** Combine with stamping, sponges, or layered colors for texture.

SHAVING CREAM

WHATS NEEDED:

- Shaving foam or foaming soap (child-safe)
- Food colouring (a few different colours)
- Small bowls or cups
- Spoons or paintbrushes
- Tray, table surface, or large sheet of paper

WHAT TO DO

- Spray or scoop shaving foam into small bowls.
- Add a few drops of food colouring to each bowl.
- Gently mix to create coloured foam.
- Place the bowls on a tray or table with paper or a washable surface.
- Add spoons, brushes, or simply invite hands-on play.
- Invite your child to explore the foam with their hands or tools. Encourage spreading, swirling, and mixing colours.

BENEFITS:

- Encourages sensory exploration
- Builds fine motor strength through squeezing and spreading
- Supports creativity and self-expression
- Develops hand–eye coordination
- Introduces colour recognition and mixing
- Provides a calming, tactile experience



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **For younger toddlers:** Use one colour at a time. Offer a small amount of foam. Let them explore mainly with their hands
- **For older toddlers:** Provide multiple colours to mix. Add tools like brushes, rollers, or spatulas. Encourage simple marks and patterns
- **For preschoolers:** Add stencils or shape cutters. Practice drawing simple shapes or letters. Turn it into a themed art activity

POTATO PRINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Potatoes
- Knife and or cutters
- Chopping board
- Paint
- Paper
- Brush (optional)

WHAT TO DO:

- Materials: Potatoes, knife (adult use), child-safe paints, trays, paper
- Prepare Potatoes: Cut in half; leave natural shapes or carve simple patterns
- Paint: Pour colors into shallow trays
- Stamp: Dip the potato in the paint and press it onto the paper
- Experiment: Layer colors, mix patterns, repeat designs
- Clean Up: Wipe potatoes and use paper towels
- Enjoy: Let prints dry and display artwork

BENEFITS:

- A tried and tested classic! Painting with potato stamps is lots of fun and cheap and easy to do at home. Toddlers and preschoolers will love getting their hands messy and creating some great pieces of art.
- Stamps are also good for:
- Fostering creativity and sense of achievement
- Developing hand-eye coordination
- Exploring emotions and feelings



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Age-Friendly:** Toddlers can use whole potato halves for easy stamping; older kids can carve more detailed shapes or patterns.
- **Indoor/Outdoor:** Indoors with trays or newspaper to catch paint; outdoors for messier, bigger stamping fun.
- **Different Shapes & Patterns:** Try stars, hearts, stripes, or seasonal shapes like leaves or pumpkins.
- **Mix Colors:** Layer multiple colors or dip different potatoes in different paints for variety.

SPONGE PRINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Sponges
- Paint
- Paper
- Scissors

WHAT TO DO:

- Use sponges in their natural shapes or cut into fun designs (stars, hearts, circles, animals)
- Dip sponges into paint or watercolors, coating evenly
- Press or stamp sponges onto paper to create prints
- Experiment with layering colors and combining shapes
- Encourage patterns, textures, and creative exploration

BENEFITS:

- Self-expression with paint
- Eye and hand coordination
- Fine motor development
- Experimenting and exploring with a new paint tool
- Sense of achievement and pride
- Colour recognition
- Sensory experience of exploring paint and paint filled sponges.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Use pre-cut large, chunky sponge shapes (circles, squares) to make gripping easier.
- Skip scissors entirely—provide ready-to-use sponges to avoid safety risks.
- Use washable finger paints or thick tempera paint for mess-friendly exploration; let kids press with whole hands if gripping is hard.
- Lay paper on the floor to allow crawling or standing work, supporting gross motor movement.

PAINT BRUSH

WHATS NEEDED:

- Sticks, pencils, pegs, or straws (for handles)
- Brush materials: feathers, leaves, sponge pieces, yarn, cotton buds, fabric strips, or grass
- Rubber bands, string, or tape to attach materials
- Paint and paper for testing

WHAT TO DO:

- Choose a handle (e.g., stick or straw).
- Pick a brush material and attach it firmly using tape or string.
- Trim if needed to shape the “bristles.”
- Dip in paint and explore strokes, textures, and patterns!

BENEFITS:

- Encourages creativity and self-expression
- Develops fine motor skills and hand strength
- Promotes problem-solving and design thinking
- Sparks curiosity through experimenting with textures and strokes
- Introduces concepts of recycling and resourcefulness



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Nature brushes:** Use twigs, flowers, or pine needles
- **Textured painting:** Try bubble wrap, foil, or cardboard ends
- **Sensory-friendly:** Soft brushes for sensitive hands
- **Learning twist:** Match brush types to patterns (dots, lines, swirls)
- **Toddler version:** Use chunky handles and soft, large materials

PAINTING ON FOIL

WHATS NEEDED:

- Foil
- Paint brush/Cotton buds or fingers/hands!
- Paint
- For inspiration look at the painting 'Starry Night' by Van Gogh.

WHAT TO DO:

- Use a sheet of aluminum foil instead of paper for a shiny, textured surface
- Paint directly onto the foil with brushes, sponges, or fingers
- Experiment with layering colors and blending shades
- Try scraping or dabbing for extra texture and effects
- Let dry and use as a standalone artwork or in collages

BENEFITS:

- Sensory Exploration: The smooth, reflective surface offers a different tactile experience than paper.
- Color Vibrancy: Paint appears brighter and more vivid on foil, capturing children's attention.
- Creativity Boost: Encourages experimentation with texture, layering, and blending.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- If you like the idea of Painting on Foil, you will also no doubt love Sensory Shaving Foam Painting.
- Draw shapes or letters before painting
- Add glitter or sequins for sparkle
- Chill foil for a cool sensory feel
- Use coloured foil for visual fun
- Explore reflections and mirror play

FOAM PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Glue
- Shaving cream
- Food dye
- Paper

WHAT TO DO:

- Mix equal parts glue and shaving foam to create a fluffy paint base
- Divide into containers and add different food coloring dyes
- Let children mix colors and watch them transform
- Provide paper or cardstock for painting
- Encourage free painting with brushes, fingers, or sponges
- Experiment with layering colors, patterns, and abstract designs
- Once dry, the paint keeps a soft, raised texture for a 3D effect

BENEFITS:

- **Hands-On Learning:** Engages children in tactile, interactive play
- **Color Exploration:** Encourages experimenting with mixing and blending colors
- **Creativity & Imagination:** Inspires unique designs and playful expression
- **Science Discovery:** Demonstrates cause-and-effect as paint puffs up in the microwave



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Use larger, easier-to-grasp tools (spatulas, big spoons) instead of hands to reduce mess and build gross motor skills.
- Limit to 2-3 colors initially to avoid overwhelming sensory input.
- Add safe, large-texture items (smooth stones, soft pom-poms) for tactile exploration without small parts risk.

LEAF PRINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Paper
- Leaves
- Paint
- Paint brushes

An open-ended art activity like this provides lots of fun and learning for younger children.

WHAT TO DO:

- **Collect Leaves:** Choose a variety of leaves with different shapes and sizes **from the park or garden.**
- **Prepare Paint:** Set out a few paint colors and a large paintbrush.
- **Paint the Leaves:** Brush paint onto one side of the leaf, gently covering the surface.
- **Print on Paper:** Press the painted leaf onto white paper and lift it carefully to reveal the print.
- **Encourage Creativity:** Let your child decide how many leaves to use, which colors to choose, and where to place their prints.

BENEFITS:

- Picking the leaves uses the child's whole body & gets them active & exploring outside.
- They will learn about leaf shapes and colours. You can make observations about colour blending etc
- A lovely way to introduce your child to nature and talk about trees and where leaves come from.
- Coordination to hold the leaves and carefully turn them over to print them so this will fine-tune fine motor skills and improve concentration.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Draw on the paper a tree trunk and branches so the children can print the leaves on the branches to create a tree.
- Paint over and around the leaf and then peel off.
- Paint a rainbow on the leaf and then print.

TISSUE PAPER ART

WHATS NEEDED:

- Colored tissue paper
- Water spray
- Canvas
- Scissors

WHAT TO DO:

- Cut tissue paper into desired shapes.
- Place them on the canvas. You can put them in a single layer or overlap them for a more colorful mix. Spray a little more water on top of the tissue paper.
- Wait for 20 minutes.
- Remove the wet tissue paper and let the canvas dry completely.

BENEFITS:

- Boosts Fine Motor Skills – Tearing, scrunching, and gluing strengthen hand muscles.
- Encourages Creativity – Open-ended art lets kids explore colors, shapes, & patterns.
- Supports Cognitive Development – Promotes focus, planning, and following steps.
- Color Recognition – Fun way to learn and mix colors.
- Calming Activity – Repetitive motions can help with relaxation and emotional regulation.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Tear or cut tissue for fine motor practice
- Stick on cardboard, paper, or contact paper
- Use themed colors for holidays or seasons
- Try scrunching for texture and 3D art
- Create letters, shapes, or patterns

STRAW PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Non-toxic liquid paint (watered down slightly for easier blowing)
- Paper or cardstock
- Plastic straws
- Something for mixing colours
- Aprons or old clothes
- Optional: Eye droppers or spoons for dripping paint, washable table covering

WHATO DO:

- Set out your paper
- Add small blobs or drops of paint onto the paper
- Hand your child a straw and encourage them to blow through it (not suck!) to move the paint around the paper.
- Watch the colours mix, swirl, splatter, and streak — no two masterpieces are ever the same!
- Let the artwork dry completely before displaying or framing.

BENEFITS:

- Builds oral motor strength (important for speech development!)
- Boosts fine motor control and coordination
- Encourages creativity and experimentation
- Supports colour recognition and cause-and-effect understanding
- Sensory-rich and super engaging



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Use food colouring and water for a taste-safe version (for younger toddlers)
- Add glitter or soap bubbles for extra texture and sparkle
- Try it on black paper for a bold twist
- Turn it into a science lesson by talking about air pressure and movement
- Cut the dry artwork into shapes or collage pieces for a second round of crafting

WATER PAINTING OUTDOORS

SET UP:

- Water
- Paintbrushes, sponges, or sticks
- Concrete walls, fences, or paving stones (Paper for indoors)
- Food dye (Optional)

Fill containers with water and give each child a brush, sponge, or stick. On a safe outdoor surface, invite them to dip their tools and make marks, letters, shapes, or patterns.

EXTENSION IDEAS

- Use different sized brushes or tools for varied marks.
- Combine with letters, numbers, or shapes for early literacy/maths practice.
- Invite children to “paint” patterns or simple pictures outdoors.

LANGUAGE

- “Can you make a line, a dot, or a circle?”
- “What happens when you press lightly or hard?”

BENEFITS:

- Develops fine motor skills and hand strength
- Builds early pre-writing and mark-making skills
- Encourages creativity, imagination, and self-expression
- Promotes sensory exploration and outdoor learning
- Supports concentration and focus
- Encourages experimentation and problem-solving



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **For Younger Toddlers:** Focus on big sweeping marks and sensory exploration & allow hand or finger painting with water.
- **For Preschoolers:** Encourage drawing letters, numbers, or simple shapes & combine mark-making with storytelling: “Draw a path for the caterpillar.”
- **For Children with Sensory Sensitivities:** Use brushes instead of hands if preferred & provide smaller, manageable tools for better control.

HAND PRINTS

WHATS NEEDED:

- Coco Powder
- Oil
- Paper

WHAT TO DO:

- Coat each hand evenly with mud.
- Press your hands firmly onto paper or a flat surface outside.
- Experiment with finger positions, layering, or patterns.
- Gently wash your hands after printing.
- Admire your natural artwork!

BENEFITS:

- Encourages creativity and self-expression.
- Develops fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination.
- Connects children with nature and sensory exploration.
- Sparks imaginative play through patterns and textures.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Age:** Toddlers – Simple prints; Older kids – layered patterns or designs.
- **Abilities:** Use smaller handprints, assist with spreading mud, or provide sensory-friendly mud.
- **Setting:** Indoors – use trays or paper; Outdoors – use ground, sand, or large sheets.
- **Materials:** Mud, soil, or safe sensory clay; optional natural additions like leaves or petals.

BUBBLE PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Small plastic containers to hold the paint mixture
- Tempera paint in a variety of colors
- Liquid soapdish
- Water
- Straws
- A push pin
- Small pieces of thick paper (construction, card stock, watercolour paper)

WHAT TO DO:

- Mix tempera paint, water, and a little liquid dish soap in small containers
- Use straws to blow bubbles in the mixture
- Place thick paper gently on top of the bubbles
- Lift the paper to reveal colorful bubble prints

BENEFITS:

- Boosts creativity with fun, colourful patterns
- Stimulates sensory play (sight, touch, sound)
- Builds fine motor and oral strength
- Encourages learning through colour mixing and cause-and-effect
- Fun, engaging process art activity



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Use different colors:** Try a variety of paint colors and mix them to create new shades and effects.
- **Change paper types:** Use cardstock, watercolor paper, or construction paper for different textures.
- **Try outdoors:** Do the activity outside to allow bigger bubbles and easier cleanup.
- **Use different containers:** Larger containers can create bigger bubbles and more dramatic prints.

SALT PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Paper/card
- Salt
- Food dye
- Glue
- Droppers
- Paintbrushes

WHAT TO DO:

- Squeeze glue onto paper in any design
- Sprinkle salt over the wet glue and shake off excess
- Use a dropper, pipette, or brush to add watercolor or food coloring
- Watch the color spread and blend along the salt
- Experiment with layering colors and patterns

BENEFITS:

- **Sensory Exploration:** Children feel and manipulate salt, engaging their sense of touch.
- **Fine Motor Skills:** Pouring, shaking, and applying color improve hand-eye coordination and dexterity.
- **Color Learning:** Encourages recognition, blending, and experimentation with colors.
- **Concentration & Focus:** Requires attention to detail when applying color to specific areas.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Science:** Learn about absorption as the salt soaks up the color
- **Art:** Explore color recognition and color blending
- **Coordination:** Practice pouring salt and shaking the tray
- **Concentration:** Focus on applying color to specific areas
- **Literacy:** Develop letter recognition, formation, and name recognition

PAINTING ICE

WHATS NEEDED:

- Ice cubes
- Watercolours, food colouring, or washable paint
- Cups or bowls for mixing
- Paint brushes or droppers
- A sensory tray

WHAT TO DO:

- Freeze your ice cubes in advance
- Set up your space
- Let the kids go wild — they can paint directly onto ice, use the melting ice to "water down" colours, or even paint on paper with ice as the brush.
- Watch as colours swirl and mix while the ice slowly melts.

BENEFITS:

- **Fine motor skills** – holding brushes, droppers, and ice pieces.
- **Science learning** – observing melting, mixing colours, and temperature changes.
- **Creativity** – experimenting with colours, textures, and patterns.
- **Calming sensory play** – the cool ice and flowing water are soothing.
- **All-ages fun** – safe for toddlers with taste-safe colours, engaging for older kids too.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Summer version:** Take it outside for a cool-down activity.
- **Winter version:** Freeze the ice in themed moulds (snowflakes, stars).
- **Add salt:** Sprinkle to speed up melting and create "cracks" for colours to flow through.
- **Nature twist:** Freeze small leaves or flowers inside the ice for painting around.
- **Colour mixing challenge:** Give only primary colours and let them mix their own.

RAIN CLOUD DRIP PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- White paper or cardstock
- Grey, white, or black paint/crayons for clouds
- Droppers, pipettes, or spoons
- Small cups of clean water (rain drops)
- Spray bottles (optional for storm effect)
- Tray or protective mat

WHAT TO DO:

- Draw or paint clouds at the top of the paper.
- Fill droppers or pipettes with clean water.
- Gently release water droplets underneath the clouds to create “rain falling” down the page.
- Watch how the water spreads, moves, and absorbs into the paper.
- Tilt the paper slightly to observe how rain flows in different directions.
- For a storm effect, lightly spray water across the page and observe how the rain spreads and blends naturally.

BENEFITS:

- Encourages sensory exploration through real water play
- Strengthens grip strength and fine motor control using droppers
- Develops understanding of cause and effect
- Supports early science learning about rain and weather
- Enhances observation skills and curiosity
- Promotes calm, focused, and mindful play
- Encourages creativity and experimentation



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **For toddlers:** Use larger droppers or let them pour water with small cups.
- **For older children:** Add labels like “light rain,” “heavy rain,” or “storm.”
- **For sensory learners:** Increase water play time with trays or textured paper.
- **For outdoor play:** Tape paper outside and let the real weather influence the activity.
- **For group learning:** Create a large shared “rain mural” where each child adds droplets.

ANIMAL FOOTPRINT PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Toy animals with textured feet
- Washable paint
- Paper or card
- Paint trays or plates
- Wipes or water for cleaning

WHAT TO DO:

- Pour paint into shallow trays.
- Dip the animal feet into the paint.
- Press or walk the animals across the paper.
- Explore different colours and footprint patterns.
- Talk about the animals and the tracks they make.

BENEFITS:

- Develops fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination.
- Encourages creativity and self-expression.
- Introduces cause-and-effect learning.
- Builds language and animal recognition skills.
- Supports sensory exploration.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Use one colour and larger animals for younger children.
- Add multiple colours and different animal types for older children.
- Match footprints to the correct animals.
- Create animal habitats around the tracks.
- Count footprints or compare track sizes for early maths learning.
- Use mud, water, or sand instead of paint for a sensory variation.

PUDDING PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Pudding Mix (Any)
- Colouring

TIPS:

Use clear cups or trays to layer colourful pudding—great for sensory fun, colour recognition, and pretend cooking play.

WHAT TO DO:

- Make the pudding following the box instructions and let it set
- Divide into small bowls and add food coloring
- Let children mix and explore the colors
- Encourage squishing, painting, and sensory play
- Enjoy tasting as part of the activity

BENEFITS:

- **Sensory Exploration:** Feel textures, colors, and consistency
- **Creativity:** Experiment with mixing and painting
- **Fine Motor Skills:** Smooshing and spreading improves hand control
- **Taste-Safe Fun:** Safe to explore with mouth as well
- **Engagement:** Keeps children interested and curious



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Cake Icing Spatula** – Have the kids smooth the pudding.
- **Pizza Cutter** – Have the kids cut the Pudding
- **Whisk** – To make fun designs
- **Turner** – Move the Pudding to one side of the paper. See how many times it takes to move the Pudding from one side of the paper to the other.
- **Tongs** – Have them try to pick up the pudding with the tongs.
- **Potato Masher** – Use it to make designs, and you can also use it as a pudding stamp!

ROCK DROP

WHATS NEEDED:

- Smooth rocks suitable for painting
- Paints, markers, or other decorating supplies
- Clear sealant (optional, to protect designs outdoors)
- A local park, playground, or safe outdoor area

WHAT TO DO:

- Paint or draw positive messages, fun designs & patterns on your rocks.
- Seal (Optional): Apply a clear sealant to make your artwork weatherproof.
- Take your rocks to a local park or playground etc
- Place the rocks in visible or fun spots for others to find.
- Children can leave a note encouraging the finder to “pay it forward” by spreading kindness too.

BENEFITS:

- Encourages creativity and self-expression through art.
- Teaches kindness, generosity, and community awareness.
- Promotes outdoor exploration and connection with nature.
- Builds fine motor skills through painting and decorating.
- Fosters pride and confidence in sharing something special with others.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Age: Toddlers – simple colors or stickers; Older kids – detailed designs and messages.
- Abilities: Provide larger rocks, pre-painted bases, or templates for easier decorating.
- Setting: Indoors – decorate and store rocks until ready to hide; Outdoors – choose safe, public areas.
- Materials: Use non-toxic paints or markers; add glitter, stickers, or nature items for extra flair.

WATERCOLOUR + SALT EXPERIMENT

WHATS NEEDED:

- Watercolours (liquid or pan)
- Paintbrushes
- Table salt or coarse salt
- Thick paper (watercolour paper works best to prevent warping)
- Optional extras: droppers, glitter, spray bottles

HOW TO MAKE:

- Paint broad or detailed areas with watercolour.
- While the paint is still wet, sprinkle salt lightly over the painted surface.
- Watch as the salt absorbs the water, creating sparkly, starburst-like textures.
- Let it dry completely, then gently brush off the salt to reveal the unique patterns.

BENEFITS:

- Introduces basic science and art concepts in a fun, hands-on way
- Explores cause and effect by observing how salt interacts with wet paint
- Develops observation skills as children notice changing textures
- Encourages creativity through experimenting with colours and patterns
- Strengthens fine motor control via painting and sprinkling



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Try different tools: droppers, sponges, or spray bottles
- Add glitter for sparkle
- Explore warm vs. cool colours
- Turn textures into stories or scenes
- Discuss why salt changes the paint (absorption and reactions)

COTTON BALL PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Cotton balls
- Paint
- Clothes pin
- Paint trays/bowls

HOW TO MAKE:

- Get everything ready next to your child.
- Attach cotton balls to a clothespin.
- Pour paint into a paint tray or a bowl that holds the paint.
- Finally, dip the cotton balls into the paint and roll them to spread all over the balls.

BENEFITS:

- Builds fine motor skills through pinching and dabbing
- Encourages creativity and colour exploration
- Soft texture adds sensory fun
- Great for process-focused, mess-free art play



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Try painting on different surfaces (paper, cardboard, fabric)
- Offer scented paints for sensory enhancement
- Explore patterns by dabbing, dragging, or stamping
- Create themed art (e.g., clouds, flowers, animals)

FRUIT PAINT

WHATS NEEDED:

- Fresh fruits (strawberries, blueberries, kiwi, oranges, bananas, etc.)
- Knife for adult use (to chop fruits)
- Bowls
- Tuff tray for messy play
- Paper, cardstock for painting
- Optional: brushes, stamps & cookie cutters,

WHAT TO DO:

- Chop fruit
- Mash fruit with a fork or spoon, or blend to make a smoother paint.
- Pour into small bowls
- Provide paper, brushes, or stamps for painting.
- Encourage kids to explore colors, mix fruits, and create designs.
- Discuss colors, textures, and smells as they play.

BENEFITS:

- Kids experience textures, colors, and smells of different fruits.
- Squishing, brushing, stamping, & spreading paint strengthens hand muscles.
- Kids can paint freely or make fruit-themed art.
- Introduces fruits, colors, and shapes in a playful way.
- Edible & Safe



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Stamping Fun – Use halves of apples, oranges, or lemons as stamps.
- Rainbow Paints – Assign different fruits to make a ~rainbow artwork.
- Scented Play – Let kids smell each fruit before painting to engage multiple senses.
- Mix with Other Materials – Add oats, rice, or edible glitter for texture.

CHALK WITH WATER

WHATS NEEDED:

- Chalk (any colours you have)
- A little bowl or cup of water
- A paintbrush or sponge (optional)
- Somewhere to draw (garden tiles, driveway, patio, or even the bathtub!)

HOW TO MAKE:

- Take a piece of chalk and dip the end into the water.
- The water makes the chalk glide more smoothly and the colours come out richer, almost like paint!
- Try painting the water onto the surface first, then drawing with dry chalk over it for a different effect.
- When you're done, a splash of water (or bath time bubbles if indoors!) will wash it all away.

BENEFITS:

- Fine motor practice – Strengthens hand muscles through drawing, gripping, and brushing.
- Creativity & imagination – Open-ended art play without rules.
- Sensory fun – Smooth chalk, splashy water, and the excitement of colours blending.
- Easy clean-up – A quick hose or rinse and the canvas is blank again!



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Mixing chalk dust with a little water to make homemade chalk paint.
- Set a challenge: Who can make the biggest rainbow? The longest road? Or even draw a whole chalk town together.

VEHICLE TRACK PAINTING

SET UP:

- Large paper on the floor or table
- Cardboard boxes opened flat
- Paper taped to the wall (standing play)
- Outdoor surfaces (washable paint only)
- Secure paper with tape to prevent slipping and frustration.

EXTENSION IDEAS

Colour Exploration:
Roll through one colour, then another. Watch colours mix naturally. Name colours casually (“blue lines”, “yellow wheels”)

Direction & Pathways:
Create roads with tape under paper. Roll up, down, across. Add ramps leading onto the paper

Story-Based Painting:
“The truck is driving through mud.” “The car is racing home.” Narrate as the vehicle moves rather than asking questions

BENEFITS:

- Creativity · Fine motor control · Visual tracking · Sensory exploration · Early mark-making · Confidence through process-based art
- Vehicle track painting allows toddlers to explore movement through art. The focus is on what happens when the vehicle moves, not on creating a picture that looks a certain way. Every line, smear, and repeat action is meaningful learning.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **For a Child Who Loves Big Movement:** Place paper on the floor. Encourage long pushes across the page. Use large vehicles. Tape paper to the wall for vertical movement. This supports shoulder strength and body awareness.
- **For a Child Who Prefers Control & Precision:** Offer smaller vehicles. Use a smaller painting space. Move slowly together. Watch the tracks appear in detail. Some children enjoy watching the marks more than making them.
- **For a Child Who Is Hesitant About Paint:** Start with dry rolling (no paint) Let them observe first. Use gloves or tools initially. Begin with one finger touch if ready. Exposure without pressure still counts as participation.

BALLOON PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Small balloons (partially inflated)
- Washable paint
- Paper or canvas
- Paint trays or plates
- Apron or old clothes
- Protective table cover or mat

HOW TO MAKE:

- Blow up balloons slightly—just enough to grip easily.
- Pour paint into trays.
- Dip balloon bottoms into paint.
- Press, bounce, or roll onto paper to create patterns.
- Let dry and display!

BENEFITS:

- Builds gross and fine motor skills
- Encourages creativity and abstract expression
- Offers sensory exploration with texture and movement
- Supports cause-and-effect learning (press, bounce, roll)
- Fun way to explore color mixing and shapes



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Toddlers: Use larger paper and simple stamping
- Themes: Make flowers, fireworks, or abstract art
- Add textures: Mix in glitter or sand paint
- Sensory twist: Use scented or textured paints
- Learning focus: Name colors, count prints, or explore shapes

CORNSTARCH PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Cornstarch
- Water
- Natural food colouring or fruit/vegetable juices
- Small containers or a palette
- Brushes, cotton swabs, or fingers for painting
- Thick paper or cardboard

WHAT TO DO:

- Mix 1 tbsp cornstarch with 1 tbsp water in small cups.
- Add a few drops of natural food colouring or juice.
- Stir until smooth and colourful.
- Use brushes or fingers to paint on thick paper.
- Let dry and enjoy

BENEFITS:

- Open-ended artistic expression.
- Engages sight, touch, and sometimes smell.
- Great for colour recognition and pre-writing skills.
- Holding tools strengthens hand muscles.
- Calming activity – Soothing and focused playtime.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Use brushes, sponges, or cotton buds.
- Paint on paper, cardboard, or fabric.
- Try finger painting for tactile fun.
- Use natural dyes like beet juice or turmeric.
- Mix in scents like vanilla or lemon.

NOODLE PRINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Noodles
- Washable paint
- Paper or cardstock
- Paint trays or plates
- Apron or protective covering

WHAT TO DO:

- Pour paint into trays or plates.
- Dip the end of the noodles into the paint.
- Press it onto paper to create a print.
- Repeat using different colours and shapes.
- Create patterns, pictures, or summer scenes.
- Allow the artwork to dry before displaying.

BENEFITS:

- Encourages creativity and artistic expression.
- Develops fine motor skills and hand control.
- Supports colour and shape recognition.
- Strengthens hand-eye coordination.
- Introduces early pattern-making concepts.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Younger Children: Focus on simple stamping.
- Older Children: Create detailed patterns and designs.
- Literacy: Stamp letters to form summer words.
- Maths: Create and extend repeating patterns.
- Group Play: Work together on a large mural.

PAINT IN A ZIP LOCK BAG

SET UP:

- Zip lock bag
- Washable paint
- Tape
- Flat surface

Add small blobs of paint to a zip lock bag, seal it tightly (removing excess air), and tape it securely to a table or window. Invite your child to press, squish, swirl, and mix the colors as they explore.

EXTENSION IDEAS

- Add glitter for sparkle and visual tracking.
- Insert a printed shape or letter behind the bag for tracing practice.
- Use cotton buds to “draw” in the paint.

LANGUAGE

- “What happens when you mix those colors?”
- “Can you make lines or circles?”

BENEFITS:

- Strengthens fine motor skills
- Encourages sensory exploration
- Introduces early color mixing concepts
- Builds hand strength (great pre-writing skill!)
- Promotes creativity and independent exploration
- Provides calming, soothing sensory input.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **For Younger Toddlers:** Use one color at a time & focus on simple pressing and sensory language.
- **For Preschoolers:** Encourage color predictions before mixing & ask them to “draw” shapes, letters, or numbers.
- **For Children with sensory sensitivities:** Allow them to press gently with tools instead of their hands & offer thicker paint for more resistance.

YOGURT PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- Yogurt
- Food colouring
- Pots
- Paint brushes
- Paper

NOTES:

- Paint is for single use only
- Do not store or reuse after play

WHAT TO DO:

- Add a few drops of food coloring to the yogurt
- Stir continuously until the yogurt is evenly colored
- Adjust the number of drops for lighter or brighter shades
- Encourage children to watch the color change as they mix

BENEFITS:

- Fine motor skills
- Stimulates nervous system
- Hand-to-eye coordination
- Helps creative development
- Boosts Confidence & Self-Esteem
- Helps young children to understand/express themselves.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Develop gross motor skills by getting the whole body involved and use hands and feet to paint.
- Add additional tools such as stamps and rollers
- Add other ingredients to enhance the sensory experience ie rice or cereal
- Paint other objects ie decorating cookies etc
- Another one that is great for fussy eaters.

COOL WHIP PAINTING

WHATS NEEDED:

- 1 can of Cool Whip (thawed)
- Food coloring (liquid or gel works best)
- Optional: Glitter (safe for children), small cups, spoons, or paintbrushes
- A tray or shallow container to contain the mess
- Paper or plastic mat for easy cleanup
- Optional: Apron or old clothes

WHAT TO DO:

- Scoop the Cool Whip into a tray. Spread it evenly.
- Add a few drops of food coloring. Swirl gently with fingers or a spoon to create marbled colors—or mix fully for a uniform color.
- Let your child explore! They can use fingers, brushes, or even toy stamps to “paint.”
- For paper art, press a piece of cardstock onto the paint, lift, and let it air dry.

BENEFITS:

- Kids explore textures, temperature, and movement with their hands.
- Scraping, patting, and mixing strengthens hand muscles and coordination.
- The soft, creamy texture is oddly soothing—great for emotional regulation.
- Safe & Edible Option – Even if they taste a bit, it’s non-toxic and harmless



HOW TO ADAPT:

- **Themed Colors:** Use holiday or seasonal colors (green/red for Christmas, orange/purple for Halloween).
- **Add Scents:** A drop of vanilla or lemon extract makes it extra sensory.
- **Learning Twist:** Use it for letter or number tracing; write in the Cool Whip for a fun educational twist.
- **Outdoor Version:** Do it on a picnic table or sidewalk—less stress about mess!

MICROWAVE PAINT

WHATS NEEDED:

- Baking powder
- Flour
- Salt
- Food colouring
- Water
- Containers
- Cardboard/ paper
- Zip Lock Bag
- Microwave

WHAT TO DO:

- Tablespoon of baking powder, 1 teaspoon of salt & enough water to make it the consistency of pancake batter.
- Divide the mix into four parts and put them into bowls or Ziploc bags along with some food colouring.
- Part of the fun will be squishing it all around to mix up the colours!
- When you're finished, pop the painting into the microwave for 30-45 seconds and watch the paint puff up and grow

BENEFITS:

- **Sensory Fun:** Kids enjoy squishing, mixing, and feeling the paint, which engages their sense of touch.
- **Color Exploration:** Mixing food coloring encourages experimentation with colors and blending.
- **Creativity & Imagination:** Watching the paint puff up in the microwave adds a magical, surprising element to their artwork.



HOW TO ADAPT:

- Re-mix the base batter and let kids only add food coloring and squish bags to simplify steps.
- Use microwave-safe plates with raised edges to contain expanding paint.
- Have adults handle the microwave step for safety.

PAINTING &
COLOUR EXPLORATION

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